



PAPER ID: 10A13D



## COLONIAL INFLUENCE ON INDIAN MUSLIM RELIGIOUS MONUMENTS IN PENANG

Ahmad Sanusi Hassan<sup>a\*</sup>, Asif Ali<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Housing, Building and Planning, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Penang, MALAYSIA

<sup>b</sup> Architecture Section (University Polytechnic), Aligarh Muslim University, INDIA

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 06 April 2019  
Received in revised form 19 June 2019  
Accepted 29 July 2019  
Available online 09 August 2019

#### Keywords:

Colonial architectural style; Indian Muslim monuments; George Town; Penang; Neo-classical elements.

### ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a level of influence of colonial style to Indian Muslim monuments built in George Town, Penang during colonial time. George Town was the earliest British settlements in Malaysia as well as in South East Asia. From 1786 to 1957, this town functioned as a port city of British East India Company. A colonial era had influenced the architectural style of the buildings built in George Town. This study focusses analysis of the architectural style and its impact to the Indian Muslim monuments. Indian Muslims were the first traders who migrated to Penang as well as Indian Hindus under the British administration. This study applied qualitative research method to the architectural style by referring to classical colonial elements. Three most popular Indian Muslim buildings namely Kapitan Keling Mosque, Madrasah Hamidi Arabi and Nagore Durgha Sheriff Shrine were selected as the case studies for the analysis. The result shows that arcade, corbel, cornice, parapet wall, pedestal, architrave, and round arch are among favourite neoclassical motifs integrated into the building design of the Indian Muslim monuments. This study concludes that apart from the British administrative buildings, Indian Muslim buildings have a reflection to the colonial architectural style.

© 2019 INT TRANS J ENG MANAG SCI TECH.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates neo-classical influence to Indian Muslim architecture in Penang. Indian Muslim architecture today is one of the architectural styles existed across towns and cities in Malaysia. The British had introduced monuments with this architectural style to the Indian Muslim traders who migrated to Malaya during colonial time. The unique about this architectural style is that it has not only Indian Muslim architectural style but also the integration of neoclassical and Malay traditional style embedded in the building design. It is the objective to identify the level of influence of neoclassical style to Indian Muslim monuments. This study selected three most popular Indian Muslim monuments in George Town, Penang. The reason for the selection is George Town is the

oldest British settlement in Malaysia as well as in South East Asia. Location of Penang State is on the north-west coast of Malaysia along the Strait of Malacca. One part of the state is on the mainland called Seberang Perai also known as Province Wellesley during the colonial time. The other part is Penang island where is the location of its capital of the state, George Town. George Town was the first British settlement in Southeast Asia (Hassan, 2009a) opened by Captain Sir Francis Light, the town named after King George III. George Town became the British port city in 1786 due to its strategic location of the harbour to dominate South East Asian trade rivalling the Dutch trade. Except from 1942 to 1945, Malaya was subjugated by Japan during World War II, and in August 1957, Malaya gained independence from the British.

During British colonial period, the architecture of Malaya has undergone a transformation with an influence of neoclassical style, with a construction of colonial building and monuments. The introduction of neoclassical style first happened in George Town, Penang. The neoclassical style also had influenced to buildings design by the expatriates who settled in George Town participating in trades (Hassan, 2009b). Apart from public buildings and shop houses, there are several buildings of different religions built by the expatriates namely Indian Muslim, Indian Hindus and Chinese traders. Their proximity is a symbol of multicultural identity in a multiracial urban settlement through the formation of architectural heritage in George Town (Bindloss and Brash, 2014). The presence of these buildings with different ethnic backgrounds in proximity depicts the tolerance and coexistence of diverse communities and people, and freedom to perform their daily rituals. Variation of the existence of various religious buildings implies that Christianity was not the only religion during the colonial period in Penang which was introduced by British.

This study focusses on architecture built by Indian Muslim community in George Town. They were the earliest expatriates besides Indian Hindus in George Town working as traders and labourers (Mujani, 2012). Free trade policy of the British administration and the decline of Malacca as a port city had attracted Indian Muslims replacing their spice trade to Penang. Both Indian Muslim and Hindu settlements were in an area today called Little India, an area allocated for the Hindu and Muslim Indian community by the British. Hindu settlement is around Queen, Church and King Street and most of them are South Indians (Mohamed & Mustafa, 2005). Indian Muslim community settled in the southern part of Little India at Chulia, Armenian and Acheh Street and for the locals, they nickname the area as Little Madras. They were Indians from Chulia or Keling ethnic background from Madras region in India. There was a leader appointed by the British known as Kapitan. The Indian Muslims had built mosques, madrasahs and shrines in this area. Besides Indian Muslim and Malay architectural style, the buildings and monuments built during this era had adornments of neoclassical style derived from Greek and Roman temple architecture from Europe. These adornments are noticeable, visually detected once looking to the building facades. Neoclassical architecture had once become the favourite style during the colonial time depicting the trading community with capitalist concept introduced by the British (Ho, Hassan & Noordin, 2005).

## 2. CASE STUDIES

This study selects three monuments namely Kapitan Keling Mosque, Madrasah Hamidi Arabi and Nagore Durgha Sheriff Shrine for the case studies. Their architectural style has an influence on

the Mughal architecture of North India. All the buildings despite having many Mughal Islamic architectural features have adornments with neoclassical style. The selection of these three historic religious buildings and monuments is due to one of each primary genre of Muslim buildings, which is a mosque, a madrasah and a shrine in George Town. The architectural backgrounds of these three selected buildings are as follows:

## 2.1 KAPITAN KELING MOSQUE

Location of this mosque is at Masjid Kapitan Keling Street. Penang Islamic Religious Council currently is the custodian of this mosque. This mosque was built by Indian Muslim expatriates, those who came as traders to Penang during the British period. This community settled in Malaysia for generations and chose this country as their homeland. The mosque caters all the ethnic groups including Malays living in the vicinity for their daily prayers. The expenditure in the construction of this mosque was donated by the leader (Kapitan) of migrated Indian Muslim community (Mousa, 2014). The structure was first built in 1802, but with the passage of time, it had gone through several renovations. Later additions include onion shaped domes, arches and turrets, the features from North Indian Mughal architecture (Figure 1) with the central dome raised to its double height. After 1930's no significant changes took place in the existing design and the form of the mosque. Minor renovations like a painting of copper sheathed dome to preserve it from oxidising happened recently. The original structure was a rectangular building with the pitched roof raised on columns.

Furthermore, Khoo Su Nin (1994) notes;

*"The original mosque was a single storey building with minarets at each corner, with an outer colonnade and a low scalloped wall and granite are similar that found in the Acheh Street Mosque. It was enlarged at the turn of the century into a grand and elaborate structure with minarets, turrets and domes. In 1916, its first major renovation carried out with an extension of the mosque, the addition of the Mughal domes and turrets, a large minaret for the muezzin and a 'madrasah' (school) for religious classes. The present form was achieved after yet another extension and re-roofing exercise, probably in 1930's. The wall around the mosque was built at the same time. Minarets and alcove of the original mosque can still be seen at the back of the present mosque. The first extensions survive as an ornate inner wall on the outer aisle."*

The design of the mosque is an amalgamation of Mughal, classical colonial and indigenous architecture of Malay world reflected by its dominant onion shaped dome with a pitched roof (Figure 2). The columns have stucco motifs at its base and capital are the influences of neoclassical style. The mosque had gone through several severe transformations since its construction. In the late nineteenth century, prayer hall had a spatial enlargement, extended in all three directions except the Qibla side. Later in 1916, the minaret was designed by the British architect, Neubronner at the entrance of the mosque (Ahmad, 1999). Other British architects Stark and McNeil were responsible for creating the boundary walls all around the mosque. The border wall in brick has two feet height, and a fencing of Moorish motives in cast iron was fabricated above it. On the eastern side, this peripheral wall has punctures with a gateway in cast iron hinged to Moorish decorated columns. Khazae, Yaacob, Alcheikh and Awad (2015) suggest that the building structure depicts the Mughal influences.



**Figure 1:** Kapitan Keling Mosque



**Figure 2:** Pitched roof at Kapitan Keling Mosque



**Figure 3:** Arches at Kapitan Keling Mosque

In 1929 a severe modification in the interior was done by a British architect C. Boucher, who created a double height dome's space by demolishing the interior of the building (Hassan, 2012) and replaced with a series of octagonal cylinder arches to support the existing dome (Figure 3). The construction necessitated removing the two existing minarets at the east of the main building for constructing the new entrance. The Mughal architectural style is reflected in the design of gateway wall (pishtaq) with turrets at their both sides which is much of the visual integrity of onion domes. The secondary domes of the main building at the west remain preserved. The onion shaped domes, pointed multifoil arches, and chattries are the peculiar characteristics of Mughal architecture. The mosque also has adornments with the neoclassical architectural elements of the colonial style, and it is a blend of both colonial and Mughal style.

## 2.2 MADRASAH HAMIDI ARABI

Madrasah Hamidi Arabi (Figure 4) was constructed at the end of the nineteenth century and is currently administered by Penang Islamic Religious Council. Located at Ah Quee Street, this madrasah is a two-storey building with neoclassical features. On the ground floor, its facade has adornments with three semicircular arches with a keystone raised on pilasters. These pilasters end to the first floor topped with a post and lintel construction filled with iron framed windows. Three bayed narrow colonnades on the ground floor are now enclosed by the grill and included to the internal space by using retractable iron frames. Ornamentation over the wall pilasters is in relief stucco work of floral patterns. On the first floor, a balcony is projected and connected to the ground floor through an external wooden staircase at the one side of the building. Ornament of balustrades is above parapet

wall and pilasters on the both surfaces marking the bays. The window shutters on the first floor are the double leaf wooden panelled type. The upper panels have louveres for cross ventilation while the lower panels are of solid wood (Hassan and Che Yahaya, 2012).



**Figure 4:** Madrasah Hamidi Arabi



**Figure 5:** Nagore Durgah Sheriff Shrine

### 2.3 NAGORE DURGA SHERIFF SHRINE

In the early nineteenth century, a shrine of a saint Syed Shahul Hamid was built at the junction of King Street and Chulia Street popularly known as Nagore Durgah Sheriff Shrine. The main entrance to this single storeyed shrine is at Chulia Street (Figure 5). Penang Islamic Religious Council is the custodian of this waqf. The plan has a rectangle shape, and each corner has motifs with small tapered minaret topped with a burji. Four centred arches are at the front of the building spanning a portico which leads to the central prayer hall. The central arch is large in comparison to the other arches and is flanked by two small finials above the terrace to emphasise it. At the King Street an additional small structure namely a portico is presently used as shops. All the columns create portico surmounted by small tapered minarets and a parapet filled with lattice screen in between. Two onion shaped domes surmounted by invert lotus and Indian Kalasa are above the roof with a large kiosk.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study investigated in detail identifying the neoclassical elements through the visual analysis of the facades. To achieve the objective, it had applied a qualitative survey through case studies to evaluate the fusion of colonial elements in the Muslim monuments' design. There were two approaches used in the survey as follows:

### 3.1 LITERATURE REVIEWS

There were three books referred in this survey. The first book *A History of Architecture* by Bannister Fletcher (1996) provided information on the classical architecture of the Greek and Roman Architecture and Neoclassical Architecture and its motifs especially from measured drawings of the building facades, which image the architectural style. All the motifs of neoclassical elements were listed in a table for comparative analysis with the motifs described in a book titled *Heritage Architecture in George Town, Penang* authored by Ahmad Sanusi Hassan and Shaiful Rizal Che Yahaya (2012). This book won National Book Award 2012. The definition of each motif was counterchecked with a definition in *Dictionary of Architecture* authored by John, Fleming, Hugh Honour and Nikolaus Pevner (1980). The description of the ornaments is as in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Architectural motifs of neo-classical architecture in George Town, Penang  
Source: Hassan and Che Yahaya (2012)

Architectural Motifs	Definition
Arcade	A sequence of arches structures emerging as a covered walkway
Architrave	A lintel or beam sitting atop capitals of the columns
Balcony/Veranda	A projected floor several feet over the building wall creating a shade beneath it and open door system for natural indoor air movement
Balustrade	A moulded lathe-built form made out of stone, wood or metal, incorporated on the footing of parapet wall or integrated as the handrail of a staircase
Classical Column	A column with a round or a square base crowned with Doric, Ionic or Corinthian capital
Colonnade	A set of reiterated columns joined by an entablature or a beam, in a free-standing manner or directly integrated into a building
Corbel	An exterior projection element of the building wall supporting a structure above it
Cornice	An arrangement of ornate mouldings fixed to a wall, arch, etc.
Cupola	A minimal size dome structure on top of a building or adorned with a crown topping a larger dome
Dentil	A pack of rectangular blocks resembling teeth embellished under the soffit of a cornice.
Fan-like window	<i>An upper semi-circular or semi-elliptical window often fixed with sash bars resembling a set of fan ribs mostly secured on top of a door or another window.</i>
Keystone	A wedge-shaped stone cast slit into the crest of a masonry vault or arch
Parapet Wall	A low-projected wall runs vertically along the edge of the building/house particularly in the classical and modern architecture to replace the overhang roof system. There is a roof gutter design behind the parapet wall.
Pedestal	A base of a column constructed slightly bigger than the diameter of its respective column and rose several feet above the ground.
Pediment	The initial design is a triangular wall section fixed above the entablature supported by columns. The design gradually evolved into different shapes most notably semi-circular and rectangular section during the neo-classical period.
Pilaster	A slightly-protruded column built as an integral part of a wall manifesting a rendition of a supporting column.
Porte-cochere/ Portico	A sheltered porch or portico primarily utilised to drop passengers from vehicles or horse carriages (in colonial times) provide protection from weather found either on the primary or secondary entrance. It often integrates with open veranda/ balcony on its top.
Quoins	A set of masonry blocks arranged vertically at the corner of a wall symbolising permanence and strength, and reinforcing the immediate impression of structural presence.
Round Arch	A curve shape masonry construction used to span an opening alongside to support the mass on top of it.
Shuttered Window	A window with angled horizontal slats to permit indirect sunlight and natural air ventilation, restricting rain and direct sunshine
Tympanum	A decorative semi-circular or triangular wall surface right on top of an entrance encapsulated by a lintel or arch

### 3.2 VISUAL SURVEY

All the case studies had undergone visual survey for the analysis of their facades. During the study, field work visits were conducted several times to the case studies. The researchers were very familiar with the characters of the monuments with more than ten years teaching experience in colonial and Mughal architecture. The field work allowed the researchers to do the assessment in detail in comparison to neoclassical elements. The result of the analysis was tabled with the marking evaluation of the integration of neoclassical motifs embedded in building facades of the case studies. This result will provide relevant data to the researchers in preparing research findings and conclusion with the level of influence of neoclassical architectural style in Indian Muslim monuments in George Town, Penang.

#### 4. RESULT OF ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 shows the influence of colonial style to the Indian Muslim monuments in George Town, Penang. Madrasah Hamidi Arabi has the highest number of neoclassical motifs in the façade design 62% followed by Kapitan Keling Mosque and Nagore Durgha Sheriff Shrine both with 48%. Both Kapitan Keling Mosque and Nagore Durgha Sheriff Shrine have Mughal architecture as the design concept, amalgamation with neoclassical architecture, which created a new style in India known as Indo-Saracenic style. Neoclassical adornments only play secondary parts in the expression of the building envelopes. Madrasah Hamidi Arabi does not apply Mughal architecture as the design concept. It has a building form interpreted from neoclassical building design. Pilasters, cornices, shuttered windows and round arch with keystone, creating an arcade which makes this madrasah distinguishable from the other two case studies. All monuments have adornments with arcade, architrave, classical column, corbel, cornice, parapet wall, pedestal, and pilaster in the design. Compared to ornaments in the British administration buildings, there are no cupola, dentil, fan-like window, pediment, quoins, and tympanum motif used in the design of these Indian Muslim monuments.

**Table 2:** Details of neoclassical influence on architectural style of the selected case studies

Architectural Elements	Kapitan Keling Mosque	Madrasah Hamidi Arabi	Nagore Durga Sheriff Shrine
Arcade	×	×	×
Architrave	×	×	×
Balcony/Veranda		×	
Balustrade	×	×	
Classical Column	×	×	×
Colonnade			×
Corbel	×	×	×
Cornice	×	×	×
Cupola			
Dentil			
Fan-like window			
Keystone		×	
Parapet Wall	×	×	×
Pedestal	×	×	×
Pediment			
Pilaster	×	×	×
Porte-cochere/ Portico	×		
Quoins			
Round Arch		×	×
Shuttered Window		×	
Tympanum			

This study finds that these buildings despite designed for Indian Muslim monuments significantly fuse with neoclassical features. Madrasah Hamidi Arabi has a principal character harmonious to neoclassical architecture style visually while other two buildings, Kapitan Keling Mosque and Nagore Durgha Sheriff Shrine have an architectural style amalgamation of Mughal architecture integrated with neoclassical style. In the case studies, neoclassical elements like arcade, classical columns, balustrade, cornice, pilaster, pedestal, parapet wall, and architrave with round arches are the dominant motifs, peculiar characteristics of British colonial architecture. While other features like a decorative pointed arch, turret, chattri, onion shaped dome with inverted Buddhist lotus and Hindu Kalasa finial are from Mughal architecture. During the colonial era, applying neoclassical

motifs in the building design were popular among master builders and architects because the elements portrayed status symbol among the trading community. This status symbol frequently conveyed the success, wealth, and prestige of the owner in their community (Hassan & Che Yahaya, 2012; Hassan, 2017).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Even though George Town had undergone several transformations throughout the ages, its inner city today can preserve Indian Muslim monuments with neoclassical architectural style. George Town at one time became an epicentre of the colonial port city; its architecture had influenced significantly by the buildings built by the Indian Muslims. This influence was not remained only to the British administration buildings but also to the Muslim religious monuments. Neoclassical architectural style regarded by the trading community at that time as a symbol of status to the building owners in their community (Hassan and Che Yahaya, 2012). The visual analysis shows that they have the extraordinary influence of colonial features. The result indicates that arcade, corbel, cornice, parapet wall, pedestal, architrave and round arch are among the neoclassical elements integrated into the building design of the Indian Muslim monuments. This study concludes that apart from the British administrative buildings, Indian Muslim buildings had a reflection to the colonial architectural style.

## 6. AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIAL

Data can be made available by contacting the corresponding authors

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank financial support under Fundamental Research Grant Scheme from Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia.

## 8. REFERENCES

- Ahmad, A. G. (1999). The Architectural Styles Of Mosques in Malaysia: From Vernacular to Modern Structures. In *Symposium on Mosque Architecture: The Historic and Urban Developments of Mosque Architecture, Riyadh*. 147–163.
- Bindloss, J. & Brash, C. (2014). *Kuala Lumpur, Melaka and Penang*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., Beijing: Lonely Planet.
- Fletcher, B. (1996). *A History of Architecture*. Cruickshank, D. (Ed.), 20<sup>th</sup> Ed. Oxford: Architectural Press.
- Fleming, J., Honour, H., & Pevner, N. (1980). *Dictionary of Architecture*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Hassan, A. S. (2009a). Colonial Houses in Peninsular Malaysia. *Contextual Issues of the Built Environment in Malaysia*. Hassan, A. S. (Ed.), Penang: USM Press.
- Hassan, A. S. (2009b). The British colonial 'divide and rule' concept : Its influence to transport access in inner city of George Town. *Transportation*. 36, 309–324. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11116-009-9193-0>
- Hassan, A. S. & Che Yahaya, S. R. (2012). *Architecture and Heritage Buildings in George Town, Penang*. Penang: USM Press.



- Hassan, A. S. (2017). *Amalan Tebusguna Tanah, Reka Bentuk Bandar dan Seni Bina di Malaysia (Land Reclamation, Urban Design and Architecture in Malaysia)*. Penang: USM Press.
- Ho, K. C., Hassan, A. S. & Noordin, N. (2005). An Influence of Colonial Architecture to Building Styles and Motives in Colonial Cities in Malaysia. *Proceedings of Conference on Asian Planning School Association APSA 10-14<sup>th</sup> Sept 2005*. Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Khazae, M., Yaacob, N., Alcheikh, Z., & Awad, M. (2015). Mughal or Moorish Architecture : The Origins of Malaysian Mosques During Colonial Periods. *Social Science and Humanities*. 23(3), 639–654.
- Khoo, S. N. (1994). *Streets of George Town, Penang: An Illustrated Guide to Penang's City Streets and Historic Attractions*. Janas Print & Resources.
- Mohamed, B. & Mustafa, R. A. (2005). Heritage tourism in a multicultural society: the case of Malaysia. In K. Chon (Ed.), *3rd Global Summit on Peace through Tourism – Education Forum, Pattaya*. 141–147.
- Mousa, W. A. Y. (2014). *Modern Mosques in Malaysia Between Regionalism and Eclecticism*. P Penang: USM Press.
- Mujani, W. K. (2012). The History of the Indian Muslim Community in Malaysia. *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences*. 6(8), 1348–1353



**Professor Dr. Ahmad Sanusi Hassan** is a Professor in Architecture Programme at the School of Housing, Building and Planning, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Penang, Malaysia. He obtained a Bachelor and Master of Architecture degrees from University of Houston, Texas, USA, and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree focusing on sustainable architecture and urban design development for Southeast Asia from University of Nottingham, United Kingdom. At the university, he is lecturing in courses related to urban design, studio architecture and history and theory of architecture. He is also teaching architecture courses in Computer Aided Design (CAD) and computer animation.



**Asif Ali** is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University Polytechnic of Aligarh Muslim University, India. He received his B.Arch. from Aligarh Muslim University with Honors in 1998. He did his M. Arch. from Ayojan School of Architecture, Jaipur, India. Presently he is pursuing his PhD at School of Housing, Building and Planning, University of Science, Malaysia. Asif Ali's current interests include Sustainable Development and Islamic Architecture in India.