THE FOUNDING OF BAHROOS

(An Account from Tradition)

by

LEE KAM HING

In 1815 Captain David Jones, Commander of the H.M.S. Ariel, was sent to Atjeh by the Penang Government to investigate a case of piracy. The Hyder Ally, a Penang trading vessel, was alleged to have been forcibly detained by the Atjehnese Sultan. Not finding Sultan Jauhar Allum Shah at Teloksamoy which was then the place of his residence, Captain Jones proceeded to Atjeh town. While at Teloksamoy he learnt that the Sultan was attacking Susu, a West Coast dependency which had rebelled against Atjehnese rule.

During his mission in Atjeh Captain Jones managed to collect a fair amount of information with regard to the condition of the place. The West Coast ports under Lebbe Dappah of Sinkell had gone into rebellion against Sultan Jauhar Allum Shah. Bahroos, another West Coast dependency, was the Southermost of the Atjehnese ports and she too had thrown off all allegiance to the Sultan. In fact the Chief there had refused to acknowledge that Bahroos at any time in history had ever been under Atjehnese rule.

Commercially insignificant but politically important, Bahroos in 1815 had just come under British protection. The British recognized the value of an independent Bahroos which could act as a buffer state between the Atjehnese in the north, and their territories from Tappanoooly and Natal down to Bencoolen in the South.

The account of the origin of Bahroos given by the Chief to Captain Jones was no doubt an attempt to prove historically the independence of Bahroos. Bahroos came into prominence in the early 15th and 16th centuries as a result of her gold and, especially, camphor export. Bahroos camphor, so named to distinguish it from other types, because of her high quality was already widely used in the Middle East. In 1520, a Portuguese ship under Diogo Pacheco touched at Bahroos on its way in search of the legendary Islands of Gold said to be off southern Sumatra. The crew were very well-received by the merchants and inhabitants of the place but in the next year they were all massacred for some unaccounted reasons. However, by 1613, Sultan Iskander Muda began to style himself Sultan of Atjeh, Priaman, Aru, Ticco and Bahroos.

"The first Settlement of this place (from tradition) is as follows, and is a literal Translation of an account which I received from the present Tuan Koo of Bahroos. Previous to Bahroos being settled, there was a Rajah De Ooloo, or Rajah of the Interior who resided on a mountain called Maligie, which is also a name to his whole Country. It pleased God to inspire the heart of one of a race of People called Se Bunyan (or Fairies) which induced him to proceed on the mountain of Maligie from whence he brought the Rajah and all his followers, or Subjects to the Country of Pansohore:—Pansohore being the original name of Bahroos. When they had remained a short time at Pansohore the Fairy took them all to a Mountain called See Mumpato where he initiated them into the Mahomedan Faith, and circumcised them. They
remained with him a season at See Mumpatoo, during which he instructed them in the principles, and laws of the Mahomedan Religion; and taught them also the Language of Pansohore; it having been from thence that the Fairy originally came. It is owing to this circumstance that the differences in the Language, Laws, and Customs of Bahroos from those of any other country on Sumatra is to be attributed.

During their stay at See Mumpatoo they were instructed also in the observation of the Sabbath, there being a Masajit or Temple there, which, though formed by nature appeared to have been constructed; the shape is a perfect square, and it is to be seen there at present.

After having instructed them as above, the Fairy took them back to Pansohore, where he ordered them to acknowledge their former Rajah as their Chief. At the same time acquainted them that if it was their wish to have any intercourse with him, or any of his Tribe at a future period, they must preserve in the Faith which he had taught them, preserve the strictest integrity throughout the whole of their conduct, and despise falsehood. To this the Rajah in the name of the whole consented, and the Fairy departed.

About this time it appears that a difference arose between the Rajah of Troosoon (a Place near Padang) and his own son named Sultan Ibrahim, which induced the latter to exile himself from his father’s Country: he therefore took with him a few followers, and as the name of his own particular district was Bahroos, he furnished himself with a bamboo of the water, and a quantity of the earth from his own district; making a vow that he could not settle or rest in any place where the weight of the earth and water was not the same as that which he took with him.

After undergoing a variety of fatiguing adventure, he at last arrived at the mouth of the River of Pansohore, where on trying the water he found it agree in weight, he then proceeded into the jungle and on weighing the earth, found it also equal, he therefore came to the determination of settling there; and for that purpose sent to invite his followers from Troosoon; on their arrival he erected a Campong.

At this time the people of Pansohore were in the habit of planting fish pots in the River; for the purpose of taking fish, some of Sultan Ibrahim’s people during their excursion fell in with, and took the contents; this form being frequently repeated, excited the surprise of the people of Pansohore, who were at length determined to watch for the purpose of discovering who were the aggressors. By so doing they discovered and followed them when to their surprise they were soon come to a large and well-populated Campong in the midst of the woods; they did not allow themselves to be discovered; but returned and acquainted the Rajah De Ooloo with the circumstance.

The next day Rajah De Ooloo proceeded with a party of his followers to Sultan Ibrahim’s Campong; and enquired of him by what right or authority he resided there.—Sultan Ibrahim immediately demanded by what authority he made the enquiry. At length after some altercation Rajah De Ooloo asked Sultan Ibrahim if he was willing to make an oath that the water which he drank, and the ground whereon he stood were his own; to this the latter readily assented, and the Morrow was appointed for the ceremony: This proposal from Rajah De Ooloo proceeded from a wish on his part to prevent hostilities.

The earth and water brought by Sultan Ibrahim from Bahroos, were of
essential service to him at this time; as he could never take the oath without the danger of perjury.

At the time appointed Rajah De Ooloo arrived with his followers to receive the oath of Sultan Ibrahim, he therefore having prepared a spot of his own earth, wherein to stand, and at the same time drank some of the Bahroos water made the required oath, upon which the Rajah De Ooloo embraced him, saying at the same time that they would reign as joint Sovereigns. From this time Sultan Ibrahim assumed the Title of Rajah De Ellier and called his Campong Bahroos in connection of the District he had quitted at Troosoon of that name.

Sultan Ibrahim went a short time after this, and paid a visit to Rajah De Ooloo; he had been there but a few days, when he became enamoured of the Rajah’s Daughter, and asked her of him in marriage, his request was granted and they were united: when Sultan Ibrahim was about to return to his own Campong he wished that the extent of their individual territory should be ascertained, and he made his mind known to Rajah De Ooloo, to that effect, upon which a day was fixed for the purpose.

On the appointed day, the two Rajahs met, when the Rajah De Ooloo said, that it would be presumptious in him to attempt a division of what belonged to the Almighty: let us therefore admit of the interposition of Providence, in the division of it—Take therefore this Bow and Arrow; and shoot with it in any direction you please; and where the arrow falls shall determine the extent of your Territory. I in like manner will ascertain mine: to this Sultan Ibrahim assented and taking the Bow and Arrow from the hands of Rajah De Ooloo, he shot the arrow from the Bow, which fell in the Country of Se Relang near Mount Ophir: Rajah De Ooloo then took the Bow and with another arrow directing it to the westward, shot the arrow which fell in Tamoon; immediately people were dispatched to ascertain where the arrows had fallen learned that they had fallen in the two above-mentioned Countries: the people of those places returned them; declaring at the same time, that they had seen them fall. By this means the extent of the authority of the Rajahs of Bahroos was ascertained, upon this the two Rajahs removed their Campongs the Rajah De Ooloo to the Hill called Se Moogrie and Rajah De Ellier, to the point of Land near the mouth of the River.

After this time, an Arab Vessel arrived from Mecca, but in standing in to the Harbour, she struck a Shoal—All endeavours to get her off were ineffective and she was entirely lost—On this vessel came forty-four Arab Priests; who on account of the accident which had befallen the Vessel, all landed at Bahroos, where they confirmed all the Inhabitants in the Mahomedan Faith; they resided at Baroos, at which place, after a length of time, they all died, and where they are buried in; the place today is called The Tomb of the Forty-Four Priests, and annual offering are made at it by the Bahroos People.

Shortly after the arrival of the above Priests, an account reached Bahroos that the country of Acheen was settled and that a Tuankoo ruled there, who had come from a place called Passay; Rajah Maharam a sovereign of Dyah accompanied the Tuankoo to Acheen, and was the first cause of the place being settled. Bahroos and Dyah were settled about the same time.

It had pleased God to bless Sultan Ibrahim with a Daughter, she was remarkable for her beauty; but what
was most extraordinary was that white blood flowed in her vein. When she had reached to an age of maturity the fame of her beauty spread far and wide; and at length reached the ears of the King of Acheen, who became quite enamoured of her from report only. He therefore dispatched a Prow to Bahroos, with a letter to Sultan Ibrahim; asking of him, his Daughter in marriage. On the receipt of this letter Sultan Ibrahim refused compliance with the King of Acheen's request; and to that effect wrote him a letter in reply. This refusal irritated the King so much that he determined to have recourse to Artifice for the accomplishment of his wishes.

For the above purpose he prepared a small force, which he ordered to proceed direct to Bahroos, for the purpose of seizing the Princess with the white blood; but as this could not be effected openly, the pretext was to (the delivery of) a Golden Ornament (of the value of about 10 Tials) as a mark of Friendship from the King to Sultan Ibrahim and when they had procured admission into the Campong were to watch an opportunity to seize the Princess and carry her off.

On their arrival at Bahroos, and on acquainting Sultan Ibrahim with the motive of their visit he seemed well-pleased, and immediately gave them admittance, but at the instant of their entering the Campong and without waiting the delivery of the present, they commenced an attack, and seized the person of Sultan Ibrahim: they killed him, and cut his head off.

When the Princess heard of the dreadful fate which had befallen her father, she leaped from the Throne on which she was sitting, and seizing a knife or creese stabbed herself immediately. Upon hearing this, the Acheenese instantly retreated to their boats, taking the head of Sultan Ibrahim with them. Rajah De Ooloo on being acquainted with what had happened assembled his followers and went in pursuit of the Acheenese. On his arrival at the mouth of the River, he found they had effected their escape in their boats, he returned therefore to the Campong where he caused the burial of Sultan Ibrahim and the Princess his Daughter to be performed with all possible solemnity.

The Acheenese in the meantime pursued their voyage and arrived at Acheen, with Sultan Ibrahim's head; it being their wish to present it to their Sovereign. The King for this purpose ordered a Silver Salver; upon which the head was placed—after which, it was laid at the King's feet, who ordered that the face should be turned towards him, which was done, when to the utter astonishment of the whole Court, the head turned from him again; this was done three times successively but the head always turned from him; after which the King bursting with rage, and indignation, kicked the head away exclaiming at the same time "This head even after death defies me" he therefore ordered it to be exposed immediately upon a Pole at the Gate of his Campong.

Immediately after the exposition of the head; the Thunder began to roar, the lightning to spread in vivid flashes; and the rain to descend in dreadful torrents, at the same time, that side of the King which had struck the head became completely paralysed. The Thunder and Lightning still continued with most dreadful rain for seven days and nights, which inundated the whole Coasts and destroyed all the Provisions which had been laid up in store. The dreadful Calamity awaken the apprehensions of the king who viewed it as a judgement of the Almighty, for some transgression which he or his people had been guilty of; he therefore collected all the Priests
of the Country when they performed Divine Worship together, making confession of and asking Pardon for their Sins. This however had not the desired effect, the inundation: thunder and lightning continuing with the utmost violence.

At length a Priest dreamt, that the whole of this Calmness had been brought on them through the King’s treatment of the Sultan’s head, he therefore making obedience to the king acquainted him with the Substance of his dream the king therefore having faith in what the Priest had told him, ordered the removal of the head, and desired that it should be brought before him—on its being brought into his presence, he kissed it, and shewed it every possible mark of honour, and having folded it on seven folds of yellow silk, he made vow to return it to Bahroos, with every mark of distinction and every honorable ceremony. Immediately on his vows being made, the King recovered the use of his side, which had been paralysed—the Thunder, Lightning and Rain also instantly ceased.

The King then held a Council in which he made known, that in consequence of what had occurred, he was convinced, that Bahroos was particularly under the protection of Providence; that in future both himself and his descendants should preserve the strictest friendship for the Chief of Bahroos and his Descendants; to this effect he made a vow, and further that should any of his subjects commit any depredations upon, or disturb the peace and friendship of Bahroos, his vengeance should not only fall upon the individual who so acted, but also those families which might be at Acheen, who should be put to death, and their homes burnt.

When the foregoing had been explained; and the necessary preparations made the King sent back the head of Sultan Ibrahim to Bahroos, accompanied with an Effigy of body in stone, those who had the charge of conveying it, kept a continued firing, and saluting from their Guns, and playing upon all kinds of warlike Instruments, until their arrival at Bahroos.

On their landing, all the people of Bahroos joined the procession to the graves, in which they intended the internment of Sultan Ibrahim’s head; and where his body had originally buried, on placing the head in the grave it instantly joined itself to the body, from which it at once appeared, as if it had never been separated; the Acheenese on seeing this were struck with terror and dismay, and fearing that Sultan Ibrahim would rise again from his grave and revenge himself upon them; they retreated to their boats, and immediately departed for Acheen, where on their arrival, they informed the King of the particulars they had witnessed.”