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Heresy Phenomena in the Malay Community in Malaysia

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Abstract

The heresy conflict is a manifestation of conflict between backwardness and progress of a civilization. When such a conflict arises within a Malay society, progress becomes difficult to be translated. The emergence of Islam for all human being among which include fighting against heresy especially ones that attempt to deviate Muslims faith while lighter matters of heresy are set aside. There are some big questions about heresy associated with the beliefs and practices of the community such as shamanism, fortune telling, and amulets and so on. This article reviews the origin concept of heresy and conflicted views disputed by the past scholars that have been opened for discussion until today. There are surveys that were conducted following the conflict of heresy since the arrival of Islam in the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and how it grew and spread into the Malay community in Malaysia. In the meantime, this article also tried to portray the major threat growing within the society such as superstitious beliefs and practices. The methodology used in this article is content analysis supported by a survey conducted through qualitative approach. Qualitative data are obtained from interviews with knowledgeable and expert key informants in this field.

Keywords: Muslim Religion, Heresy, Superstition, Islamic Beliefs, Malay Community

Introduction

The word heresy is usually used within a Christian, Jewish, or Islamic context, and implies with different meanings according to their belief and worldview. The founder or leader of a heretical movement is called a heresiarch, while individuals who commit heresy are known as heretics.

Heresy is defined as a creation or a beginning of something also known as *bid'ah* in Arabic terminology; to start something or practicing something which is in contradiction to the Quranic teachings, sunnah or ijma' (consensus of Muslim scholars) and the principle revealed by

Allah. According to Abdul Kadir et. al (2017), the term of *bid'ah* is originated from the Arabic word بدع (badaá) – بَدَعَ (yabda') بَدْعًا (bad'án) that carries meaning of inventing something new without any previous example.

Meanwhile in terms of legislation, heresy is defined as every new case in matters of religion, a new thing that strays or deviates from religion (al-Arab, 1988). While the word al-Badi' is one of the names of God that means creator. This is because, God has a loving nature to create something new, solely new and has never been created before (al-Kuwaiti, 2008).

Literature Review

In terms of discussion on heresy, the scholars have different views on this matter. There are two main points of view where one is that all practices that are not practiced by the Prophet (SAW) is heresy. Among the scholars following this view are Malik (164 H-241H), al-Shatibi (790 AH) and Taymiyyah (728H). They hold to the word *Kullu* in the hadith of the Prophet (SAW):

Meaning: "Indeed, each new case is heresy and every heresy is heresy"

The word *Kullu* means all, therefore in the hadith all practices that are not based on Islamic law is heresy. Whether the practice is of customary context, worship or faith. These scholars believed that there is no good heresy (*bidaah hasanah*) or bad heresy. The expression of heresy itself means vile and atrocious.

On other occasion, there are also scholars who categorized the heresy into two states, namely good heresy (*bidaah hasanah*) and deviant heresy (*bidaah dhalalah*). Among those scholars are, Salam (577 H-660H), Nawawi (631 H-676 H) and Jauzi (510H-597H) (al-Kuwaiti, 2008).

Brief history of heresy

The issues related to the deviation from syara' existed as early as the days of the Prophet (SAW) and continued to exist to this day. The following is a brief summary about the history of the emergence of heresy.

The Emergence of Heresy in Islamic Society

Seeds of deviation from Islamic law have actually appeared in the time of the Prophet (PBUH). The fact is based on a hadith where there were three companions who came to the house of the wife of the Prophet (PBUH) and asked about the worship of the Prophet (PBUH). Having reported it to them, they felt dwarfed by their own worships compared to the Prophet (PBUH). They say, "Our worship is nothing compared to the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), since he had been forgiven for both his past and future sins" One of them said, "Indeed, I will pray forever every night (without sleep)". Then another said, "I will fast *Dahr* (full year) and I will not break". And another said, "I will stay away from women and will never marry forever". They came to the Prophet (PBUH) and said:

"You say so and so. There I am, by Allah, the one who is most afraid of God among you, and also most pious. I fasted and also broke fast, I prayed and also

slept and married a woman. Whoever hates my sunnah, then they are not among my class” (Kadir, 2010).

The history mentioned above illustrates that there are among the companions who tried to deviate in matters of worship. However the effort has been prevented by the Prophet (PBUH). This reveals that the matter of innovations or deviations is very easily spread if it is not forbidden at the very initial stage.

Heresy in Malay Society

The heresy in the Malay community could be aptly linked to the beliefs of the past Malay community. Kadir et. al (2016) claimed that the existing problem has been rooted from the failure of the Malay community in understanding the significant concept of bid’ah. These past beliefs originated the beliefs of animism, hinduism mixed with the teachings of Islam. For example, animism belief is the belief where guardians who guard the earth as ghosts (Alwi, 2008). This conflict of belief is what led Sayyid Syeikh al-Hadi, a Malay scholar in the early 20th century trying to explain to the public the importance of using the mind. The use of intellect is intended to spread and instill Islamic teachings within the community. He succeeded in injecting awareness on the need for *ijtihad* and disregarding the *taqlid* (following or imitating without any knowledge) in Malay community (Bakar, 1993). The effect of *taqlid* is that what causes the superstitious beliefs to take root in the Malay community.

The belief in superstition is heresy in one’s faith (aqidah). The belief has succeeded in coloring the Malay society's environment until now. Among those superstitions which still remain are the belief in the practice of a shaman, fortune telling, charms and so on. Whenever there is any difficulty or pain, there are a number of Malay societies who would seek the shaman (bomoh) who is supposedly able to alleviate any inconvenience or cure any disease. Similarly, in the event of losing of valuables, often the references and advice of the shaman are taken into account and become their guidelines. They visit a shaman with a perception that he knows of the unseen and is able to interact with the supernaturals (Al-Khumaiyyis, 2007).

According to Mohamad (2008), beliefs in a shaman in curing a disease is seen widespread in the Malay community. Unknowingly, there are shamans who are directly involved in the deviation of the aqidah. Among the elements of deviations are:

- i. Using jinn.
- ii. Worship other existences other than Allah (SWT).
- iii. Believe in the supernatural, spell or fortune telling.
- iv. Use of dirty, unclean or illegal (haram) materials.
- v. Beliefs that violate faith.
- vi. Deeds that violate the Shari'a.

In the meantime, there are some practices which are not based on the Islamic teachings or *syara’* in the Malay society. What is more alarming, at the same time there are those among Malay societies who are easily influenced by deviant practices of obedience without clear background from the teaching of Islamic law (Ibrahim, 1999). The deviations in question are:

- i. Worshipping of sacred places (believed to be)
- ii. Worshipping those who are considered as guardians
- iii. Entertaining, camping and worshipping the beach
- iv. Belief in magic powers through readings and practices
- v. Belief in the shamans and mediums who (supposedly) have absolute power.

In addition, according to Yusof (2007), the Malay community often considers practices done for generations as a religious custom that must be followed. This practice is carried out without any clear indication of *syara'*. Such forms of practices are:

- i. Practice in shaving baby's hair.
- ii. The match and the bargaining of the bride.
- iii. Practicing of feasting for the deceased.

The stated practices still exist in the Malay community as if there were no studies on the status of the practices whether they follow the Islamic law or contrary to the teachings of Islam? With that being said, it is evident that the superstitious beliefs which are in line with the heresy in the creed have emerged in the Malay society since the advent of Islam to Malaya. The difficulty in curbing this practice has been felt by today's preachers. What is more, there are also those scholars who seem readily to compromise with such practices that are against the will of Islam, by allowing the practices in their families.

Methodology

In this study, the methodology used is content analysis obtained from the study of ancient and modern books. This research methodology is selected as the legal debate on Islam requires research based on content analysis or library research. In addition, some in-depth interviewing with major informants involved directly in the field of study is also conducted.

Findings and Discussions

The findings from this study revealed that there are three main practices that led to heretical threats in the Malay community. These three practices are:

The Use of Amulet

The use of amulet ornament is nothing new in a society. In fact, the use of this amulet has existed in the Arabian era of Jahiliyyah for the protection of any interruptions from the *jinn*s. In the Arabian Age of Jahiliyyah, this amulet is often worn around the neck. Also known as amulet is any ornament or charm that hangs at the door in the house and also in the vehicle for the purpose of protecting the house or vehicle (al-Qaradawi, 1994). Such beliefs are easily dispersed, causing the beliefs to still exist until now.

Most importantly, according to al-Qaradawi (1994) the use of this amulet is prohibited even if it uses the Quranic texts. The ban is based on the following arguments:

- i. There is a clear argument about the ban as stated in the hadith:

“The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) was approached by a group of 10 (ten companions) to pledge allegiance to him. Rasulullah SAW accepted 9 but rejected one of them. The companions asked the Prophet, why did he refuse one of them? Then he replied: "In the man there is an amulet ornament". When the man cut the amulet, only then was he accepted by the Prophet. Shortly thereafter, he said: "Whoever hangs the the amulet has indeed done shirk to Allah".

- ii- As sadd al-zāriah (closing the space for evil). This is because the use of amulets opens the opportunity to shirk to Allah
- iii. If the amulet is written with a Quranic verse, it becomes an insult when its users carry it around everywhere even to the toilet.
- iv- Indeed, the Qur'an is revealed as the guidance and constitution of human life and not intended to be a charm of amuletism.

The phenomenon has also existed in the Malay society till today. Here are some of the heresy phenomena that have been detected:

- i- The use of 1000 dinars verse as a charm
The hanging of the verses of the thousand dinars is considered to be their selling charm where the dependence on profit is certainly not entirely attributed to God. This makes the amulet as the medium between the creature and God. With the use of the amulet has created a room for shirk to Allah.
- ii- The use of amulet tied at the waist.
The amulet is written with the Qur'anic verse and mixed with other verses. The purpose of this amulet is as 'body booster'.
- ii- Also similar with the charms.

Consumers believe that the amulet is capable of making its users immune and possessing strange powers (Kadir, 2009)

Fortune Telling Practices

Fortune telling also exists in the Malay community. Often, fortune telling enthusiasts will visit the well-known mediums for reading. In the meantime, according to Alwi (2007) there are deviant teaching practitioners who use the practice of knowing the unseen and reading the fate of certain individuals to attract new followers and layman people.

In fact, fortune telling practice has existed since the Arabian era of Jahiliyyah. In the Arab society it is known as '*kahanah*' a means of believing in the possession or message of the unseen world. *Kahin* also means someone who knows about the unseen. This knowledge covers what will happen or what is in someone's heart. This word refers to a tribe named al-kahnah. They have been blessed by Alah with intellect but have been deceived by Satan into becoming people filled with evil (al-Qaradawi, 1994).

The phenomena of fortune telling is no exception in modern Malay society today. The predictions propagated through the prophecy of twelve stars (zodiac): Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces, Aries, Taurus and Gemini are widespread in most magazines in Malaysia. These star predictions are widely described in casual magazines

distributed monthly. For example a person born on July 22 to August 22 is a Leo-starred, prediction in July 2008, the girl's prediction for this month is, she will be attacked by a love virus and earn extra money. At the same time there will be a disagreement between the couple (Zakir, 2008).

The horoscope section as often appears in casual magazines is intended to attract fans or readers. Typically, the section that is often displayed, of course, has its own influence. The effect of this horoscope culture, is to make its fans believe in the prophecies that have been mentioned (Adam et. all, 2010). This phenomenon invites the belief in elements of superstition by prophesying without any obvious fact. The effect is the Malay society's involvement in the beliefs and practices of the heresies in the creed.

Supersticious Practice

According to the main informant, a senior officer of the Pahang Islamic Religious Department (JAIP), the Malay community loved to interact with nature until they were convinced that the jungle had a guardian and so on. Due to over imagination with the unseen world has led the Malays to easily admire something that are weird and mystical. For example, once there was a spread in the Malay community about the specialty of geckos (the giant lizard) where they were capable of treating various diseases and produce a special enzyme that would be effective in curing a deadly disease. Information on the advantages of these lizards was spread through the internet until it attracted hundreds of lizard seekers after being offered high prices (Kadir, 2014).

Another example of common superstitios practices associated with the Malay customary belief include young ladies should not singing while cooking because they will asking for aged husband. But despite the truth, when they are singing and not paying attention to cooking at the same time, they might mix up and end up doing some kind of awful tasting dish or accidentally cause fire. That is why they not allowed to do so. For kid, they are not allowed to open an umbrella at home because a snake would came out from the inner centre of the umbrella. But the truth from this belief is to prevent someone from getting a poked-eye. The kid under the umbrella may accidentally use the tip of the umbrella to poke someone's eye behind him. These beliefs of the superstitions as described are easily dispersed and often ocured in Malay society from one generation to another generation. It has thus exposed Muslims in the creed of the creations without any sustenance. In the context of Islam the beliefs are considered as heresies to the faith.

Conclusions

The writing described in this article, is a form of discussion of the existence of heretical heritage of the Malay community. This heresy is closely related to the belief of the Malay community before the advent of Islam and reveals the involvement of heresies in the form of *aqidah*. The seriousness of this heretical issue is evidenced by its emergence since the time of Rasulullah SAW, Khulafa 'al-Rasyidin, the era after the companionship until the coming of Islam into the Malay world.

The existence of beliefs and practices of superstition through meditors is of great concern in Islam since it will gradually led individuals away from Allah's guidance. This iincludes the use and pracatice of shamans and become difficult to be dealt with. Some Malay societies see that the phenomenon of shamans is an alternative to solve their problems while the reality

is in contrast, many dubious elements have been used by shamans to cure the patient. In order to create the noble civilization of the Malay Muslim community, it is advisable for them to revisit and having in-depth study on the teachings of Islam from the supreme scholars or ulama'. The influence of the inherent heresies needs to be constrained to allow the civilization of the Malay community to be transformed in line with the Islamic mainstream that has shone the region hundreds of years ago.

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