

Heresy in Malaysia: An Analysis

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Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the issues on heresy in Malaysia. The problem relating to heresy needs to be urgently addressed as it directly affects Islamic theology and Muslims. Although Malaysia has witnessed a rapid development in the field of Islamic understanding and da'wah missionary among the Muslim community, the heretic movement is still rampant. This scenario has raised questions on factors that contribute to the movement of heresy among the Muslim community. These questions encourage the researcher into researching the subject in order to come forward with answers and solutions. In order to arrive at the answers, the researcher has conducted a research by adopting two research methods namely library research and field work research. For library research, past literature and relevant views about the issue of cultism were collected. The field work research involves observations and surveys is done through interviews. The facts and relevant information are obtained directly from the people concerned and also from the current situations of Muslim society. All data is analyzed inductively and deductively to expose the important factors that contribute to the movement of heresy in Malaysia, as well as the solutions and actions taken to combat this problem successfully. The result of this research proves that there are seven factors which contribute to the development of heresy in Malaysia. They are the weakness of enforcement of law, the weakness of Islamic studies curriculum, the influences of western culture, negative contents in mass media, ancient belief, the characteristic of the cults and the weakening of Islamic values.

Keywords: Islam, Heresy, Deviant Teaching, Theological Streams, Islamic Theology

1. Islam In Malaysia

The position of Islam in the Federal Constitution is an especially important issue because this issue is closely related to the trust and faith of the majority of the population in Malaya then and Malaysia today. This issue is also a sensitive issue because for the Malays, religion cannot be separated from their daily lives. That is why Islam is regarded very highly. (Mohamad Bin Arifin, 1999, 99).

Article 3(1) in the Malaysian Constitution acknowledges Islam as the religion of the Federation, but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation (Federal Constitution of 2002, 20).

In accordance with the State Constitution, Islam is the official religion of the state except for Penang, Malacca, Sabah and Sarawak. The Federal Constitution does not provide that Islam is the official religion of the states concerned (Federal Constitution 2002).

Article 11 provides for the protection of Islam from any other religions or doctrines which may influence Islam. The state law has given a provision for the position of Islam in the states, such that it limits the dissemination of any religious doctrines or beliefs other than the Islamic religious doctrines or beliefs by any individual to any follower of any one religion

of the Federation (Federal Constitution 2020).

Religious freedom referred to in Article 11 (1) provides that every citizen has the right to profess and practise a religion that he professes, and it is subjected to Clause (4) to promulgate his or her religion. According to Clause (4), the state law (particularly in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan) may be overruled by the Federal Law in the dissemination of any religious doctrines or beliefs for those professing the religion of Islam (Federal Constitution 2002).

In short, the provisions relating to Islam clearly affirm that Islam is the religion of the Federation and has a special position compared to other religions. Nevertheless, this provision does not mean that Islamic law is fully implemented because it is not the purpose of the Constitution. Full implementation of Islamic law cannot be carried out because of certain restrictions in the Constitution (Mahmood Zuhdi Abdul Majid 1997, 103).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Islamic Faith In Malaysia

The administrative affairs of the Muslims are subjected to the jurisdiction of the King of each particular state. Thus, the legislative power in relation to the legal affairs of the Muslims is the responsibility of the State Legislature. The Legislature has the power to convene a special legal order in relation to the affairs of the Muslims. However, the law should not contradict with the provisions in The Federal Law (Federal Constitution 2002).

Thus, each of the states implements and manages its own Islamic affairs. Selangor was the first state to establish Islamic Law Enactment (1952) and this was followed by the other states. These enactments provide general administrative provisions of Islamic law in two aspects: public or private. These provisions will determine the issues pertaining to the relationship between Islam and the State government as well as identifying the content of Islamic law to be adopted by Muslims in Malaysia (Hokker, MB, 1984, 144).

From the aspects of fiqh, generally, Muslims in Malaysia follow the school of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah in terms of theology and the Shafi'i sect (mazhab). This sect is the de facto official sect of Islam in Malaysia. The official status of this sect is not obtained through legal sanction or decree or court but through the administrative practices in producing the fatwa and practices in the Syariah Court. Chronologically, the history of Islamic administration in Malaysia, emphasises on Shafi'i sect especially in issuing a fatwa. This matter stems from the pressures by the young people affected by the Middle East reformed movement of Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh (w. 1905M) and Sayyid Rashid Rida (w. 1935M). The role of traditional scholars and their political cooperation with the authorities strengthen the Shafi'i sect through legal sanctions (Ibrahim Abu Bakar, 1994, 17-18).

The emergence of theological streams such as the Shiites and the non-Sunnis and challenges by those who are considered heretic (as practised by the Darul Arqam movement) and the anti sunisme traditions of Orthodoxy (as supported by Malaysian scholars in religious practices) and assumptions to several issues such as women's rights and freedom to choose religion (question of apostasy) in the 1990s by either some traditional scholars who occupy government official positions or otherwise, react aggressively to the challenges above. Through the gazetted fatwa, stringent measures were taken against the Shiite and Darul Arqam movements prohibiting their activities as well as arresting their leaders under the Internal Security Act. Meanwhile the anti hadith sect was only prohibited from carrying out activities without involving any arrests under the Internal Security Act, eventhough in terms of challenges to the teachings of Islam this group's activities are more serious than the Darul Arqam movement (Ahmad Hidayat Buang 2003, 11 - 12).

Shiite movements and activities of the anti hadith are indeed a challenge to the homogeneous teachings of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah in Malaysia. Scholars in the past, just like the young people today, faced challenges with the traditional Shafi'i fiqh. The response to this challenge was similar, that was, by the issuance of fatwas. Fatwas issued in the states set three conditions:

- 1) Declaring that all Muslims in the country follow the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah in terms of faith, morals and sharia
- 2) Beliefs other than the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah are considered contradicting the Islamic law.
- 3) Spreading any form of teachings in any manner whatsoever other than that of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah is prohibited (State Gazette 1997).

The above fatwas clearly show a trial in the collaboration with the country's political authorities to ensure all Muslims in Malaysia follow the right path of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. This has indirectly made sunism as Malaysia's official sect. These fatwas show the seriousness of the Malaysian government in preventing the views of the non-Sunni from spreading, thus, establishing a strong foothold in the Islamic community (Ahmad Hidayat Buang 2003, 12-13).

2.2 *The Meaning Of Heresy*

The terms heresy or deviant teachings are terms that are more commonly and popularly used recently in Malaysia, especially among the religious bureaucracy as well as the mainstream media in Malaysia. In addition, there are also several other terms frequently used in the mainstream media which have the same connotation as heresy, such as contamination and misappropriation of faith.

The connotation of the terms described above, in principle, is not inconsistent with each other. On the other hand, they are closely related to all of the terms used and strongly reinforce each other, and can be used interchangeably to replace one another in reference to the deviant teaching professed.

2.3 *Heresy In Terms Of Language And Terminology*

The term "teachings" is a relative term as there are many definitions given by various parties. According to the Kamus Dewan, it is defined as the doctrines taught, advice, guidance, theories and sects (mazhab). While "deviant" is defined as not following the right way, confusing (action, belief etc.) and deviate from the right path (Kamus Dewan 2002).

Therefore, it can be concluded that heresy as used in the Malay language, refers to the knowledge that is taught and disseminated secretly or widely to others who deviate from the righteous path.

Prof. Dr. Abdulfatah Haron Ibrahim (1994) defines heresy as the teachings and practices contrary to Islam. In another occasion, Prof. Dr. Abdulfatah correlates heresy with tasawuf- tariqah. This is because today's Muslim community understands tasawuf-tarikat wrongly. As a result, tasawuf-tarikat knowledge has been transformed into deviant teachings due to the involvement of people who are not among the philosophers.

Heresy is defined as "any doctrines and practices, initiated and supported by Muslims and non-Muslims who claim that the teachings are based on the teachings and practices of Islam whereas the teachings and practices contradict that of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. They are also a contradiction to the Islamic faith and the venerated sects of the school of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah." (Engku Ahmad Zaki Engku Alwi, 2010)

Based on the above definition, all teachings, either in the forms of faith, worship and mysticism, are infused by the elements contrary to Islamic shariah which are apparent in batiniyyah, Hinduism, Neoplatonism, diverse interpretations of the Qur'an, hadith and the use of false hadith. As a result, all these elements are blended together and weaved neatly into an image of what is expressed as heresy.

3. **Categories And Features Of Heresy**

The scope of heresy is very broad. It encompasses all aspects of life, including aspects of beliefs, customs, way of life, business, religion, politics, economics, and many others. Based on a research carried out by the Islamic Research, JAKIM (2006), there are various forms of heresy identified in Malaysia. Generally, heresy can be divided into three main categories:

- i) The new forms of teaching
- ii) The Tarikat forms of teaching
- iii) Teachings through traditional beliefs and practices associated with life, mystic and culture.

3.1 *The New Forms Of Teaching*

According to Muhammad Uthman el-Muhammady (1997), the new doctrine that threatens the purity of the Islamic faith is divided into two forms, namely, threats towards understanding other traditional beliefs and threats towards understanding modern beliefs, such as the heretic belief, which has the teachings of God in themselves or in the human body, the Jabariyyah, Mu'tazilah and Wahdah al-Wujud beliefs that violate the concept of oneness of Allah (s.w.t). Modern threats are mostly created by humans themselves such as, secular ideologies that separate the religious affairs of life from materialism, science, communism, socialism, capitalism and liberalism.

Generally, most Muslims in Malaysia are less aware of how the new modern schools can affect or adulterate the purity of the teachings of the Islamic faith. This adulteration of Islamic faith may be adopted as their way of life by most Muslims. This new teaching is in fact not Islamic at all. It actually contradicts the concept of true Islamic faith.

3.2 The Tarikat Forms Of Teaching

Almost all forms of heresy camouflage behind the tarikat and tasawuf doctrines to the point of abusing eminent names such as Tarikat Ahmadiyya, Naqsyabandiyah, Syadhiliyyah, Qadiriyyah, Syattariyyah etc in a manner which is inconsistent with the Islamic law (Abdulfatah Haron Ibrahim, 1994, 1).

Occasionally, certain forms of tarikat teachings are named after their founders, and they would combine their names with that of famous Tarikat among Muslims as an approach to misrepresent the views of Muslims about their teachings and their tarikat. These misrepresentations are in fact a deviation from the actual Islamic teachings.

Among the features that adorn aberrant tarikat teachings are believing the tasawuf terminologies which are in outright conflict with that of Islamic law as said by al-Hallaj (d. 309H): "Ana al-Haqq" (I am the true God) besides the philosophical terms, mysticism and *takwil tasawuf* that has far deviated from the true faith and worship. In addition, the deviant tarikat also urges tarikat followers to lighten or not perform acts of worship and other Islamic obligations. Similarly, followers of the deviant tarikat teachings are not hesitant to sin. Even worse, these misguided tarikat teachings have also formed underground political movements that can threaten the harmony of the Muslims (Umar Farukh 1983, 516).

3.3 Teachings Through Traditional Beliefs And Practices Associated With Life, Mystic And Culture

Deviant teachings can also be detected through traditional practices, superstitious beliefs, heterodoxy and polytheism. The third type (heterodoxy) is a teaching that has been firmly rooted in Islamic society handed down from one generation to the other. In other words, it is actually fictitious or delusionary which can also be in the forms of taboos, customs, prophesies, cults or beliefs which deviate from the teachings of Islam and their authenticity is not known ('Ali Mahfuz, 1956, 420-421). This deviance is a result of the influence of many other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, animism and dynamism. In Malaysia, these practices and beliefs are being confused or misunderstood with Islamic teachings such as in healing practices, cult activities and magic. (Engku Ahmad Zaki Engku Alwi, 2007b)

Some examples of heretic superstitious practices of the Muslim community in Malaysia, are invincible martial arts practices, shamanism and the use of incantation in massaging as well as in carrying out mores.

Overall, it can be concluded that the characteristics of digression in doctrines or tarikat can cause a void of faith among practitioners (JAKIM 2006), based on the following:

- 1) Sources from al-Quran and al-Hadith.
 - i) Believe in the existence of new revelations.
 - ii) Change the text and meaning of the al-Quran on purpose.
 - iii) Believe in the existence of arcane and apparent meaning in the contents of the Al Quran.
- 2) Divinity
 - i) Avow to the incarnation of God in him.
 - ii) Believe in the positive and negative impacts of a guru's recital upon an object such as a rock, mountain and others.
 - iii) Avow to know things that are occult and in fortune-telling.
 - iv) Believe in the existence of absolute power of objects such as wood and stone.
 - v) Believe that their teachers can expiate their sins with money.
- 3) Prophethood
 - i) Confess that they or their teachers receive revelation.
 - ii) Admit that they or their teachers as a prophet or Jesus.
 - iii) Believe there are yet other prophets after Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).
 - iv) Admit to receiving qasyaf or the knowledge of laduni.
 - v) Claim to be the representative of the prophet himself who can confer syafaat to his students.
 - vi) Claim that they themselves or their teachers are divinely protected.
 - vii) Claim that their teachers are entrusted with the apostle tasks.
 - viii) Claim that their teachers have miracle powers.
- 4) Sam'iyat / Mughayyabat
 - i) Believe that the souls of the dead or saints can be incarnated into the body of the living.
 - ii) Ask help from the dead.
 - iii) Believe that certain people do not die and will be reborn as Imam Mahdi.
 - iv) Believe that the dead can provide assistance when called upon.
 - v) Believe that sorcerers can summon the spirits of the dead in practicing witchcraft.

- vi) Predict the emergence of Imam Mahdi and the resurrection.
 - vii) Confess that their teachers hold the key to the gates of heaven.
 - viii) Confess and believe that one can communicate directly with Allah through the Nur Muhamad found in himself.
- 5) Shariat
- i) Nullify certain obligations in Islam such as prayer, fasting, tithing, pilgrimage and others as well as create new obligations.
 - ii) Submit to the teachers spiritually and physically through spiritual marriage.
 - iii) Neglect the Friday prayers because of mysticism practices.
 - iv) Belief that there is no necessity for congregational prayers as well as no necessity to face the Kiblah during prayers.
 - v) Believe that solemnisation of marriage according to shariat is merely a custom, thus, it requires another ritual, that is spiritual remarriage.
 - vi) The act of adultery, gambling, drinking alcohol and all forms of sins can be committed by the teachers or caliphs of tarikat and forgiveness of their sins and that of their followers are guaranteed.
 - vii) Believe that it is adequate to just have the intention to perform the prayers.
 - viii) Legalize things that are forbidden by Allah.
 - ix) Believe that all religions are the same.
 - x) Believe that performing the pilgrimage is not necessarily in Mecca. It can be performed in other places as well.
- 6) Manners / Morals
- i) Comply blindly with the teachers' teachings even if they commit sins.
 - ii) Believe that followers can receive incredible strength from their teacher.
 - iii) Require both male and female followers to be tested in a special room and swear not to tell anyone what happens between their teacher and them.
 - iv) Insist that followers keep the teachings confidential, if otherwise they will be afflicted with problems.

4. Factors Affecting The Spread Of Heresy And Its Solutions

- 4.1 Weak and inadequate enforcement related to heresy under the Syariah Criminal Offences, that is, enforcement process is not overtly formal in nature and is bound by the general rules of administrative and departmental procedures. Inadequate enforcement manpower results in the inefficiency of the administration and enforcement machinery. The improvements in professionalism and quality of enforcement officers are not at satisfactory levels. Thus, continuous courses and training should be held to give them exposure of better quality information for a more productive work.
- 4.2 Provisions of the enacted law are not fully enforced, even though the current act and provisions are sufficient to eliminate the problems of heresy. Among the provisions of the civil law and others which are relevant (such as article 149 of the Constitution, the Internal Security Act (ISA), Article 11 of the Federal Constitution, the Penal Code and the Sedition Act 1948) should be referred to in cases involving heresy.
- 4.3 Faith Rehabilitation Centers do not exist in every state in Malaysia. The existence of these centers is very relevant to the severity of the situation. These rehabilitation centers should be equipped with a complete and appropriate curriculum in matters pertaining to the discipline of faith. These centers should also be in direct contact with the institutions of higher learning in this country in order to provide competent trainers, produce brilliant ideas, and a perfect place to carry out the rehabilitation activities. This is because the Islamic law teaches that the death penalty must be carried out against apostasies due to heresy. At the same time, their faith should also be restored in order for them to repent.
- 4.4 Missionary movements and refinement of faith are not widely practised by various agencies and educational institutions in the country. Refinement and reinforcement movements must be integrated into education at all levels, primary, secondary and higher education. An appropriate curriculum with the current developments on the question of faith should be included. This refinement movement of faith must also be extended through sermons at the mosques in the country. The clerics and religious scholars should produce more writings, researches and publications related to the Islamic faith and heresy as a useful source of information to the Muslim community. This information should be disseminated through mainstream newspapers and magazines and other media for a wide and effective dispersion. These religious scholars must also conduct continuous

studies on matters relating to refinement of faith, deviation of faith, heresy and missionary strategies.

- 4.5 Mass media whether electronic media, print media or information technology are not fully utilized as an effective medium of propagation of Islam in strengthening the Islamic faith besides revealing the signs of the existence of heresy in the community. This is because the mass media channels are channels that are easily accessible by the public. Thus, they are the most desirable and appropriate channels to be utilized by the authorities as a means of propagation of Islamic values. Religious authorities in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs should tighten surveillance, censorship and impose bans on the distribution of literature that is superstitious and deviant in nature which is detrimental to the Muslim community. To punish the people who insult the sanctity of Islam, the current Islamic Criminal Law Enactment should be enforced.
- 4.6 Lack of cooperation between Muslim communities and the religious authorities. The authorities should mobilize forces to enhance public awareness of the importance of preserving the sanctity of Islam and encourage them to engage in refinement and strengthening of faith movements in their respective manner and capabilities. In this case, all Muslims should urge one another to enliven and fully utilize the mosque and other Islamic institutions. In one aspect, the mosque committee, village committee and parents, should train their youngsters to acquaint themselves with the mosques and musollah on Islamic education to strengthen the faith, as well as train them to attend religious activities held in their area.
- 4.7 Finally, the task of combating the spread of heresy, abolishing the ignorance of faith and strengthening the faith is the duties and responsibilities of all Muslims. It should not be shouldered by a certain party only, but it should involve the participation of all segments of society right from the individuals through to the authorities that assume the trust in strengthening strategies of the Muslim faith.

5. Conclusion

From the Islamic perspective, heresy is a very serious problem. Heresy involves the question of faith which determines a man's status in Islam, whether he is still a Muslim or otherwise. It is undeniable that heresy is easily committed and spread within the community. There are many factors that influence the spread of heresy throughout the world.

The spread of heresy leads to substantial threats to society and the nation, besides affecting the status of a person's faith in Islam if he or she is involved in it. The act of heresy can lead to polytheism which can eventually result in apostasy.

In Malaysia, the phenomenon of heresy exists, and is spreading widely in the Muslim community. The issue of heresy is very complex and chronic in nature, that is, it can affect anyone regardless of their social status and level of thinking. The case of heresy can occur in the community at any time and in any place, and is spreading rampantly through various channels available in the community such as the mass media, religious and social activities.

Thus, the issue of heresy must be addressed seriously by not only the religious authorities but also the individuals, in order to curb it from spreading wildly among the Muslim community in Malaysia.

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