

THE MUSLIM EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA AFTER THE POL POT ERA*

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Introduction

The Cambodian civil war in the 1970's has ruined the country in terms of properties and society as a whole. The Cambodian people of all walks of life and of various religions were badly affected. The Muslims, mostly descendants of the kingdom of Campa and the Malays from Nusantara, were not exempted. After the Khmer Rouge was defeated, the Cambodian society is rearing to develop their nation once again. The Muslim community started to reorganize themselves around the teachings of Islam by reorganizing Islamic classes, rebuilding *madrasas*, mosques and *suraus* as they believe that Islam is the core and strength of their community. They reestablish their relations with Muslim countries especially Malaysia, by sending delegations to various organizations including ministries in order to request for aids. Their brothers, the Malay-Cam who migrated earlier and settled in Malaysia gave very positive response toward rebuilding up the community by providing religious teachers, mostly graduates from the Middle East. Besides, together with other Cambodians they actively rebuild their beloved country, the Kingdom of Cambodia. Now they have become once again a force to be reckoned with. They prove once again that religion can play an important role in the community building, preserving their ethnic identity and at the same time playing an important role in Cambodian nation building process.

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The Muslim Education In Cambodia After the Pol Pot Era

The third quarter of the 20th century has seen a horrendous crime committed against humanity by the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. The people of Cambodia of all walks of life went under the strict scrutiny of the *Angkar*¹ a way of finding out who did what under the previous government, the Lon Nol administration. This was to weed out elements which may be considered as anti-Khmer Rouge. All Cambodians people, the Khmers (which constitutes the majority of the Cambodian population), Chinese and all other minorities including the Muslims, suffered a great deal under this Pol Pot regime from 1975 to early 1979. This paper will concentrate on the Muslim community after this black period of Cambodian history. The Muslims together with their fellow citizens lost everything from their family members to their possessions including properties. After Cambodia was liberated from this inhuman regime, they started to rebuild their society and their beloved country together with other communities.

But first of all let us briefly see who are the Muslims and how this community comes into being in Cambodia. The Muslim community is formed mainly of the Malay and the Cam people, besides a very small number of Arabs, Afghans, Pakistanis and Indians. Presently, within the Muslim community, only the Malay and the Cam remain in the country as the rest was allowed to leave Cambodia within the first few days of the Pol Pot regime together

1 A Khmer term meaning "organization". Within the Pol Pot regime, *Angkar* refers to the Khmer Rouge organization.

2 Mak Phœun 1988, p. 83-93. See also Po Dharma 1981 & Po Dharma 1982.

with the remaining foreigners grouped together in the French Embassy.

Historically, the Malay and the Cam were known as "Cam-Jva". The word "Cam"² refers to the people from the ancient kingdom of Campa, which occupied approximately the central part of today's Vietnam. The "Jva" or "Chvea" for Jawa, which in Cambodia represents all the Malay community without any reference to their exact place of origins, which could well be the Island of Jawa, but also any other islands of the Malay archipelago and the various states of the Malay Peninsula. According to the "Jva" in Cambodia, they came from Borneo, Sumatra, Singapore, and Terengganu and also from the kingdom of Pattani in the XIVth century³. The Malay and the Cam could not be easily be differentiated as both practice the same religion, Islam and they belong to the same linguistic group, the Austronesian. In short, they form a homogenous community, which nowadays is known as "Khmer Islam"⁴ that is the Khmers who profess Islam. Their number is about 450,000 people⁵ spread

3 Mak Phœun 1990 p. 50.

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

5 Dr T.Y. Abdulcoyaume 1999. Short of reliable statistics, various numbers of Malay-Cam community in Cambodia since independence, have been forwarded by various writers. Po Dharma 1981 estimated at between 150,000 and 200,000 people; Mak Phœun 1988, estimated at 300,000 people. See also Ben Kiernan 1996 p. 254-255. Abdulcoyaume 1999 estimated at 500,000 Cham and Malay people killed in Pol Pot's Killing Fields. A census in 1874 showed that they numbered 25,599 (E. Aymonier 1876, p. 26-27.) In 1862, Spooner estimated the population of Phnom Penh at about 5,000 people, the tenth of whom were Malay (*ANSOM, Indo., Amiraux 12705, A. Spooner, "Rapport sur le Cambodge", 30 December 1862).*

6 *Laporan Korban Eidul Adha & Aqidah di Kemboja 1421H (2000 Masihi)*, t.t., diterbitkan oleh Al-Ameen Serve Holdings Sdn Bhd dan Yayasan Pembangunan Umat Islam Kemboja. Concerning the arrival of the Malay and the Cam people in Cambodia see Mohamad Zain Bin Musa 1991 and Mohamad Zain Bin Musa 2001.

out in some 362 villages⁶.

The Presence of the Malays and the Cam in Cambodia

Since their arrival in Cambodia, the Malay and the Cam have lived in harmony with the Khmer, who form the majority of the Cambodian population. The presence of Malays and Cam in Cambodia dates back several centuries as the Malay and the Campa kingdoms had gradually established various forms of contact with the Khmer's. The Malays from the Malay Peninsula continued to go and settle in Cambodia until the present days. In the 1990s, most of them are involved in business or missionary activities.

The majority of the Cam community arrived after the fall of Vijaya, the capital of Campa, in 1471 followed by that of the in 1692–3 after the Vietnamese annexed the region of Phanrang⁷, and in late 18th century and early 19th centuries when the Nguyen and the Tay-son brothers were fighting one another⁸. They fled their homeland in search of a place which would provide security and where they were made to feel welcome. It was Cambodia that served both needs. Some took refuge further away in the Malay Peninsula (Kelantan, Johor and Melaka) and in the islands of the Malay Archipelago (Sumatra and Borneo).

Hence, the arrival of the Cam people in Cambodia was primarily the result of pressure by the famous Vietnamese Nam-

7 For this episode of Campa history, see J. Boisselier, 'La statuaire du Campa Recherches sur les cultes et l'iconographie', PEFEQ, 54, 1963, pp. 358–9, and Po Dharma, 'Les frontières du Campa (Dernier état des recherches)', in *Les frontières du Vietnam (Histoire de frontières de la Péninsule Indochinoise)*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989, pp. 128–35.

8 See Mohamad Zain Bin Musa 1990.

9 For the annexation of Panduranga, the last state of Campa, see Po Dharma, *Le Panduranga (Campa) 1802–1835: Ses rapports avec le Vietnam*, 2 vols., Paris: PEFEQ, 1987.

tien, which started after the official creation of the Viet state in AD 939, until the identity of Campa was wiped out in 1835⁹. As for the Malays, they went to Cambodia for two main reasons, either to expand their business or to engage in missionary activities among their fellow Muslims.

Location of the Malay-Cam Settlements

On settling in Cambodia, the Malays and the Cam formed a unique community as both groups practised the same religion – Islam. There was a great deal of intermarriage between the two groups. They were well received by all, from the ordinary Khmer people to the aristocracy and the monarchs. They were allowed to settle in all parts of the kingdom.¹⁰ In the nineteenth century, the first French to arrive in Cambodia were surprised by this symbiosis and observed that ‘a Muslim population and a Buddhist people [were] living together in almost brotherly relations’.¹¹

The locations of their settlements before and after the Pol Pot era remains the same; however there are some new villages are being formed. Their biggest concentrations are on the banks of *Tonlé Thom* (the Mekong) (from Kratié to Phnom Penh), on the banks of Tonle Sap (from Phnom Penh to Kompong Chhnang, especially in Chraing Camrès, Khléang Sbèk and Kompong Luong), in the region of the Beng Tonlé Sap (the Great Lake), as well as in the provinces of Kompong Cam (Thbaung Khmum), Pursat and Battambang, and

10 Mak Phœun, *Histoire du Cambodge*, pp. 397–8.

11 Auguste Pavie, *Mission Pavie Indo-Chine 1879–1895: Géographie et voyages. I. Exposés des travaux de la mission...*, Paris: Challamcl, 1901, pp. 28–9, mentions the Cam people, but it is understood that those Muslims were, in fact, both Cam and Malays; likewise, in other writings, the term Malay in some cases refers to both Malays and Cam.

Kampot. They enjoyed the same rights as the Khmer people.

Where ever there are big communities, they built mosques or *massala*, which served as places of worship as well as centres of religious and other community activities, including classes for Islamic knowledge. Together with the Khmer, they enjoyed good times together; they endured the same fate and the same sufferings when the country was faced with instability. The latest sufferings were when the whole country was a victim of the genocidal regime of Pol Pot, who committed horrendous crimes against their own people during the 1975–9 period.

Dawah works

The Malay and Cam are the biggest components of the Muslim community in Cambodia. The *Khmer Islam* name refers to this community. Even though there were debates among the Malay and Cam on this name, they never came to a conclusion or a consensus, which they could bring forwards to the government as to what name they should be called. The major problem was not they were divided between racial line of Malay or Cam but rather of their interest being citizens of Cambodia. Some are of the opinion that they should be integrated fully in the Cambodian nation by sacrificing their race denomination. Others argue that even though they are known as Cam or Malay, they can still serve their country faithfully and productively as for centuries history has proven that they can be trusted and a force to be reckoned with¹². These lines of argument are being debated among themselves from time to time.

12 See Mohamad Zain Bin Musa, "The Malay and the Cam People and Their Relations with the Administration of the Kingdom of Cambodia From 1858 to the Present Day", working paper presented at the 16th IAHA Conference, 2000, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.

In view of no simple solution to what name they should be called, the Muslim community religiously devoted their time and energy to building themselves up socially and economically. At the same time they displayed unquestioned loyalty to the kingdom and in return they get access to a higher social status in the Cambodian military as well as in civil administrative hierarchy. This chain was broken, and that was badly, during the 1975-9 Pol Pot era. Lots have been written of what happened during this period of time.

After the Pol Pot regime was evicted in early 1979, all communities in Cambodia were like just being born again. No thing of the modern world was left untouched, monetary, education, health, administration, defense, justice systems and most of all religions, Buddhism, Islam and others. Cambodia went back to Year Zero. As for the people's life, no one knows exactly how many are left after this black period of the Cambodian History. As for the Muslims, according to those who survived the Pol Pot regime, when they went back to their village they found out that only very few were spared by the Pol Pot era. One village on an island in the province of Kompong Cam were completely razed and most its people were killed. This village was called *Koh Phal*, which means *Prosperous Island*. The raid and the destruction of the village happened after some 350 Cam families protested a Krauch Chmar *Angkar's* order. The order, ordering Cam girls to cut their hair short, came after the *Angkar* have collected all copies of Koran. To the community, cutting a Muslim girl's hair short is considered a disgrace to society. After the island was completely razed, the *Angkar* has changed its name to *Koh Phes (Ash Island)*¹³.

13 Also mentioned in Ben Kiernan 1996 p. 263-264.

14 In Cambodia and Vietnam and within the Muslim community, *Tuan* refers to the Islamic teachers, and *Hakim* refers to a well-versed person in Islamic laws. A *Tuan* or *Hakim* command a very highly respectable position in the Muslim community

During the Pol Pot era, any form of religious identity was completely destroyed. Most *Tuans* and *Hakims*¹⁴ were killed or died of disease or starvation; religious books were destroyed, and most mosques and *suraus* were destroyed or turned into pigsties. Longing to practice their religion, fearing that the young would become non-Muslims and most of all knowing that the Islam is the community's strength, the Muslims started to rebuild their community by gathering all of their energies with utmost urgency to cleanse religiously their houses of worship, mosques and *suraus*. At this time among the Muslim people only Malays and Cam were left, the Arabs, Pakistanis and Indians Muslims have all left Cambodia together with the remaining foreigners after the 17 April 1975 Khmer Rouge victory.

From this moment the Muslim community regained their confidence as the new government of Heng Samrin was encouraging all forms of activities of a civilized community: schools were reopened, religious practices were allowed and places of worships, Buddhist pagodas, mosques and *suraus* were reopened. As there was no money circulation in the country, people bartered for every thing they needed. The very few *Tuans* and *Hakims*, one of the precious elements left for the new society, opened up Koranic classes all over the country. Tuan Zakaryya Adam Osman who has survived the regime, and a follower of a group called *Kaum Muda*, reorganized the schools in his home village of Khpob, in Svay Khleang in the district of Krauch Chmar. The following is his story related to me in 1987.

In Prèk Kout, a village adjacent to Khpob in Svay Khleang, where there was a high concentration of *Kaum Muda* followers, those who had knowledge of Islam were all dead, and Zakaryya alone survived. Most of the Prek Kout Muslims were to be found,

and new villagers were coming, some come from as far as Andong Sâr and Angkor Ban, all in the province of Kompong Cham. The new government opened classes for national schools, and allowed the Muslims to reorganize Islamic classes by themselves. But there were very few students attending either school, because primarily there were no teachers, and secondly the parents of those children were very poor to let their children going to school. They would rather keep their young to help them earn a living. In short, there was short of the villagers' participation as their main preoccupations were to earn a living.

Zakaryya was working very hard to convince the villagers to send their children to both schools, national and Islamic schools. As the government policy requires the children to go to national school only in the morning, he got these school going age children to attend Islamic school in the afternoon. He himself taught in both schools, morning and afternoon in Khpob and Prèk Kout.

In the government, Tuan Zakaryya is now Undersecretary, Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs, and within the Muslim community he was Deputy *Mufti* until 2000. He told me recently that since he held both offices he found out that not only in Svay Khleang did the Muslims organized Islamic classes but also in other villages all over the country, where ever there was a *Tuan* who survived the Pol Pot regime. But unfortunately only very few survived. In some villages, a few of those who could only read Koran and has very shallow knowledge of Islam survive and become *Tuan*.

The Muslims tried their best to give their children education because they believe that only education can give them good prospects in society: religious education to make them good people and good citizens of the country, and national education give them

mobility in the society. And with these they can become useful to the country.

Zakaryya said when he was teaching in Svay Khleang, his students came as far as from Kompong Ro, Choumnik, to the east, and Andong Sor to the west. There were shortages of every thing: books and stationeries. As for *kitab*s, religious books, with the help of villagers, he searched in vain in houses in his student's villages, especially in the former *Tuans'* houses. But no *kitab*s were found. After that he made several trips to Phnom Penh's markets to look for *kitab*s. He found some and they were exchanged with rice, which he brought from his home. The barter was done because at that time there was no money circulation in the country. He also found out that some *kitab*s sold there were brought in from Cam villages in Vietnam, like Saigon and Chaudoc. The *kitab*s sold there in Phnom Penh were snatched like hot cakes as not only he alone in search for them but also those from other parts of Cambodia.

Not long after that, not event *kitab*s from Vietnam were available. He started to look somewhere else. He got in touch with *Rabitah* (Saudi Arabia). Soon after that he received 10 *kitab*s; it was a personal gift from some one. These *kitab*s were delivered by mail. This was the beginning of so many things to happen in the field of Islamic education in the country.

At first he was so afraid that the government would take action against him by trying to revive the teaching of Islam and not only that but to get in touch with outside world. He was so afraid as the memory of Pol Pot era still haunted him, and any one else, as this kind of thing was strictly forbidden under the Pol Pot regime: the punishment was nothing else but death. Zakaryya's determination in teaching in both national and religious schools

has earned him a place in the society.

On the other hand the government realizes the importance of the Muslim community in the process of national building. Every year in the month of December the Heng Samrin government organized a conference (*Moha Sanibat*) of the *Tuans* and *Hakims*. The conference was aimed at formulating a policy for the development of the nations. And the *Tuans* and *Hakims* can play a very important role in nation building. They are very influential figures in the Muslim society; through them, the government message can be conveyed throughout the country. After the conference in the month of December 1987, 200 cartons of Koran weighing 22 tones offered by a person by the name of Isa Bin Nasir from Dubai, United Arab Emirate were distributed throughout the country through the *Tuans* and *Hakims* who were present at the conference. Prayer mats were also distributed.

In some villages, the copies of Koran are sold to individuals. The money collected was for building of *suraus* or mosques. When the *suraus* or mosques were completed, the Koran bought earlier was now presented to *suraus* and mosques. Once again every one enjoys the reading and learning of Koran.

During the early period of liberation under the Heng Samrin regime, Zakaryya went to many villages to give Islamic talks on various topics of the teachings of Islam, especially at this time, on *Fardhu Ain* (religious obligation of the individual Muslim). The Muslim community also organized talks cum classes during weddings. At these occasions, villagers hired a PA (personal address) system. *Tuans* are invited to give lectures. These occasions are called "jamu puk" (*village feast* in Cam) or "pataum tuan" (*gathering of teachers* in Cam). It consists of lectures on prayers, fasting, *zakat*

(tithe), the hajj, or any topics related to the teachings of Islam. There were also Koran reading sessions, where children are showing off their skills. There were also talks on *tafsir* (interpretations of the mighty Koran) and *Hadiths* (the traditions of Prophet Muhammad) session.

All this was possible because of the understanding of the government who knows that all communities, not only Muslim, are thirsty of knowledge especially the teachings of their religions. Within the Muslim community, there were no more accusations throwing at one another of belonging to *Kaum Muda* or *Kaum Tua* as in the 1960's and 1970's. This speeds up the process of integration of the community in the modern era of nation building.

Besides the teaching of Islam by local people, there were also some from outside Cambodia to carry out dawah works. Since 1990, a few groups of *Dawah Tabligh*, consisting of some overseas Cam and Malay, and *Arqam* went to Cambodia and Vietnam. Since 1991, the Regional Islamic Da'wah Council of South East Asia & Pacific (RISEAP), Malaysia, under the leadership of Dato' Ahmad Nordin Mohd Zain, has been sending regularly some Cam graduates, to organize Islamic classes in Cambodia, and Vietnam, for the youngs and to train old and new *Hakims*. Those who were sent there were under this program were :

1. Ustaz Sulaiman Ibrahim, al-hafiz, Cairo,
2. Ustaz Hussein bin Yaakob, Al-Azhar, Cairo,
3. Ustaz Ismail bin Salleh, Madina University, Saudi Arabia,
4. Ustaz Ismail Yusoff, Al-Azhar, Cairo,
5. Ustaz Idris bin Yusof, Ummul Kurâ University, Mecca, Saudi Arabia,
6. Ustaz Yusoff Abdul Rahman, Riyad University, Saudi Arabia,

7. Ustazah Norlaili binti Salleh, Malaya University, Malaysia,
8. Ustaz Nasri, Kota Baru, and
9. Ustaz Hasan Husin Basri bin Tuan Ibrahim (he alone was sent to Ho Chi Minh ville).

Under this program, a school has been built in Phnom Penh, a few schools have been repaired.¹⁵ The teaching of Islam has started once again and is welcomed by all Muslims in Indochina. Among them, Ustaz Sulaiman Ibrahim chose to remain there; others shuttled back and forth between Kuala Lumpur and Phnom Penh.

Mosques and Schools

As mosques or *suraus* are considered as the centers of all the community's activities, the Muslims started rebuilding new ones, or renovating those that were damaged during the Khmer Rouge era. Due to shortage of funds, villagers in the province of Kompong Cham, mainly fishermen and farmers, contributed a portion (which was about 10%) of their catches or crops to *baitulmal* (community treasury). Some others contributed 10-20 riels a month to the fund.

As for the building of schools, it was not a big problem. All along the history of teaching of Islam in Cambodia, the community uses *suraus* or mosques or even the *Tuan's* house as class rooms. Some times there were fund collections which were mainly used for purchasing of tables, chairs and blackboards. The *Tuans* lived on his students donations. Since the 1990's the funding came from Cam and Malay who now live overseas, such as in Malaysia, France, the United States. They normally send their money to build or repair

15 Discussion with Ustaz Yakob bin Ahmad. He did not go there as he was committed in Malaysia.

schools, *suraus* or mosques in the village of their origin.

From 1984 to 1987, as Mr. Zakaryya held the post of secretary of education for the district of Krauch Chmar, a district in Kompong Cham province, he has used his good office, as a *Tuan* and as an education officer, to influence the parents to send their children to school. According to the Mufti's office¹⁶, in Cambodia, there are now some 320 Muslim villages, 110 of which are in the province of Kompong Cham¹⁷. If a village does not possess a mosque or a *surau*, as the villagers are either too poor or they are too small a number, the congregations are held at some one's house; the Mufti's office told me that there are 270 mosques and *suraus* now in the country and some 600 *Tuans* and *Hakims*.

Meanwhile, they enjoy a lot of encouragement from the present Cambodian leadership. The first Islamic school established after the Pol Pot era was the *Madrassa Hafiz Al-Quran*, built in Trea district (in Kompong Cham province). It has now some 300 students and is headed by Ustaz Sulaiman bin Ibrahim. Then followed by the *Dubai School* in Km-9 (built by Muassash Isa bin Nasir), the *Darul Aitam* in Pochentong (built by the Jam'iyyah Ihyaturath Al Islami, Kuwait), The *Ummul Kura* in Chrouy Montri (having some 300 students, and is still expanding; it's funded by a Saudi), the *Madrasah Hajjah Rohimah Tambichik* in Angkor Ban, and the *Maahad Al Muhammadi* in Beng Pruol, Kompong Cham, Cambodia. The family members of Ustaz Fikri Mohamad, now living in Malaysia are the main sponsors the construction and maintenance both the buildings and the teachers' expenses of the said *Maahad Al*

16 Zakaryya Adam Osman's interview in July 2000.

17 *Mingguan Malaysia*, 21/01/2001 p. 29.

Muhammadi.

Some Problems

In view of the backgrounds of the schools funded by various people employing graduates from various countries, there are those who for some reasons, accuse those attending or supporting schools funded by the Kuwaiti or Saudi Arab as belonging to Al Wahabi (from Imam Mohamad bin Abdul Wahab) movement. This is in fact a small problem, as it does not go to the extend of groups fighting or any case being brought to the courts of law, but it is disturbing as it could break the unity among the Muslims. It should be noted that though there was only one incident since the fall of Pol Pot regime, which happened in Phum Poeuh, in the district of Krauch Chmar, Kompong Cham province, where one Imam who was accused of being supporter of Wahabi School were stabbed to death in mid-2000. Consequently, some parents chose to send their children to school they believe would teach them the true teachings of Islam. The province of Kompong Cham is far advanced compared to other provinces in terms of number of well-organized Islamic schools. Next come the area around the capital, Phnom Penh, and in the provinces of Battambang and Kompot.

Besides, a new school is in the process of building, in Prèk Kout, Svay Khleang, by a group of Cams from Washington State, USA. Ustaz Sulaiman Ibrahim who is now running the Al-tafiz school in Phum Trea will head this new school. The Trea Al-tafiz will cater only for Muslim girls when the school in Svay Khleang, which is meant for boys, is ready. It will be a two-story building, built on the land of the late Baurtes Osman, who is the grand father of Mohamad Zain, the writer of this article. A Mohamad Zain's father house nearby, donated to the said school, will be the headmaster's

residence.

If before the Khmer Rouge regime, the young Cambodian Muslim students went to Malaysia, Thailand, Egypt and Saudi Arabia to quest for the knowledge, they now add Kuwait, Lybia to the list of their destinations. These countries have been offering scholarships to the young Muslims. In Malaysia, the RISEAP, the International Islamic University of Malaysia, offer also scholarships to the young *Khmer Islam* to pursue their degree in various fields. And now a few institutions in Malaysia extended their help to the young Cambodian Cam; the latest in date is the Madrasatul Quran Al Hilmiyah in Kota Bharu Kelantan offers two schoolships a year starting from the nex school opening.

Social Organizations

As for the community organization, in term of religion, the Muslims are placed under the Cambodian Islamic Council (CIC) (in Malay it's called *Majlis Agama Islam Kemboja, MAIK*). Its structure is borrowed from the one which is currently practiced in Malaysia, known as *Majlis Agama Islam*. The head of the council is called *Changvang* (Supreme Chief) or *Mufti*. The *Changvang* and his council members are appointed by the king; he is not the Muslim community leader but a spiritual leader and is a knowledgeable person in Islamic laws and has the confidence of all. The current *Mufti* is Ustaz Kamaruddin Yusoff. He is bestowed the title of *Oknha* by the Cambodian king. The *mufti* deputies are: Ustaz yusof Kadir and Ustaz Arshad. H.E. Zakaryya Adam Osman was his deputy until 2000. There are four sections in this *Majlis Mufti* namely: Education, *Baitulmal*, Administration and Mosque development. The advisors are H.E.s Math Ly, Tol Loh and Ismail Osman.

Socially the Muslim community is allowed to form any

society (business or otherwise) or associations. They enjoy as much rights and freedom as other Cambodian communities, the rights and freedom guaranteed by the constitution. As a result, they have formed four associations competing one against another on the one hand for the improvement of socio-economic status of the community members and for the betterment of the country on the other.

The four associations are the *Samakum Islam Kampuchea* (Cambodia Islamic Association) whose President is H.E. Math Ly; the *Samakum Khmer Islam Kampuchea* (Khmer Islam of Cambodia Association) whose President is Wan Math; the *Samakum Islam Preah Reach Anachakr Kampuchea* (Kingdom of Kampuchea Islamic Association) whose President is H.E. Ahmad Yahya; and the *Samakum Cam Islam Kampuchea* (Association of the Muslim Cam of Cambodia) headed by a teacher known as Gru Zain, now living in Prèk Pra. It is interesting to note that there are both terms, *Khmer Islam* and *Cam* used in the associations names. There are also foundations such as *Cambodian Muslim Development Foundation* and *Cambodian Islamic Development Community*. If H.E. Zakaryya Adam Osman concentrates on the development of the teachings of Islam, H.E. Ahmad Yahaya works on developing the modern education. He concentrates especially on the tertiary education: he found some funds for Muslim students to go to universities and now personally sponsors some 50 students in a Phnom Penh university.

The associations main activities seem to concentrate on soliciting funds for mosques and some items which are related to Islamic teaching, such as Koran or *kitab*s. This is not good way to do as at this moment members of the society are in need of so many things such as vocational training, from which if they are well equipped, they would be able to earn a decent living; they also

need jobs. In view of this it would be wise to have investors who are willing to open up industries in the country and employ them. By so doing the poor Muslims would not suffer as they are now. Some of them who get offer to work overseas, especially in Malaysia, are separated from their family and some even get cheated by some unscrupulous agents or employers.

The main concerns of the Associations on building Mosques or finding *kitab*s or Koran for the community is understandable as the community is evolved around the idea of Islam, which is the core and strength of the community. In order to be influential within the community, someone has to be able to provide the community with some thing they need; and this is nothing else but Koran, *kitab*s, mosques or *surau*. Any aids, which are in relation with Islam, are very much appreciated; graduates in Islamic studies are very well placed in their society.

On political and diplomatic front, under the leadership of Prime Minister Hun Sen, the *Khmer Islam* people once again witnessed the past glory of their community and enjoy the trust of the Cambodian leadership as seen from their appointments to high ranking positions such as minister, deputy ministers, members of parliament, and high ranking officers in civilian and military in the new Kingdom of Cambodia. These people played very active and fruitful roles in local and international arena especially among the Muslim countries denouncing the genocide of the Cambodian people, "committed by the Indochinese communist on the Muslim Khmers"¹⁸. Some of the prominent figures are H.E. Math Ly, Member of Parliament and the Prime Minister's advisor; H.E. Tol Loh, Member of Parliament, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education; Oknha Othsman Hassan, member of parliament

18 *Le Martyre des musulmans khmers*, p. 3.

and advisor to the Prime minister, H.E. Ahmad Yahya, Member of Parliament and Minister of Transport; H.E. Ismail Yusoff, Member of Parliament; H.E. Ismail Osman, Member of Parliament and Undersecretary, Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs; H.E. Zakaryya Adam Osman, Member of Parliament and Undersecretary, Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs.

Economically, the *Khmer Islam* are now farmers, fishermen, butchers¹⁹, carpenters, business people and entrepreneurs, the professions they are well known for centuries. Oknha Othsman Hassan is now one of the prominent entrepreneurs in the country; he has opened up, besides other businesses, an assembly plant for Malaysian *Modenas Kriss* motorcycle.

Since their arrival in the country, the *Khmer Islam* always consider Cambodia as their home. They have been working very hard to defend and building up the country. As they practice Islam, they have been considered by the Cambodians as a peculiar group of people, as they could never let themselves be assimilated by the ethnic Khmer whose religion is Buddhism. This peculiarity is due to their religion, Islam, which they believe as the unifying factor in their desire to keep their identity alive. This strong will of preservation of their identity is proven particularly after the Pol Pot era in which any form of religion was completely destroyed. To them, Islam is the core and strength of their community. That is why we see that, in order to get support or to be influential in the community, one has to carry out works which has connection with the religion. Understand this situation, the government has given them full support, and this is guaranteed by the constitution, to revive and develop their religion. Secondly, the Muslims know

19 Nowadays the Khmers also practice this profession, which was religiously forbidden for them.

very well that only education can give them mobility in the society. That is why their main task after the country was liberated from the Pol Pot regime, was to concentrate on developing education. They are moving in the right direction as religious education will make them good people and good citizens of the country, and national education give them mobility in the society. And with these they can become useful citizens. Thus the Muslim community continues to live in peace and harmony with other communities in the kingdom. They believe that for a long time to come, the Khmer authorities will need them as much as they will need the Khmer authorities. They strongly believe that what was observed by the first French who arrived in Cambodia that “a Muslim population and a Buddhist people living together in almost brotherly relations”²⁰ was very true, and hope that this bond will never be broken.

20 A. Pavie 1901, p. 28-29 mentions the Cam people, but in fact it is understood that those Muslims were in fact both Cam and Malay; likewise in other writings the term Malay, in some cases, refers to both the Malay and the Cam.

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