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# RAWA MIGRATION TO THE MALAY PENINSULA IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY: THE CASE OF PAHANG, PERAK, AND SELANGOR<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

*Little research attention has been paid to the Rawa or Rao community from West Sumatra who migrated to the Malay Peninsula. The few available accounts are scattered and fragmentary, and contradictory in some respects. The issue is complicated by the deliberate attempts of early Rawa migrants to hide their true identity, leaving their descendants in the dark as to their roots and ancestry. Several reasons may explain this disposition, one being the involvement of the Rawa people in different wars in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula which consequently led them to be viewed by some quarters as an unruly and warlike people. This paper aims to examine the contributory reasons for the migration of Rawas to the Malay Peninsula in the 19<sup>th</sup> century focusing on the Malay States of Pahang, Perak, and Selangor, where the largest Rawa communities emerged. Using mainly qualitative, archival research, this paper highlights the impacts of Rawa migration, especially in the socio-economic and political contexts of the respective Malay States. It is also worth studying the perceptions or reactions of the British and local authorities towards the Rawas, as these too might have influenced their way of dealing with the issue of identity in relation to other groups in the Peninsula.*

**Keywords:** Rawa, Malay Peninsula, migration, Pahang, Perak, Selangor

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## Introduction

The Rawa (also known as Rao or Rau) are a Malay ethnic group originating from Western Sumatra in Indonesia. Coming from a province known today as Pasaman (previously known as Rao Mapat Tunggul), the group are sometimes known in general as Pasaman, Minangkabau, and Minang people; the first two indicate the regions in West Sumatra, while Minang refers to the larger ethnic group to which the Rawas belong (according to some). Occasionally, they are known as Padang people, in reference to a leading city in West Sumatra. In addition to the above names, there are other terms with which the group are intermittently identified. For instance, the appending of the Arabic name al-Rawi denotes they are of Rawa patrilineal heritage. Moreover, Raub, the name of a place in Pahang, Malaysia, is also believed to actually originate from the word Rawa, in reference to the predominance of the Rawa community who settled there, working in tin mining areas in the state.<sup>2</sup>

While the contributions and roles of other ethnic groups of Indonesian origin in various socio-economic and political developments of Malaysia are well-noted and acknowledged, those of the Rawa community in Malaysia are somewhat down-played and depreciated. Their history (i.e. their roots and their coming to Malaysia) is also fairly contentious, with different views being held by different scholars. Additionally, among some Rawa people of older generations, there was a tendency to conceal their identity, causing their descendants to lose touch with their Rawa roots and traditions. Apart from examining the reasons for the Rawa migration to the Malay Peninsula, particularly to Pahang, Perak, and Selangor, this paper aims to highlight the impacts of their migration in various socio-economic, political and cultural developments of the states. Observations will also be made on the perceptions and reactions of various the people in Malaya towards the Rawa migrants, particularly the British and local authorities, since these might have influenced the way the Rawa identified and perceived themselves in relation to other groups in the Peninsula.

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<sup>2</sup> Zaffuan Haji Manap, *Bingkisan Sejarah Raub: Rao dan Pagaruyung: Pertaliannya dengan Raub dan Pahang* (Kuala Lumpur: Anjung Media Resources, 2007), 73.

## **Methodology of study**

Using mainly library research method and content-analysis approach, this paper used existing published works on the Rawa people in the Malay Peninsula, selected for their relevance to the inquiry, in order to gather relevant information on the topic. In addition, some information was derived from interviews conducted on the present Rawa people in the respective states concerning their knowledge of their ancestors and predecessors who came in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as migrants from Sumatra. Starting with the roots and origin of the Rawa people, this paper provides information on their reasons and process of migration to the Malay States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, followed by the impacts of their migration, which include the contributions of the group to the socio-economic, political, and cultural developments of the states. A brief discussion on the question of Rawa identity is also touched upon, considering the inclination of some the migrants to conceal their true identity as Rawa people.

## **Literature review**

There is scarce historical literature focusing on the Rawas in Malaya. Only in recent years has there been growing interest in the history of Rawa people in Malaysia, largely due to a greater awareness among the younger generations and interest to uncover their roots and be proud of their identity. With the exceptions of some works and articles dealing specifically with the Rawa community in the Malay Peninsula, other existing literatures dwell on larger ethnic groups of West Sumatra, particularly the Minang or Minangkabau people, while some others choose to concentrate particularly on prominent leaders of the Rawa community, especially those who led anti-colonial struggles against the Dutch, such as Tuanku Rao, Tuanku Imam Bonjol, and Tuanku Tambusai.

There are noteworthy works on the Rawas in the Malay Peninsula. Following a seminar on Malaysian Rawas organized by the Society of Rao (Rawa) People of Malaysia, known as JARO, Muhammad Bukhari Lubis, Mohd Rosli Saludin, and Talib Selamat<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Bukhari Lubis, Mohd Rosli Saludin and Talib Selamat, ed. *Rao di Sana Sini* (Tanjong Malim: Persatuan Jalinan Rao Malaysia (JARO), 2009).

edited a book that explains the origin of the Rawa people, their history of migration and diaspora in the Peninsula. Highlighting the Rawas as a distinct group different from other communities in Sumatra, the work deliberates on traditional Rawa customs and practices, as well as contributions of some prominent Rawa figures in Malaysia. Unfortunately, it lacks information on the reasons for the Rawa migration to the Peninsula.

Another informative piece is the edited work of Zabidin Haji Ismail and Talib Samat.<sup>4</sup> A compilation of various articles on the Rawa community in several states in Malaysia, namely Perak, Pahang, Kelantan, Penang, and Selangor, the work sheds light on the coming of the Rawas to the Peninsula, the contributions of leading Rawa figures in Malayan politics before and after independence, as well as traditional customs that are continued by some Rawa people in the country. The work is rather comprehensive, covering various aspects of the Rawas in the Peninsula, their history and present conditions, but it is short of information related to the Rawas in certain Malay States, particularly Pahang.

Zaffuan Haji Manap<sup>5</sup> on the other hand focuses specifically on the history of Rawas in Raub, Pahang. Based on manuscripts known as *Riwayatut Tammauwi* by Imam Ishak Haji Muhammad Ariff (1908-1992) and oral accounts, the work also covers the history of the Pagaruyung Kingdom in Sumatra, where he deliberates on the reasons for the migration of the Sumatran people to the Malay Peninsula. Contributions by the Rawa migrants to their localities are also mentioned either as religious scholars, warriors, nobles, etc. Given the emphasis on the history of Rawa community in Raub, Pahang, the lack of detailed information on Rawa in other Malay States such as Perak and Selangor is thus naturally expected.

Undri<sup>6</sup> also addressed Rawa migration in covering the history of Pasaman province in Sumatra, where the Rawas originate, describing the socio-economic and political conditions of the region

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<sup>4</sup> Zabidin Haji Ismail and Talib Samat, ed. *Masyarakat Rao di Malaysia: Analisis tentang Sosiobudaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Nurpress Sdn. Bhd., 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Zaffuan Haji Manap, *Bingkisan Sejarah Raub*.

<sup>6</sup> Undri, *Orang Pasaman: Menelusuri Sejarah Masyarakat di Rantau Minangkabau* (Padang: Centre for Studies of the Padri Movement, 2009).



from the early Hindu-Buddhist period to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While this work is useful as it provides relevant information to the topic under study, the accounts mainly evolved around the 20<sup>th</sup> century events and developments rather than the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His article was published in conference proceedings on the migration of Rawa people to the Malay Peninsula, and specifically deals with the migration process of the community from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This volume of proceedings is itself a compilation of various articles on the process of Minangkabau migrations to Malaysia, diplomatic relationships between Indonesia and Malaysia, and Minangkabau cultural impacts in West Sumatra and Malaysia etc. Although the migration is well-covered in these works, information of the socio-economic and political contributions of the Rawas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Malay Peninsula is lacking.

On the contributions of the Rawas in the Peninsula, Talib Samat<sup>7</sup> deserves attention. Apart from the Rawa contributions, the author also discusses the history of the Rawa migration to Malaya in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, highlighting particularly on the impacts of the Padri War in Sumatra, and Rawa settlements in various Malay States, namely Pahang, Selangor, Perak, Kelantan, Pulau Pinang, and Negeri Sembilan. While the work is relevant in providing some information with respect to the topic under study, the overall focus is more on the leading Rawa figures in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Malaysia, which is what the work is essentially all about.

Apart from the above works, articles of two Western scholars specifically on the Rawas are noteworthy. In his article, Milner<sup>8</sup> explains the migration of the Rawa community to the Malay Peninsula in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with derogatory commentary on the supposed characteristics of the Rawa people, whom he describes as annoying, arrogant, inclined to be involved in conflicts, and whom he considered to pose a threat to the stability of the Malay States at the time. Such negative views appear to have stemmed from some disparaging remarks made by several British colonial officials and to

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<sup>7</sup> Talib Samat, *Sejarah Kedatangan dan Biografi Tokoh-tokoh Rawa yang Terkenal di Malaysia* (Perak: Penerbit Mentari, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> A. C. Milner, "A Note on 'The Rawa,'" *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 51, no. 2 (234) (1978): 143-148.

some extent local Malay leaders in the Peninsula pertaining to the Rawas, whom they saw very often involved in ongoing conflicts in the Malay States, such as Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, and Selangor. For this paper, such perceptions held by the people of authority in the Malay Peninsula towards the Rawas will be assessed in order to determine the impacts they had on the community, and whether this contributed to some Rawa of that period to lay low and covertly hide their identity.

Watson<sup>9</sup> clarified the history of the Rawa people in 19<sup>th</sup> century Malaya, arguing that they are different from Rinchis, another community whom Milner briefly mentioned in his paper as being of the same origin as the Rawas. Dwelling on the differences between the two groups, Milner maintains that the Rinchis, or more accurately Kerinchi people, came from another province in Sumatra and not from Pasaman. In doing so, he explains the main traits of the Rawas, describing them as religious and that they had the expertise in gold mining.

On the Padri War which is one of the main reasons for the migration of the Rawas to the Malay Peninsula, a substantial number of works can be found, but they are devoid of detailed accounts on how the war affected the lives of the Rawa community, forcing them to leave for the Malay States. Such works include those by Muhamad Radjab,<sup>10</sup> Dobbin<sup>11</sup> and Graves.<sup>12</sup> Apart from providing the socio-economic and political background of Sumatra in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, these works discuss the underlying reasons for the outbreak of the Padri War and its aftermath. Instead of focusing on the involvement of the Rawa people in the war and the impacts of the war on the group, the authors relate to the whole Minangkabau community instead.

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<sup>9</sup> C. W. Watson, "Rawa and Rinchi: A Further Note," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 55, no. 1 (242) (1982): 82-86. C.W.

<sup>10</sup> Muhamad Radjab, *Perang Paderi di Sumatera Barat (1803-1838)* (Perpustakaan Perguruan Kementerian P. P. and K., 1954).

<sup>11</sup> Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847* (Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, No. 47, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth E. Graves, *The Minangkabau Response to Dutch Colonial Rule in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1981).

## Historical background

Not only are the views on the origin of the Rawa people contentious, but also controversial. The first view maintains that the Rawas came from Pagaruyung in West Sumatra,<sup>13</sup> while the second argues that they originated from Champa (in Indo-China), and lastly from Batak area (in North Sumatra).<sup>14</sup> Similarly debatable is the question of whether the Rawas used to have their own kingdom headed by a king prior to the expansion of the influence of Pagaruyung Kingdom over their land. The answer is yet again inconclusive, with different views put forward by scholars. One theory suggests that there was the so-called Rawa (Rao) Kingdom known as Negeri di atas Angin ('Country above the Wind') in the Pasaman region, centred at Lubuk Sikaping around the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century. Believed to be a Buddhist kingdom prior to the spread of Islam, the Rao Kingdom was initially detached from the well-known Pagaruyong Kingdom. Later, the two kingdoms and some other areas in Sumatra were merged for administrative and political reasons by the Dutch colonial administration.<sup>15</sup>

As a group, the Malay Rawas generally belong to the larger Minangkabau tribe. While this is the popular view, there is a conflicting supposition that the Rawas are different from Minangkabau people that they are not of the same tribe. Having their own distinctive customs, language, and tradition, the Rawas are further divided into several clans such as Ampu, Kandang Kopusak, Pungkuik, and Molayu. Again, there are different views as to the identification of the actual Rawa clans with some pointing out that groups like Kotopang, Tanjung and a few others are also Rawas.<sup>16</sup> The different clans, up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were led by lesser kings

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<sup>13</sup> Amran Dt. Joraho, "Asal-usul Orang Rao: Ditinjau dari Peninggalan Kebudayaanannya" in *Rao di Sana Sini*, ed. Muhammad Bukhari Lubis, Mohd Rosli Saludin and Talib Selamat (Tanjong Malim: Persatuan Jalinan Rao Malaysia (JARO), 2009), 20.

<sup>14</sup> Syamsuruddin, "Sejarah Asal Usul Rao" in *Rao di Sana Sini*, ed. Muhammad Bukhari Lubis, Mohd Rosli Saludin and Talib Selamat (Tanjong Malim: Persatuan Jalinan Rao Malaysia (JARO), 2009), 191.

<sup>15</sup> Amran Dt. Joraho, "Asal-usul Orang Rao", 27.

<sup>16</sup> Amran Dt. Joraho, "Asal-usul Orang Rao", 36.

who, despite the prominent position of the Pagaruyung kings, ruled their people and areas independently, since the latter had direct control only over the surrounding areas near the Pagaruyung palace.<sup>17</sup>

Sumatra during the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a gradual expansion of the colonial Dutch influence. Spearheaded by the Dutch United East India Company or Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), various islands were subdued into the Dutch East Indies (modern Indonesia), including Java, Sumatra, Moluccas, Celebes, etc., as the Company's trading interests grew and expanded. Starting with its monopoly of the spice trade, the Dutch eventually ruled over the region of East Indies, capitalizing on treaties signed with local leaders and its military superiority.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Sumatra witnesses a reformation movement to purify Malay-Muslim practices from pre-Islamic beliefs and practices that are not in line with Islamic teachings. Led by prominent Rawa religious scholars such as Tuanku Rao, Tuanku Imam Bonjol, and Tuanku Tambusai, what began as a religious movement soon evolved into a jihad (resistance movement) against the Dutch, known as the Padri War (1821-1837). The war led to many devastating results, with many Rawa leaders and their followers who joined in the movement persecuted and killed, forcing many others to flee from Sumatra to the Malay Peninsula.

Similarly, in 19<sup>th</sup> century Malay Peninsula, the Western colonization process was under way, with the British seeking ways and means to further expand their interests. Apart from the strategic location of the Peninsula being near to the major trading route of the Straits of Malacca, the abundant mineral resources in the Malay States including Pahang, Perak, and Selangor also explained the growing interests of the British in the region. The outbreak of internal conflicts and civil wars in the Malay States facilitated British intervention and subsequently the establishment of British hegemony over the whole Peninsula. Following the Pangkor Treaty sealed in 1824 with Raja Abdullah, the Sultan of Perak, British influence

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<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Bukhari Lubis and Afriadi Sanusi, "Sejarah Penghijrahan dan Diaspora Masyarakat Rao di Malaysia" in *Rao di Sana Sini*, ed. Muhammad Bukhari Lubis, Mohd Rosli Saludin and Talib Selamat (Tanjong Malim: Persatuan Jalinan Rao Malaysia (JARO), 2009), 48.

gradually spread, with the appointment of colonial officials and advisors known as Residents, assigned to render advice to individual Malay Rulers or Sultans of the different states. Such was the situation in the Malay Peninsula during the migration of the Rawa people in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Previous Rawa migrations**

Studies show that the Rawas were known as farmers, traders, skilled miners, able administrators, and as deeply spiritual and religious. The first wave of Rawa migrants to the Malay States arrived circa the 5<sup>th</sup> century and such a migration continued as coastal ports in the west coast of the Peninsula grew.<sup>18</sup> The early migrants, many of whom were farmers, left their home provinces, most likely searching for more profitable activities in the intra-Malay coastal trade. Given the long-established Minangkabau tradition whereby young men are encouraged to mark their own destiny, travelling to far places and acquiring new experiences, it is plausible that the Rawa migration continued to take place in the subsequent centuries.

The rise of the Malacca Sultanate in the 15<sup>th</sup> century as a new political power, and a commercial and Islamic centre in the Malay Archipelago, marked a new era in the history of trans-migration between the people of the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. Given the position of Malacca as an important trading centre at that time, it is to be expected that the Rawas who were known as merchants chose to migrate to Malacca and from there disseminated to other Malay States. The fact that Malacca had a political hegemony over some parts of Central Sumatra following the handing over of Indragiri, Jambi, Tungkal, and Siantan by King of Majapahit to Malaccan ruler, Sultan Mansur Shah (1459-1477),<sup>19</sup> means that the migration of people between both sides of the Malacca Straits could have increased even more now that the Malay Peninsula and some parts of

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<sup>18</sup> Undri, "Orang Rao ke Semenanjung Malaysia" in *Proceeding Seminar Budaya Masyarakat Serumpun "Dinamika Hubungan Minangkabau dan Negeri Sembilan"*, ed. Nursyirwan Effendi, Batu Sangkar, June 10-11 2010 (Padang: BPSNT Padang Press, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Buyong Adil, *Sejarah Melaka dalam Zaman Kerajaan Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pusaka, 1973), 44.



Sumatra were under the control of the same government. Furthermore, considering the status of Malacca as an important Islamic centre at that time, it is most probable that some Rawas decided to settle there either to learn more about Islam or to serve as religious teachers and preachers. Malacca was also the main transit hub for Hajj pilgrims from throughout the Indo-Malay Archipelago.

By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it can be safely said that the Rawa migration was no longer a new phenomenon, and the coastal ports of Sumatra were essentially integrated in the active and cosmopolitan trade and culture throughout the Malay Peninsula, connecting the peoples of the region. The decision of the last ruler of the Malaccan Sultanate, Sultan Mahmud Shah, to migrate to Kampar in Central Sumatra in 1526, after the destruction of his exiled government in Bentan Island (near Singapore) by the Portuguese,<sup>20</sup> is one proof of the close connections between Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. On the other hand, the coming of Seri Maharaja Perba or Tok Raja Jelai and his three siblings to Kuala Lipis in Pahang in 1591 was believed to be the first migration of nobles of royal blood (Pagaruyung) from Sumatra to the Malay Peninsula. Their offspring continue to live in the area until today.<sup>21</sup>

While migration had become a common practice among the people of both sides of the Straits of Malacca, several new developments in the subsequent centuries prompted even greater numbers of people to migrate. The activity of gold mining in the Malay Peninsula, especially in Raub, Pahang, starting from the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>22</sup> drew many Rawa migrants from Sumatra. Rawa people were noted for their gold mining activities in their home region from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century,<sup>23</sup> which combined with the prospect of lucrative riches, would have caused a large migration to the Peninsula, particularly Pahang. Apart from being known for their pioneering gold mining activities, the Pahang Rawas were also believed to be the

<sup>20</sup> Barbara W. Andaya and Leonard W. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan), 56.

<sup>21</sup> Zaffuan Haji Manap, *Bingkisan Sejarah Raub*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Mohd Rosli Saludin, "Hubungan Rao Negeri Sembilan dengan Rao Raub, Pahang" in *Masyarakat Rao di Malaysia: Analisis Tentang Sosiobudaya*, ed. Zabidin Haji Ismail and Talib Samat (Kuala Lumpur: Nurpress Sdn Bhd, 2013), 166.

<sup>23</sup> Undri, *Orang Pasaman*, 5.

predecessors of some Rawas in other Malay States such as Perak and Selangor, following their movement from Pahang to the neighbouring states.

The process of migration continued into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as some Rawas were stimulated by the development of the tin mining industry that began to take off in the Malay Peninsula at the time. Of the Malay States, Perak, Selangor, Malacca and Negeri Sembilan were especially rich with tin ores, attracting many people from different parts of the Malay Archipelago. As with the reasons for their participation in the gold mining industry, many Rawas went to the Malay Peninsula to work as tin miners.

Apart from the Rawa laymen who worked as peasants, merchants and miners, the 18<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed for the first time, the migration of a Pagaruyung prince to the Malay Peninsula. This followed the policy during the reign of Sultan Abdul Jalil Johan (c. 1739-1780) to send off Pagaruyung princes to become local leaders in different parts of Sumatra and the Peninsula. In the Peninsula, the royal prince was in the person of Raja Melewar (Mahmud), who was appointed as Yang Dipertuan of Seri Menanti in Negeri Sembilan from 1773-1795,<sup>24</sup> and whose descendants later became the kings of the state. The despatch of the prince naturally led to the migration of his followers or supporters too, some of whom were Rawa people.<sup>25</sup> Due to the prominent status of the Pagaruyung royalty in West Sumatra, it was maintained that Sultan Abdul Jalil Johan himself, sensing that Raja Melewar might need some help to secure his position in Seri Menanti, had ordered a Rawa noble of royal blood from Padang Nunang, Tengku Muda Khairul Alam bin Tengku Badrul Alam to follow up after Raja Melewar in 1773. Together with forty Rawa warriors, he left for Seri Menanti only to find that Raja Melewar had succeeded to become to the ruler of the area, having defeated his rival, Raja Khatib. Instead of remaining in Seri Menanti, Tengku Muda Khairul Alam and his followers later moved on to Raub in Pahang and settled there.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Zaffuan Haji Manap, *Bingkisan Sejarah Raub*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Mohd Rosli Saludin, "Hubungan Rao Negeri Sembilan", 169.

<sup>26</sup> Zaffuan Haji Manap, *Bingkisan Sejarah Raub*, 77.

In addition to princes, warrior bands and mercenaries, some of whom shared blood relations with the Pagaruyung family, migrated to the Malay States to open up new lands and later became leaders of different places in the Peninsula. Once settled in the areas, invitations were sent out to other warrior groups and families in West Sumatra to come over in order to assist and protect their land and position. One such instance was the invitation made by the descendants of Seri Maharaja Perba, who ruled Hulu Pahang, to warrior groups in the 1830s and early 1840s.<sup>27</sup> This consequently led to the migration of some West Sumatran groups, probably including a significant Rawa contingent, to the Malay Peninsula. Additionally, there were also Rawa noble-warriors who came mainly to find new place of settlements, like Tok Perak or Tok Prak in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His actual name was Raja Ahmad bin Bendahara Putih, and for his service to a *Pembesar* (noble) of Perak in suppressing piracy and restoring peace in the state, he was given the title of Panglima. From Perak, he then moved and opened up new settlements in Hulu Pahang, like Kampung Sengkela and Gesing.<sup>28</sup> Rawa migration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

While the Rawa migration to the Malay States was well under-way from the 5<sup>th</sup> century, this was on a much smaller and more gradual scale than the influx during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This followed several socio-economic and political developments, of which the latter were exceptionally important. Unlike the previous migrations which are lacking of details in terms of years of migration, names of prominent figures who led the Rawas, their destinations and settlements in the Peninsula, etc., more sound and detailed information could be found with respect to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Rawa migration.

Regarding the socio-economic reasons, as with the previous centuries, the migrating tradition of the Minangkabau society of which the Rawas are part of, and the involvement in trade and mining activities (particularly tin), were the main contributory factors for the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>28</sup> Subari Ahmad Jaafar ar-Rawi, "Raja Ahmad Anak Bendahara Putih Tuan Titah ke-10: Nenek Moyang Keturunan Rao Persemendaan di Raub Abad ke-17" in *Masyarakat Rao di Malaysia: Analisis Tentang Sosiobuday*, ed. Zabidin Haji Ismail and Talib Samat (Kuala Lumpur: Nurpress Sdn Bhd, 2013), 142-146.

large Rawa migration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The tradition known as 'merantau' (to leave one's village in search for better life) in a way related to the matrilineal nature of the Minangkabau society, whereby women took care of ancestral lands while young unmarried men left behind their families for other places in order to gain new life experiences, so that they could become better individuals and have a good life.<sup>29</sup> It is still being practised until today. Some eventually returned back to their home province in West Sumatra, bringing with them vast experiences and sometimes wealth, but many others did not, having established their own families in the Peninsula as they married local women there.

Regarding trade and tin mining industries, the industries thrived tremendously during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as more areas were opened to mining activities, the transportation system improved, and the British and Dutch trading networks facilitated selling to the whole world market. This in turn warranted a large workforce of tin miners, a profession that many Rawa migrants were ready to fill up. In Perak, for instance, a noble of Larut area, Ngah Ibrahim, employed many Rawas to work in his mines. They were brought in by his subordinate officer of Rao origin, Abdul Karim bin Raja Aman Shah, in the 1870s and 1880s to work initially at Larut and then Selama, Perak.<sup>30</sup>

Compared to socio-economic factors, political reasons are perhaps the most distinctive of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Rawa migration in the sense that they were not the main reasons for the Rawa exodus in the previous centuries. The political developments in Sumatra at that time which witnessed the expansion of colonial Dutch influence had left long-lasting impacts on the Rawa community. The most important political event was the Padri War (1821-1837) which saw the involvement of prominent Rawa religious leaders and a large number of Rawa supporters against the Dutch. Their defeat caused many Rawas to flee to the Malay States in order to avoid persecution from the Dutch.

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<sup>29</sup> Oka A. Yoeti, *Diaspora Perantau Minang: Sukses di Rantau, Enggan Pulang Kampung* (Bandung: Penerbit Angkasa, 2017), 2.

<sup>30</sup> Zabidin Haji Ismail, "Perak" in *Masyarakat Rao di Malaysia: Analisis Tentang Sosiobudaya*, ed. Zabidin Haji Ismail and Talib Samat (Kuala Lumpur: Nurpress Sdn Bhd, 2013), 14-15.

Following the establishment of Dutch rule over Sumatra by the 1840s, many warrior groups and families left for the Malay Peninsula, some upon the invitation of local leaders of Sumatran origin, who had already established their power base in several Malay States in earlier centuries. For instance, the descendants of Seri Maharaja Perba who ruled Hulu Pahang had invited some warrior groups of Pagaruyung blood to enter into their service around the 1830s and early 1840s.<sup>31</sup> What prompted these rulers to call for their own kinsfolk could have been due to security reasons, as they felt safer being protected by their own people. In the meantime, what prompted the warrior groups who had been called for to migrate could have been due to the diminishing power of the Pagaruyung Kingdom, with the last Pagaruyung king, Sultan Tunggal Alam Bagagar Shah Johan, being forced by the Dutch to abdicate in 1833,<sup>32</sup> causing them to move to the Peninsula rather than living under the Dutch rule. Given the rather close relations between noble-warriors groups in Sumatra, it is possible that amongst those who accepted the invitations were of Rawa origin or they had Rawas as their followers. Accepting the offer to serve the local leaders in the Malay States provided them with an opportunity to move on with lives in a new place, free of Dutch control in the Malay Peninsula.

### **Rawa settlements and relations with the locals**

In migrating to the Malay Peninsula, the Rawas entered through coastal ports in the west coast (i.e. in Penang, Perak, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan and further south in Singapore). From the coastal ports, they navigated through rivers to reach different places in the Malay States. In Pahang, the Rawas mostly settled in Hulu Pahang, which included areas like Raub, Kuala Lipis, Bera, and Bentong. Of these places, Raub has the largest Rawa concentrations, and it is known as the “Lubuk Rao” (Rao’s pit). Being isolated in the interior part of Pahang, the place was conducive for the Rawas as it was far from their potential enemies. Additionally, the abundance of gold in the area further served as a stimulus for the Rawas to migrate there.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Zaffuan Haji Manap, *Bingkisan Sejarah Raub*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Undri, “Orang Rao ke Semenanjung Malaysia”, 165.



Some of the Rawas reached Pahang via Negeri Sembilan, and others via Perak. Of the latter group, they were led in the 1850s and 1860s by leading figures such as Rawa Pakeh Khalifah Saka, Tujuan Saka, and Nantian Saka, etc. At the same time, there were Rawas of Pahang who transited to Perak and later on moved to Selangor. There were also groups of Rawas who migrated northward from Pahang to the state of Kelantan, and settled in places like Pasir Mas.

Meanwhile in Perak, the largest number of Rawa migrants settled in Gopeng. Other places include Tapah, Selama, Temoh, Teluk Intan, Sungkai, Bidor, Chemor, Tanjung Malim (Bernam), etc. These places along the Titiwangsa Range, which has large tin deposits, were ideal areas for Rawa settlement. The migration to Perak mainly took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the Padri War in the 1820s and 1830s, and later due to the development of the tin mining industry in the 1870s and 1880s, which in turn contributed to the opening of numerous settlements and increased commercial activities among the people. Apart from those who migrated directly from the Sumatran Island, there were some Rawas who came through the north (i.e. from Penang), and some through Pahang and Selangor. For instance, the Rawas who settled in Gopeng in the 1850s mainly came through Kelang, Selangor.<sup>34</sup>

In the meantime, among those who migrated to Tanjung Malim (Bernam) in the 1860s and 1870s were the Rawas of Pahang, who either refused to be dragged into a civil war (1857-1863) between Tun Mutahir and Tun Ahmad for the throne of Pahang and the subsequent conflicts (1866, 1868 and 1870), or who escaped with their lives after being involved in the warring events. Of the first group, Dato' Haji Mustapha bin Raja Kamala, a notable follower of a respected warrior, Imam Rasu bin Tok Shaharum or Dato' Gajah (Tok Gajah), led a group of Rawas to migrate to Tanjung Malim (Bernam) circa 1870-1871. From Perak, some of them proceeded further to several places in Selangor like Kalumpang in Hulu Selangor, Hulu Langat, Gombak, and Kampung Baru.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Selangor, the biggest concentrations of the Rawa community were in Kalumpang, Hulu Selangor, and this remains true until now. In terms of their flow of migration, some

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<sup>34</sup> Zabidin Haji Ismail, "Perak", 13.

came from Pahang via Tanjung Malim (Bernam) to Kalumpang in the 1860s and 1870s. Another group from the north, i.e. Penang, travelled downwards past Perak and then to Selangor. As for leading Rawa figures in Selangor, the most notable was Panglima Kanan, whose real name was Hj Salam bin Datuk Berkanun. He originated from Kampung Kota Raja, Rao Mapat Tunggul, in West Sumatra, and he was greatly involved in the development of the Kalumpang area in the 1880s.<sup>35</sup> It is clear that the large deposit of tin in Kalumpang was the main motivation for the Rawas to settle there. Another possible factor was the close proximity between Kalumpang (Hulu Selangor) and Hulu Pahang, and between Kalumpang and the Perak borders. Surely, given the mode of transportation at that time, Kalumpang was the most viable place for the Rawas coming from Pahang, Perak, and northern states like Penang. Apart from Kalumpang, other centres of tin mining attracted the Rawas to migrate there, including Kelang and Kuala Lumpur.

In terms of the relations between the Rawa migrants and the ruling authorities in the Malay Peninsula, different reactions were visible particularly among the local Malay rulers and the British. While the presence of the Rawas in 19<sup>th</sup> century Malaya was welcomed by those who were in need of their services, either as warriors or miners, their active participation in local politics was perceived by few quarters as a threat to the stability of the Malay States. This followed their involvement in numerous conflicts and civil wars such as in Pahang, Selangor, and Negeri Sembilan.

As skilled warriors, the Rawa migrants were received with open arms by some local leaders of the Malay States to serve as soldiers; to protect their position, land, and sometimes to fight against enemies. Some of these leaders, as mentioned earlier, were of Sumatran origin who favoured warrior groups from their home province in West Sumatra. For instance, in the civil war in Pahang between Tun Mutahir and Tun Ahmad from 1857 until 1863, many Rawas in Raub, Pahang, initially joined the latter's camp. Later, although Tun Ahmad triumphed in the power struggle, the involvement of the Rawa people continued, as some of them now sided with the sons of Tun Mutahir namely, Wan Aman (Wan Abdul

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<sup>35</sup> Dzulkifli bin Buyong, *Sejarah Kalumpang*, unpublished manuscript.

Rahman) and Wan Da in a series of fruitless campaigns against the now Bendahara Tun Ahmad in the late 1860s and 1870, thus witnessed the fighting between the Rawas of both warring factions.

The conflict resulted in some Rawas having to escape to other states (either due to their refusal to get involved in the wars or their loss in the wars), and established a negative view among the other Malays of Pahang towards those Rawas who fought against Bendahara Tun Ahmad in the late 1860s and 1870, and by extension the Rawas generally, who came to be popularly stereotyped as traitors and enemies of the state. Among those condemned by the people of Pahang included Rawa leaders such as Sutan Tengahari and Sultan Bangkahulu, who after their defeats fled to Selangor.<sup>36</sup> Such a perception in turn may explain why some Rawas, particularly those who sided with the losing party, chose to hide their identity, adopting different names or being secretive of their origin, even to their own descendants.

Apart from Pahang, the Rawa people had also participated in political struggles in different Malay States such as Selangor and Negeri Sembilan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Selangor, the Rawas who fled from Pahang, were involved in the Klang War (1867-1874) between Raja Abdullah and Raja Mahadi, as they followed Wan Aman and Wan Da seeking refuge in the state.<sup>37</sup> Other conflicts involving the Rawas included the Raub-Bernam War and the Raub-Gumut War, generally known as the Pahang-Selangor War, in the early 1870s.<sup>38</sup> There were also Rawas involved in civil war between Tengku Kudin and Tengku Mahadi near Kuala Lumpur.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, there were groups of Rawa who meddled in the affairs of Negeri Sembilan, getting involved in the conflicts between Linggi and Rembau in the 1820s<sup>40</sup> and later between Sungai Ujong and Rembau in the 1850s.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Zaffuan Haji Manap, *Bingkisan Sejarah Raub*, 91-95, 99-100.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>38</sup> Dzulkifli bin Buyong, *Sejarah Kalumpang*, unpublished manuscript; Aruna Gopinath, *Pahang, 1880-1933: A Political History* (Kuala Lumpur: Council of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> Zabidin Haji Ismail and Talib Samat, ed. *Masyarakat Rao di Malaysia*, 87.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Undri, "Orang Rao ke Semenanjung Malaysia", 165.

While the decision of the local Malay rulers to recruit Rawa warriors was due to their military prowess, the readiness of Rawa mercenaries to render their services in support of the various conflicting factions was partly to fill their pockets. For instance, in the case of the opposition group who fought the Pahang government in 1868, its Rawa supporters were promised by Wan Aman and Wan Da special rights in the gold mining around Raub, Pahang, if their campaign was successful. While it is unfair to generalize all Rawas as equally susceptible to such temptations, nevertheless, due to the rebellions actions of some Rawas led by the non-Rawa figures, Wan Aman and Wan Da, it is possible that several quarters in Malaya at that time tend to perceive the Rawa people in general as opportunistic mercenaries who helped foment and stoke wars in return for material gains.

Not only did such a negative perception of the Rawas prevail among the local Malay rulers and masses, but also among some British colonial officers who were in the Malay States at that time. Compared to the local Malay rulers, the views of the British officers seemed to be even more condemnatory, describing the Rawas as warlike, unruly, and rebellious, and that the group threatened the stability of the Malay States. Apart from the involvement of the Rawa group in various conflicts in certain parts of the Peninsula, the past record of the Rawa people as the staunchest opponents of the Dutch colonial rule in Sumatra, manifested in their greater participation in the Padri War, might have as well influenced the British views and attitude towards the group.

One of the British officers, Hugh Clifford, who later became British Resident of Pahang (1896-1900, 1901-1903), in commenting on the Rawas who migrated to Hulu Pahang in search for gold, described the group in February 1887 as mercenaries, and as very evil and arrogant people who had no sense of respect within their own selves. Earlier, the same tone was voiced out in 1859 by Resident Councillor at Malacca, Colonel R. Macpherson (1857-1860), depicting the Rawa migrants as a group of people from interior part of Sumatra who were never tired of wars and who gloried in battle.<sup>42</sup> Given such perceptions, it is no surprise that some

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<sup>42</sup> Undri, "Orang Rao ke Semenanjung Malaysia", 167; Zaffuan Haji Manap,

Rawa migrants decided to conceal their true identity for fear of possible repercussions of any kind such as loss of assets and properties, loss of good names or even persecution by some parties for their involvement in the earlier political struggles.

The remarks and reports by the local Malay leaders concerning the Rawas are also worthy of attention as they might have weight on the British perceptions of the group. For instance, in 1855, the leaders of Sungai Ujong and Rembau complained to the British of the Rawas' intervention in the affairs of their domains. The Rawas were also reported to have raided and looted the people who lived in their areas.<sup>43</sup> More importantly, the rise of Malay warriors of Rawa origin in certain Malay States against the colonial rule must have further enhanced the negative views held by the British. Among the notable Rawa leaders who fought against the British authorities in the 1890s were such as Tok Gajah and his son, Mat Kilau, who in the eyes of the British were Malay insurgents or rebels whose resistance called for swift actions. The British managed to suppress the opposition where both leaders were forced to flee to Kelantan, and later, Terengganu.

Last but not least, perhaps, for some Rawas, it was simply because they wished to avoid disputes among themselves either over position or influence. This can be seen in the instance of Wan Musa, a descendant of Pagaruyung royalty in Pahang whose information on his ancestral lineage was deliberately concealed in order to avoid possible dispute with the royal family of Negeri Sembilan, also from Pagaruyung ancestry.<sup>44</sup> Because of the above reasons, some Rawas might have been reluctant to disclose who they really were, thus explained the lack of details and sometimes conflicting information regarding the Rawa community in the Malay Peninsula.

### **Contributions of the Rawa migrants**

As with other Malay migrants who came from various parts of the Indo-Malay Archipelago, the Rawas were also instrumental in the socio-economic and political developments of the Malay Peninsula in

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*Bingkisan Sejarah Raub*, 58.

<sup>43</sup> Undri, "Orang Rao ke Semenanjung Malaysia", 165.

<sup>44</sup> Zaffuan Haji Manap, *Bingkisan Sejarah Raub*, 6.



the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In politics, the Rawa migrants, particularly those of noble and warrior groups, were known as able administrators. With the administrative and fighting skills that they possessed, coupled with their respected lineage, some were appointed as leaders of different areas and entrusted with high-ranking positions by local Malay leaders and rulers. In Pahang for instance, Tok Gajah was appointed as a minister in the Pahang court and there were others too who served the Pahang ruler, Bendahara Tun Ahmad, including Jo Pogangal Rao, his son Panglima Sutan, Panglima Haji Muhd Salleh Lentoral-Rao, Imam Perang Haji Yusuf bin Tan Ibrahim, and Tengku Abdul Samad bin Tengku Muda Khairul Alam.<sup>45</sup> In Perak, Dato' Haji Mustapha bin Raja Kamala was one notable Rawa leader entrusted with the administration over Tanjong Malim. In Selangor, the leading Rawa figures included Panglima Kanan, Panglima Kiri Kalumpang, Panglima Besar, and Panglima Ulung Kalumpang.<sup>46</sup>

Their recruitment by the local Malay leaders or rulers to assist in administrative matters or rule certain areas helped safeguard the leaders' position, land, and families from enemies. For instance, the prominent Rawa figure Tok Gajah fought against contenders for the throne of Pahang in addition to the British. In Selangor, Panglima Kanan, Panglima Kiri Kalumpang, and Panglima Besar defended the state from Pahang attacks, and later Panglima Kanan together with Panglima Ulung Kalumpang assisted the Pahang warrior, Mat Kilau, to fight the British. As skilful warriors, they were also entrusted with the suppression of piracy, such as in the case of Panglima Kanan who assisted Sultan of Selangor, Sultan Muhammad, in fighting off pirates at Sabak Bernam. For his services in defending the state and eliminating the pirates, Panglima Kanan (Hj Salam bin Datuk Berkanun) was awarded the title of 'Panglima Kanan' (Right-Hand Warrior) by the Sultan of Selangor.

As far economic development is concerned, the Rawas' contributions can be seen in the field of trade and commerce, mining activities and agriculture. Known as active traders and merchants, the

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<sup>45</sup> Zainal Abidin Hj. Nordin, "Selangor" in *Masyarakat Rao di Malaysia: Analisis Tentang Sosiobudaya*, ed. Zabidin Haji Ismail and Talib Samat (Kuala Lumpur: Nurpress Sdn. Bhd., 2013), 74.

<sup>46</sup> Dzulkipli bin Buyong, *Sejarah Kalumpang*, unpublished manuscript.

Rawas conducted trade with people of various parts of the Malay Peninsula, in Penang, Perak, Selangor, Malacca, etc. In Pahang, the gold industry led some Rawas to engage in the trade of gold ores while many others as gold miners. The name Raub, which refers to a Rawa dominated area in Pahang, bears the importance of the gold mining involving the Rawa people. The term Raub comes from a Malay word 'meraub' or grabbing gold. In Perak, given the abundance of tin ores, many Rawas worked as tin miners using panning and gravel pumping methods, or tin traders.

Moreover, with the existence of many rivers in Perak, a number of ports emerged at various strategic locations in the state such as Durian Sebatang and Teluk Intan, hence facilitating Rawas' involvement in trade. Of these two, Teluk Intan or Teluk Mak Intan on the banks of the Perak River was believed to be opened by a lady of Rawa descent named Mak Intan. Many traders came to trade at the port including from China and India.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, in Selangor, tin mining and tin trade which involved the Rawa people, alongside other Malay groups from Sumatra like Kerinchi and Mandailing, led to the substantial economic and urban development of some areas in the state, including Kuala Lumpur.

Following the decline of tin production by the late 1880s, many Rawas began to be involved in rubber tree plantations, hence they contributed to the agricultural sector. Agriculture was not a new field to the Rawa migrants, since their home province of Sumatra was predominated by an agrarian culture and economy. Like many other migrant communities in the Peninsula at that time, the Rawas were involved in various agricultural activities such as planting different kinds of crops, fishery, and animal husbandry.

Another effect of the Rawa migration was the opening of new lands or settlements in the Malay Peninsula. Of the three states (Pahang, Perak, and Selangor), it seemed that Pahang was explored earlier by the Rawas. In Pahang, the new settlements opened by the Rawas were mostly in Hulu Pahang, such as Raub, Dong, Gali, Semantan Hulu, Sengkela, Kuala Lipis, and Gesing. Some of these places were opened in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by groups of Rawas, led for instance by Tengku Muda Khairul Alam and Tok Perak. Other

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<sup>47</sup> Zabidin Haji Ismail, "Perak", 16-18.

pioneers during the same century included Haji Abdullah Malim Pendeta, Tok Shaharom (the father of the famous Pahang warrior Tok Gajah), Datuk Paduka, Tan Ibrahim, and Datuk Baginda. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the descendants of these Rawa forerunners opened more areas in the state of Pahang.

In Perak, starting especially from the 1850s onwards, many Rawa migrants began to settle in central and south-east Perak, opening up many new settlements in areas like Gopeng, Tapah, Chemor, Selama, and Tanjong Malim. Selama for instance was opened by a group led by Abdul Karim Raja Aman Shah, who came to work in the mines of the Perak noble Ngah Ibrahim in the 1870s. Also in the 1870s, Teluk Intan was believed to be explored by Mak Intan, and Tanjong Malim was re-opened by Dato' Haji Mustapha bin Raja Kamala, who then became Penghulu or village headman in the area.<sup>48</sup> Tanjong Malim had previously been opened by Bugis people in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but was subsequently abandoned. Meanwhile, in Selangor, some of the areas were opened or developed, along with other West Sumatran groups, by Rawas who came from Perak and Pahang. The areas included particularly those in Hulu Selangor, such as Hulu Bernam, Kuala Kalumpang, Kalumpang and Sungai Gumut, and in other places like Gombak, Kampung Baru, and Kuala Lumpur.

Finally, the Rawas were known for their efforts in spreading Islam in the Malay Peninsula. This is especially true with regards to some prominent Rawa leaders who commanded high respect among the local community in addition to their compatriots due to their religious knowledge and leadership. Serving as religious teachers or imams, these Rawas were often associated with the construction of mosques and religious schools, and delivering popular religious sermons. Apart from being a skilful warrior of noble origin, Tok Perak, who migrated to Perak and later Pahang, was noted for his efforts in preaching Islam. During his lifetime, he was invited by numerous local leaders to come and talk about Islam in their localities until his final years, when he eventually died in 1802 at the age of 102 years old. He was then succeeded by his son, Tok Imam Abdullah Hashim or Tok Duhas, who became imam in Kampung

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<sup>48</sup> Zabidin Haji Ismail, "Perak", 12-19.

Terap, Hulu Pahang.<sup>49</sup> In Tanjong Malim, Dato' Haji Mustapha bin Raja Kamala was noted for his contribution in the establishment of a religious centre for people to learn about Islam and learn to read Quran.<sup>50</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The Rawa or Rao people originating from West Sumatra were no strangers to the Malay Peninsula, since their coming can be dated back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. However, their modern history in Malaya has been shrouded in mystery and obfuscation, including deliberate attempts to hide their origins by Rawa people themselves. While their history has been dubious and to some extent controversial, there is a lack of detailed information on the community, especially prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even among the descendants of Rawa today, some have no or limited knowledge of their root and ancestry, not knowing how to speak the Rawa language and no longer practising traditional Rawa customs.

To explain this loss of identity, it is partly because they were not allowed to speak of their past or to reveal their identity, and this was caused by several factors such as the negative feeling or attitude of the local leaders and British authorities towards the Rawa community who migrated to the Malay States, and the desire to avoid conflicts among the Rawa themselves over power or position. Notwithstanding this, the Rawa migrants were extensively involved in various socio-economic and political developments of the Malay Peninsula in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and for that, their contributions ought to be appreciated and acknowledged in the rich ethnic tapestry of modern Malaysia.

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<sup>49</sup> Subari Ahmad Jaafar ar-Rawi, "Raja Ahmad Anak Bendahara Putih", 150.

<sup>50</sup> Zabidin Haji Ismail, "Perak", 19.

# AL-SHAJARA

Special Issue

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