



About **Penang Story Lectures**

The Penang Story Lecture Series aims to create awareness about Penang's history and heritage. The theme this year is "Penang in Global History" focusing on the role the people of Penang played in local, regional and global histories. Equally fascinating is Penang as a place, a refuge and centre for knowledge development and intellectual movements.

The lecture series also aims to explore Penang's unique "place-identity" and strengthen the enabling factors that continue to make Penang attractive to talent. These public lectures examine a particular theme from a multi-disciplinary perspective.



Foreword

The Penang Story Initiative: Local, Regional and Global Histories

With UNESCO World Heritage Site Inscription in 2008 and the growing awareness about cultural heritage issues, this new chapter of the Penang Story not only continues to celebrate cultural diversity but expands to include a re-discovery of Penang's place in local, regional and global history. There will be a special emphasis on Penang as a place of "conjunctures, confluences and contestations"; highlighting the cosmopolitan society that contributed to the making of Penang's "spirit of place"; and all this by concentrating on Penang's multi-ethnic community and their contribution to local, regional and global histories.

The Penang Story is an open platform for all those with an interest in Penang from different parts of the world to contribute towards "deepening" the story. The project's focus is not only on events and people but also on other intangible heritage involving foodways, economic activities, values and beliefs, education and all other aspects related to George Town's "Outstanding Universal Values".

The Penang Story will build a greater sense of solidarity amongst locals particularly stakeholders in George Town. It will also deepen the public's understanding of Penang's role as a place attractive to talent and a home where ideas germinate and return to influence world affairs. This will boost the sense of possibility so important to Penang's civil society movement. Lastly, we hope that Penang Story will encourage communities to become proud of their own heritage whilst engendering great respect for the traditions and history of other communities. Ultimately, all communities will become aware of having contributed to Penang's development and progress.

Dato' Anwar Fazal
Chairman
Penang Story

About the Speaker



Dr. J. Raja Mohamad

Dr. J. Raja Mohamad was born in 1946 at Udayarpalayam in Tamil Nadu. A post graduate in history, archaeology and anthropology, he worked in the Department of Museums, Tamil Nadu for over 35 years. Dr. J. Raja Mohamad is the author of several books including *Maritime History of Coromandal Muslims – A Socio-Historic Study on the Tamil Muslims 1750 – 1900* (2004), *Islamic Architecture in Tamil Nadu* (2004) and *The Role of Muslims in Indian Freedom Struggle in TamilNadu 1857 – 1947* (2004). He has brought out many new facts on the history of the Tamil Muslims. In addition, he has published more than 100 research papers in the field of history, art and architecture, archaeology and maritime history; there are many new discoveries due to his credit. A well known researcher in the study of maritime trade of the region, he has visited various countries in the course of his research. He is highly appreciated by various social, cultural and academic organisations. He was recently awarded by the Tamil Nadu State Government in 2012 for “The Best Services for Communal Harmony in the State”.

Moderator



Hj Ramzan Ali

Ramzan Ali Bin Abdul Hamid was born in Sakkarakottai, Ramnad District on 25 May 1960. He and his family move to Penang in 1965. During his primary education (1967-1972), Hj Ramzan Ali was studying in SMK Hutching while for his secondary (1973-1977) in SMK Westland. It was after his secondary education that he joined Habib Jewels in 1978. In 1992, Hj Ramzan Ali decided to start his own business called Ramzan Jewels. Not only was Hj Ramzan Ali successful in business trades, he shows prominent communication skills when he joined Toastmaster International – Tamil in 2007. He had won first place for three times in International Tamil Toastmaster contest 2008, 2009 and 2013. In addition, he contributes in various ways for different Indian Muslim society in Penang.

Abstract of

The Muslim Trade from Coromandel Coast in relation to Kedah and Penang



The Coromandel Muslims – the Cholias (Chulias) – picked up the maritime trade in the ports of Kedah in 17th century. They became the favourites of the ruling house and were nominated as harbour masters and royal merchants. The Sultan of Kedah sent his ships to the ports of Coromandel Coast where the Cholia merchants negotiated goods for him. Thus the Coromandel trade was initiated in both ways. The concentration of Cholia Muslims swelled in Kedah in due course of time and they stood in the forefront of the sea-borne trade here. The commercial records of the British portray the dominant role of the Coromandel Muslims in the maritime trade of Kedah. The Tamil – Cholia – Muslim, Jamal, was the most influential minister in the State and was authorized by the Sultan to handle the negotiation with Francis Light over the British settlement in Kedah. The deep rooted commercial contact of the Cholia families continued in Kedah beyond 19th century.

When English settlement was founded in Penang in 1786 it captured the imagination of the Cholias as a place with a future. Penang became a free trade zone where the Indian and British goods were exchanged for Straits products. Hence Penang was the most desired destination of the Coromandel Muslim vessels. Muslim traders from Nagapattinam, Nagore, Karaikal, Tranquebar, Porto-Novo and Cuddalore conducted vast trade in Penang. Immigration also flowed along with trade. The early birds got bigger worms. The Coromandel Muslims could not withstand the competition of the British in the long run and their trade enterprises declined. However, many of the immigrants settled here as traders, big and small, and continued at various levels to the present day.

Programme

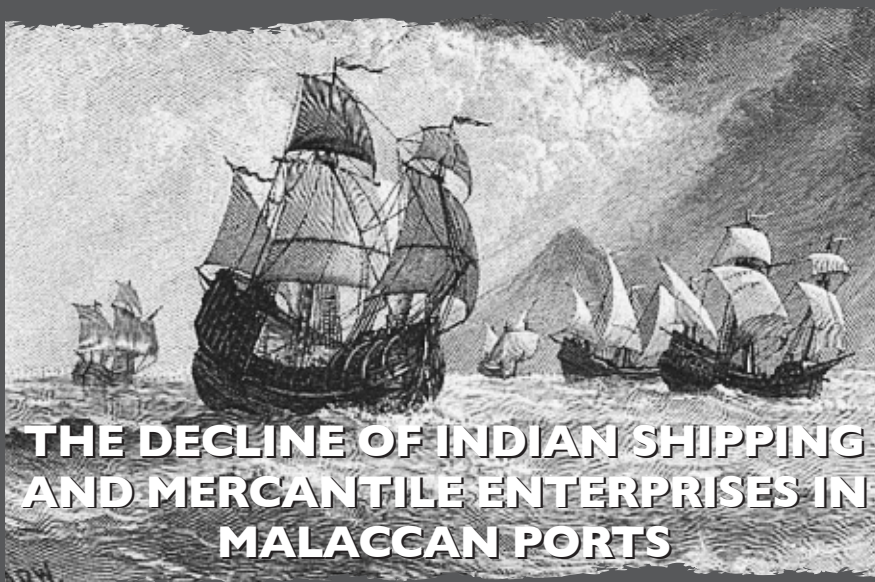
7.45pm: Registration

8.00pm: Introduction by Moderator

8.15pm: Public Lecture by Dr. J.Raja Mohamad

9.30pm: Q & A

10.00pm: End



THE DECLINE OF INDIAN SHIPPING AND MERCANTILE ENTERPRISES IN MALACCAN PORTS

- An overview of 19th century

Dr. J. Raja Mohamad, Pudukkottai

The ocean with all its hazards was a constant attraction and challenge enticing a variety of participants with a potential rich reward for the enterprise and the risk. Many ports had grew and fell on the Indian coasts under the impact of complex set of factors such as climatic, political and economic. The Indian shipping has extended its hands to the ports and entrepôt of many countries, around the world through the ages. The Indian contact with Malay Peninsula is of long anterior to Christian era and there was constant movement of Indian traders for about a thousand years. Under the Cholias (Chulias) there was brisk trade between the two regions. The commercial contact led to the cultural link between Indian sub-continent and South East Asian lands.

At the time of the rise of Islam in the 7th century A.D., the Persians and Arabs shared the trade of Indian Ocean via Coromandel ports to the great centres of Malacca, Ceylon and China. Malabar was the vital link in the trade of Indian Ocean with the west. The expansion of Islam beyond Arabia is an economic movement as well as religious and political one. The Gujarati Muslims, Coromandel Maraikayars, Labbais and Chettiars, the Mappilas of Malabar, the trades of Bengal were prominent in the Indian overseas commerce in Malay Archipelago. These traders were ruling the oceans for more than five hundred years, till the occupation of Malay by Europeans, which ultimately sealed the fate of the Indian shipping and enterprises. The paper is a short discussion on the decline of Indian trade in Malacca by about 19th century.



From the 13th century, the Muslim traders were gaining strength in the Malaccan ports. By about 15th century the Malay Peninsula was Islamised. The men who took Islam across the Bay of Bengal were members of mercantile community. They carried the faith along with their wares and took efforts in spreading it. The Gujaratis and Coromandel Tamil Muslims have done much in this direction but the influence of the Tamil Muslims work was well rooted and stayed. The Arabs lost their superior position in Indian Ocean trade around 15th century. The Gujaratis handled much of the trade in Malacca. At the same time the traders of Coromandel also played an influential role in the South East Asian trade, though not to the extent of the Gujaratis. The Gujarati Muslim ships also freighted for the Coromandel traders when they touched the coast. The ports of Coromandel such as Pulicat, Porto-NoVo, Pondicherry Nagapattinam and Santhome were drawn in to Asian trades and established close shipping link with Malacca. The hinterland villages of these pre-eminent ports were engaged in handloom manufacture of various descriptions and the ports were outlets

for these goods. Along with the Muslims, the Chettiar merchants were also trading side by side and their capital was bigger, ¹ The Gujaratis monopolised the cream of Malaccan trade but the Coromandel traders handled the bulk. The Indian ships came to Malacca with textiles and were exchanged for South East Asian spices and Chinese products.² The trade between India and Malacca not only made the fortunes of the Indian traders but also enriched the Malaccan ports. Indian traders made profit of more than 300 percent on their commercial transaction. The Malay States derived good income from taxes and levies.

Indian shipping was brisk from Cambay, Malabar, Coromandel and Bengal to the Ports in Malacca. From 13th century onwards many of the ports in Malacca emerged as international emporia. The ruling houses of the Malay States extended all facilities to the Indian traders in their ports in view of the vast revenue. In each port, the merchants from different nations were under the charge of their respective harbour master, whose duty was like that of a port officer and chief merchant. There were harbour master each in Gujarati, Malabar, Coromandel Coast and Bengal. On arrival, each merchant will applied to his native harbour master to trade and he will arrange for the sale and transport of the commodities³ though the Hindu merchants who were handling bulk of the trade; the Muslim traders were influential in the court and ports of the Malay states⁴. The religious ties and association of the converts with the Muslims of other nations opened new fields of service to the Muslims.

¹ J. Raja Mohamad, *Maritime History of the Coromandel Muslim – A Socio Historical Study on the Tamil Muslims 1750-1900*, Chennai: Government Museum, 2004, pp. 151

² A. Cortesao (Ed), *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires Volume 2: An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, written in Malacca and India in 1512-1515*; And, *The Book of Francisco Rodrigues: Rutter of a Voyage in the Red Sea before 1515*, London: Hakluyt Society, 1944, pp. 240

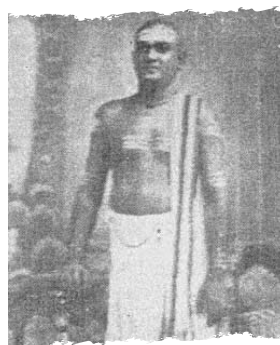
³ *Ibid.*, pp. 272-73

⁴ S. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malay and Singapore*, London: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 6 ; A. Cortesao (Ed), *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires Volume 2*, pp. 241 ; Barbara Watson Andaya, "The Indian Saudagar Raja in Traditional Malay Court" *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* Volume 51 Part 1 (1978), pp. 19-24

The influence of Tamil Muslims was so great in Malacca that it had an impact on the political fortunes of Malacca from 15th century. They obtained many concessions for their trade and also played a significant role in the political life of the land. They become powerful in the royal court intrigues and were in a position to make kings and ministers⁵. The mother of the third ruler, Raja Kasim was the son of a rich Tamil Muslim. Tamil Muslim merchants were the harbour masters in Malaccan ports. Due to the concentration of the Muslim traders, Malacca was the most important commercial centre in the south East Asian region and it was also a main diffusion centre for Islam⁶.

It was at this stage the position of Muslims was seriously affected by the intrusion of the Portuguese in Indian waters. The Portuguese captured Malacca in 1511 and the sultan had to escape. The Portuguese were generally hostile towards the Muslims and restricted their trade. The Indian traders, particularly Muslims, transferred their trade interest from Malacca to avoid Portuguese and chose centres favourable to them such as Brunei, Johor and Perak with the support of the respective Sultans.⁷ However, the failure of the Sultan to thwart the Portuguese in Malacca gave great opportunity to other ports and the Muslim traders were emerging as the sole shippers in Malacca. The Portuguese favoured the Chettiar (Keling) merchants to keep the Malacca trade going. In spite of that, the Hindu merchants found it extremely difficult to compete with the Muslims.⁸

Textiles constituted the major export from the 15th to 17th centuries. Cotton piece goods with gold threads were exported from Pulicat, Mylapore (Santhome), Porto-Novo, Nagapattinam and Nagore



Chettiar.

⁵ Kernial Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement 1786-1957*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 28-29

⁶ D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, London: Macmillan Limited, 1955, pp. 28

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 199-2501

⁸ Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, pp. 29

to the ports Malacca. Slave trade was also brisk. The major category of import were spices, tin, copper, gold, silk cloth etc. Thus, the staple raw materials were exchanged to the manufactured goods of India⁹

The Dutch captured the ports of South East Asian countries competed in the export and import markets much to the detriment of Indian traders, particularly Muslims. They considered the Muslims as their trade rivals, since the trade enterprises of the Dutch were guided by commercial spirit. They also tried to secure monopoly of the key commodities such as spices. However, they could not impose

⁹ A. Cortesao (Ed), *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires Volume I*, pp. 91-93

¹⁰ M. J. Bremner, "Report of the Governor Balthasar Bort on Malacca – 1678" *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* Volume 5 Part I. (1927), pp. 14

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 51

¹² *Ibid.*



Textile trading.



Coolies.

restrictions in the long run on trade of the non-Dutch ships to trade in Malacca and allowed limited trading activities. Coromandel Muslim ships were also permitted. The French and Danes helped the Coromandel traders by providing their flags and technical support in seaborne trade.

A large number of Muslim merchants were in Dutch Malacca. The Dutch writers mention mainly Muslim merchants and their shipping at the close of 17th century.¹¹ It is a fact the establishment Islamic rule in the northern tract of India from 13th century, more and more Hindu shipping passed it to Muslim hands. Therefore, with the gradual loss of their own shipping, Hindu merchants were increasingly confined to the inland. In Gujarati and Bengal, this has also transpired. The roles of Hindu merchants in overseas trade were limited to brokerage, sale of supply of goods, money lending and other service in the ports¹². Thus, a part

of the Indian shipping decreased. With the exit of the Hindu shipping the Muslim traders, and ship owners from Coromandel were the sole shippers in the trade of Malacca from the 17th century. By using this opportunity, the maritime Muslims of the Coromandel Coast plied their ships to the ports Malacca. The Dutch and English has recorded about the ships built by the Muslims on the Coromandel Coast. The Muslims also purchased ships built in Malacca. Muslim ships from Poro-Novo, Cuddalore, Pondicherry and Nagapattinam were conducting profitable trade in the entrepôt of Malacca. The British occupied Malacca in 1795 and took the Asian trade in to their hands. At the beginning of the ascendancy of English power in Malacca, they were extending concessions to the Muslim shipping but restrictions came as their economic ambition grew. It is true that there were only Indian Muslim shippers. During the last decades of 18th century and in 19th century, the majority of them were Coromandel Maraikayars and Labbais. These merchants had a jerk when they had to give up their former position to the wealthiest community of Malacca, the Chinese¹³

In such an adverse condition in the 19th century the trading activities of the Indian Muslims, the Cholias, was in decline. There was limited trade to the port of Kedah from Nagapattinam and Porto-Novo.

Elephant trade was attractive during this century.

The Cholia ships imported elephants into the Coromandel along with the other South East Asian goods.¹⁴ The Nagore and Nagapattinam merchants continued the trade connection with Kedah in their old sails even in the last decade of 19th century. However, the number of vessels that traded with South East Asia was lesser. The English records gave a lot of information on the Muslim shipping to the ports of Malacca and the commodities of export and import, names of ships, captains etc.¹⁵ The Cholia Muslims had to survive in a highly competitive environment of growing European capitalism and modern shipping technology.¹⁶ At the close of 19th

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-45

¹⁴ "Public Sundries" *Tamil Nadu Archives* No. 21/25 Jan 1772 ; "Some Account of Kedah Factory Records in Strait Settlement" India Office Library, London 10L/G/345/1/1789

¹⁵ "Selections for the Records of Madras Government No. XIX" *Tamil Nadu Archives* 1855: 61-62 ; The National Archives, *Public Consultation Volume* 339 (1808), pp. 1314-15

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

century, the Indian Muslim shipping and trade enterprises were not appreciable. Traders with lesser capital and old sails had to shift to other occupations.

The rise of European power particularly the British supremacy brought virtual eclipse of the Indian shipping and trade in South East Asia, where they were frequenting for



more than 1500 years. The Muslims and the Indian shippers in Malacca were edged out by the British. The relatively smaller and scattered business of the Muslims found it increasingly difficult to compete with the European trading companies, with their large resources and centralised administration. The Indians lost control over the staple commodity of Malacca i.e. spices, textiles as well as their markets and supplies. The Indian intermediary was no more required by the British. They began to place orders directly with the producers and finally established their own factories, employing Indian workers¹⁷ The private English merchants competed with the Indians merchants in all the trades and the Indians were no match to them. The superior shipping technology was also another challenge.

¹⁷ Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, pp. 31-74

The decline of Mughal power in India was also a serious blow to the Indian commerce and resulted in the loss of confidence in the business circles.¹⁸ The British conquest of Malaya and India deprived the Indian maritime enterprise of any significance in Eastern Seas. Loss of political power of India combined with a serious deterioration in their status as a commercial force in Asian trade. Under the pretext of industrialisation and modern capitalism as the masters of two sub continents, the British set out to organise consumer market for manufactured goods of British Isles and source of supply of raw

¹⁸ S. Bhattacharya, *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal from 1704-1740*, London: Luzac & Co, 1954, pp. 106

¹⁹ Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, pp. 70-74



materials. The Indian enterprises were curbed whenever they found it in conflict with British interest. The remaining Indian merchants and shipping were dragged and subordinated as local transport and retail trade. With the eclipse of Indian shipping and mercantile enterprises, the Indian influence also declined in Malaya. There were an exceptionally few who continued to feature prominently but the Indians in Malaya generally ceased to wield any significant economic or political power. The commercial and economic power of Indians transformed into a docile labour class, never to recover from the former importance in the century to come¹⁹.

(This paper was presented in the 18th session of Tamil Nadu History Congress – Erode Sept. 30, Oct 1,2. 2011)

Joint Organisers

THINK CITY SDN BHD (TCSB) is a subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional Berhad, the investment arm of the Malaysian government, and an urban regeneration agency operating in the historic city of George Town. It manages the George Town Grants Programme (GTGP), which is a public grants programme designed to protect and preserve George Town's Outstanding Universal Values. These include the city's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural living heritage, architectural legacy and intangible heritage as a historic port city in the Straits of Malacca. Think City's involvement in this project provides focus on the cultural mapping process (documentation and outreach activities involving local histories and heritage) and the intangible heritage of the city.

THE PENANG HERITAGE TRUST (PHT) is one of Malaysia's most successful non-governmental organizations championing the heritage conservation with special emphasis on Penang and George Town. The PHT played a pivotal role in the nomination of George Town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was also a key partner in the 2001/02 Penang Story Project bringing together local communities through a celebration of cultural diversity.

Knowledge Partners

GEORGE TOWN WORLD HERITAGE INCORPORATED (GTWHI) is the area manager of the George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site. It provides consultation and public awareness regarding the World Heritage Site. GTWHI also provides advice to the State and Local governments regarding heritage conservation issues and assists private property owners about best practices in conservation.

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA (USM) is Malaysia's Apex University with wide-ranging research programmes. USM initiated several projects directly related to heritage conservation work in Penang and elsewhere.