

Dakwah Among Indian Mualaf in Malaysia

Dakwah dalam Kalangan Mualaf India di Malaysia

RAZALEIGH MUHAMAT @ KAWANGIT
SALAWATI SARINGAT

ABSTRACT

This article sets out to look activities and challenges of dakwah among Indian Mualaf in Malaysia. It was sure that their Muslim culture applying becomes a dilemma when they are a Muslim minority group. It suggests that when this group begin to practice Islām, their behavior changes dramatically. This is because instead changing their faiths, they also need to maintain their new culture as Muslim converts. Whilst they are welcomed by their Indian Muslim counterparts, it is nevertheless hypothesized that they may not participate fully in the Muslim mainstream. This document research based method finally found that Indian Mualaf only involved with internal activities in order to build relationship between them and this given them a big challenge to put them as Muslim dominated by Malays in Malaysia.

Keywords: Dakwah activity; Indian Mualaf; Muslim mainstream; culture; organisation

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk melihat aktiviti-aktiviti dan cabaran-cabaran dakwah di kalangan golongan Mualaf India di Malaysia. Sesuatu yang pasti, amalan kebudayaan sebagai seorang Muslim di kalangan golongan Mualaf India ini menjadi suatu dilema oleh kerana mereka adalah golongan Muslim minoriti. Ini kerana apabila mereka memeluk Islam sikap mereka juga akan berubah secara drastik. Di samping perubahan akidah, mereka juga perlu merubah budaya mereka besesuaian dengan budaya Muslim. Walaupun mereka dialau-alukan sebagai Muslim oleh golongan Muslim lain di Malaysia, mereka tetap dihipotesis sebagai golongan yang berbeza dari umat Islam di Malaysia. Penyelidikan berdasarkan kajian kepustakaan ini mendapati aktiviti-aktiviti yang dilakukan oleh Mualaf India lebih bersifat dalaman hanya untuk merapatkan hubungan sesama mereka dan ini memberi cabaran yang besar kepada mereka untuk menempatkan diri mereka sebagai umat Islam yang didominasi oleh orang-orang Melayu di Malaysia.

Keywords: Aktiviti dakwah; mualaf India; golongan Muslim; budaya; organisasi

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable fact that from the perspective of Islam, dakwah (calling) is firmly stand for the development of humanity. This is due to the fact that dakwah has obviously offered salvation in the worldly life and in the hereafter. Therefore, a Muslim who views this task as an obligatory and holy has largely been involved in such activities of dakwah especially towards minority Muslims all over the world. In Malaysia, dakwah which was perceptibly observed to be a force of social change particularly in the seventies has involved many outreach activities towards minority Muslims including the Indian *Mualaf*. Actually, Islam is not new in this community since Indian people have already known the religion since it was spread in their motherland, Indian subcontinent. However, how to

ask them to be a good Muslim after their conversion is not as easy as usually presumed. As a community who has its own identity, Indian Muslim has also struggled to preserve its humanistic tradition. The paper will discuss this issue which focuses on two important questions namely how dakwah is being conducted among Indian *Mualaf* and how do they response towards this so called humanistic approach of dakwah.

THE MIGRATION OF THE INDIAN COMMUNITY TO MALAYSIA

One of the communities in Malaysia at present is the Indian community. They are the third largest community and is numbered at 2.5 million people. The majority of them are centered in Kuala Lumpur,

Selangor, Perak, Penang and a few other states. Their migration to Malaysia before independence had formed a community with its own identity. Their existence has also made them as a main target for the missionary movement in Malaysia. Due to the fact that Islam is a missionary religion, there are a number of missionary movements such as PERKIM, Islamic Outreach-ABIM, Masjid India, PERMIM and others which conduct missionary activities using various approaches, either to convert them as Muslims or strengthen their faith in Islam that they have converted into. During the missionary activities among the Indians, a few challenges have been identified. They will be briefly described in this paper.

History has stated that Indians came to Malaya about 2,000 years ago and they are divided into two groups, the early migrants and the modern migrants. The early migrants were the elite as they came as merchants and called Malaya "Suverarnabhumi" or "Golden Land". The modern migrants came during the British colonial period and worked as rough laborers and was paid low wage to work in the sugar cane and coffee plantations. Only in the 19th century, did they move to the rubber industry which was before this controlled by the Malays.

There were a number of factors which encouraged them to come to Malaya. The economic development of Malaya was an important factor that encouraged migrants to this country, especially the Chinese and Indians. The economic situation of Malaya in the first 20 years of the 20th century showed a vibrant economy. According to statistics between 1898 and 1905, the tin production of Malaya was half the world's production. Although there was competition from other countries such as Bolivia and Nigeria, Malaya remained the main producer of tin. The proof is seen, when the activities of tin mining brought in a mass migration of Chinese migrants to Malaya to work in the tin mines.

Besides profits from tin, rubber also brought in profit for Malaya. In 1905, there were 38,000 acres of rubber plantation. This increased to 100,000 acres in the following year. Due to increased demand, the British took steps to expand rubber plantations to the whole of Malaya. It is due to this development that the British brought in Indian migrants to work in the rubber plantations. Furthermore, they provided

the labor that was easily available and cheaper as compared to the locals.

The date of Indian migrant laborers to Malaya was said to be circa 1786, after the British took over Penang. They were brought in to work either as servants or laborers in the plantation sector. At the end of the 18th century, their number increased following the opening of Singapore in 1819 (Tregonning 1962: 44). Therefore, in 1910 there was a mass migration whereby 2532 Indian laborers were brought in through Penang. In 1921, the number of laborers coming in increased and was estimated to be around 100,000 people. According to Zainal Abidin (Zainal Abidin Abdul Wahid 1979: 111), many were brought into Malaya through contracts. According to the contracts, they were to work for a period of time, usually three years. The contracts were for those who registered with recruiting agents in India. This system was known as "a regularly organized system of kidnapping". This system worked between 1910 and 1938 and was known as a contract laborer system. Then it changed to the Kangany system and it is said that this system was more profitable for the British as the wage rate given was lower and the workers were of more quality.

Besides the rubber plantations, the British tried to diversify the agricultural activities in Malaya by introducing crops such as tea and coffee. It was obvious that tea planting received much welcome and high demand. Besides rubber, tea and coffee, the British also opened coconut and palm oil plantations. Following this, the British brought in Indian laborers to work in these plantations. For example, in 1957, 54% of Indian laborers worked in palm oil plantations and this number increased from year to year (S. Sandhu & A. Mani 1993: 164)

Apart from their migration as laborers, the development wave of Malaya also attracted educated Indians to come to Malaya to work as lawyers, doctors and as such (Tregonning 1962: 52). There were also among them who involved themselves in small and big businesses. Initially, their migration was not for permanent stay in Malaya. However, with the facilities provided by the British such as education, housing and employment, they decided to stay on in Malaya.

DAKWAH TO THE INDIAN MUALAF COMMUNITY

As was explained in the introduction, there are a few dakwah movements which has taken various efforts to dakwah to the Indian *Mualaf* community such PERKIM, Islamic Outreach-ABIM, Masjid India and PERMIM. Their roles in the missionary movement are explained as thus:

PERKIM

The acronym for Islamic Welfare Organization of Malaysia, it was initiated by the late Tunku Abdul Rahman around 1960. As a welfare body, it was not surprising that PERKIM successfully attracted Indian *Mualaf* to be a good Muslim. Among the welfares handed out were support letters to apply for houses, trading licenses, school registrations, shelters, orphanages, vocational courses, hostel schools and as such. Besides the welfare factor, the other factors attracting converts were the talks, classes in their mother tongue and counselling services which also helped the community to approach Islam. (Mahayudin Abu Bakar 1994: 121-122)

ISLAMIC OUTREACH-ABIM

Islamic Outreach-ABIM (IOA) is a dakwah agency under the patronage of ABIM. IOA was set up to spread Islam among the non Muslims and new converts in Malaysia. Among the activities of IOA is to hold Islamic classes, a place to meet and exchange opinions among the converts, hold seminars, forums, publications, provide health service, provide lodging services and set up in a village for converting as in Banting, Selangor.

The Banting project was one of the efforts of IOA for the Indian *Mualaf* who live in estates. Among the main objectives of this project is to promote true Muslim culture of the Indians who work in the estates, making it a basis for efforts to propagate other Indian *Mualaf* and to provide guidance and assistance to develop those who are poor. In the efforts to make Banting project a success, IOA held weekly Saturday classes in Tamil for converting. It also helped finance the schooling of the very poor to further their studies in religious schools. Financial assistance such as loans and agricultural assistance were also given (Mahayudin Abu Bakar 1994: 121-122). The Banting

project was placed under an Indian convert Dr Mohd Sivalingam with the help of a group of activists "Banting Convert Visits". They will visit to forge better ties and as encouragement to the new converts to be able to live as Muslims.

INDIAN MOSQUE

This is the symbol of the commitment of the Indian community to Islam and unity among the community. This is where religious education (talks, sermons and *Tazkirah*) in Tamil are presented by several religious teachers. Most of them are of the Hanafi sect. The mosque is also a stopover for Indians who have just arrived from India and are looking for employment in Malaysia. It is also a place for socializing among them. Through the Imam of the mosque, the community also sends messages, things and others to their families in India whenever the Imam returns to India. Therefore, the mosque plays an important role to the Tamil Muslims in Malaysia and Kuala Lumpur specifically. It is thus not surprising why many Tamil Muslims pray there especially during Fridays and other times as the language that is used makes it easier for them to understand the message that is being conveyed.

PERMIM

PERMIM is the acronym of the Indo-Muslim Federation of Malaysia, started in 1973. The movement is active in dakwah to the Indian Muslim specifically and to the Muslim community as a whole. There are a few activities from various angles that have been accomplished by this movement, such as from the education, economy and social sector to promote the teachings of Islam.

Realizing that education will change and pattern lives, PERMIM holds fardhu ain classes almost everyday except on public holidays to the Indian Muslim community in all of its divisions which are at the religious schools that have been set up. Among the lessons given importance during these classes are Tauhid, Fiqh and hadith. Importance is placed on Quranic studies to ensure reading among the community. To expand the community's knowledge on Islam, the organization also sponsors courses such as Islamic understanding courses and these courses are usually given by staff of the Islamic Religious Department where these courses are held.

Islamic education also spreads wide information to this community through the reading materials such as the magazine *Nam Kural* and the book titled *Holy al-Quran - A Scientific Perspective* by Moulavi Hasan.

To prepare Indian Muslim students to face government exams such as *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) and *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia* (STPM), PERMIM organizes examination workshops. Among the subjects given importance are *Bahasa Malaysia*, English, History, Mathematics and Science (Secondary Committee of Examination 1996). According to Anver Hussain (Anver Hussein 1997. Syarikat Saudagar Kertas Kamila Sdn. Bhd. Kuala Lumpur. Interview. 29 of December 2011), RM150 is allocated for each student to ensure the workshop is a success. If there are students among them who are successful in their studies and have the opportunity to further their studies to a tertiary level, public or private, the organization allocates five loans to five students annually. Islamic education is also done through the electronic media by this organization through the program *Uswah* which is organized by the Dakwah Section of Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM2) (Ahmad Redzuwan Mohd Yunus 1998: 65)

The role of PERMIM in the economic field to develop the Indian Muslim community, especially the *Mualaf* is quite obvious as compared to its roles in other fields. This is because of their tendency of the community towards business. To achieve this, a seminar titled “Business By Vision 2020” was organized by them. The consciousness of the organization towards their community also saw them providing assistance such as *Hari Raya* assistance every year. The main motive for this was to enable those in need to be able to celebrate the festival as others. Beside these, the organization also provides assistance to the unfortunate and this noble deed also extends to the international level by providing assistance to the Bosnian Fund, which is provided for by the community.

Through social aspects, the organization strengthens the relationship between Indian Muslims at division level where PERMIM has held dialogues with the youths. Dialogues are held to find solutions to problems within the community. Usually, the division level will present their problems to PERMIM during the dialogue sessions before the problems are forwarded to the government. The organization also

holds relationship strengthening functions between them. These functions are held with feasts. The objective of these functions is to enable the Indian Muslim community on all levels to be able to gather and exchange ideas and get to know each other. *Hari Raya* functions are also held for the same reason. Breaking fasts functions are also held and this is quite a popular activity among them as it is held quite often.

Besides these activities, other important days in Islam such as *Lailat al-Qadr*, *Mawlid al-Rasul* and *Isra' Mikraj* is remembered with talks by invited speakers, be they foreign or local and these programs are held every year although it does not involve all divisions. Special talks are also held by those with knowledge as the community needs continuous religious education and usually the main location is the mosque. Among those prominent figures who have poured in their efforts among the Indian Muslim community are Dr. Hj. Mohd Iqbal, Dr. Hamina Syed (India) Maulana al-Haj Hassan Azhari (Sri Langka), Moulavi S. Sheikh Nuri, Moulavi Abdullah Bukhari, Moulavi Abul Qasim and others.

CHALLENGES FACED IN DAKWAH ACTIVITIES TO THE INDIAN MUALAF

There are a number of challenges and obstacles that have been identified in the efforts to spread dakwah to the Indian *Mualaf* in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the writers would only describe two important factors which are believed to be the great challenge for the process of dakwah among them in the country. The first is about Missionaries. It is realized that the most obvious problem faced by the dakwah movement to spread real Islam to the *Mualaf* is the shortage of missionaries among the communities themselves, what more the experienced and experts. Therefore, the organization occasionally invites foreign missionaries where they want to hold religious activities such as religious talks and as such. The situation is more critical as the missionaries that are needed should be able to communicate in Tamil to spread Islam. This is because the target is easier when the language used during the activities is easily understood by them to enable them to understand the message being conveyed. The above factor is probably due to Indian Muslim community itself which is too busy to volunteer some time to spread Islam to the

Mualaf. They are busy and tired due to the fact that a majority of them are business people, in other words, self employed. Therefore, there are some Malay missionaries who organize functions although the target is the Indian *Mualaf* community. Since the language used in Malay, the Indian *Mualaf* cannot properly follow the although they are from those highly religious educated and very credible (Ahmad Redzuwan Mohd Yunus 1998: 66).

Second, challenge of other Religions. As a new converts, one may realize that the root of the challenge is basically arisen from their former religion i.e. Hinduism. Some of them cannot be totally separated from their former customs and culture. They still practice some unIslamic elements particularly during the visit to their Hindus families. The family especially those who are strongly against their conversion into Islam also keep persuading them to reconvert into their former religion. The situation has become more serious when some of them are even using such forceful means in order to achieve this objective. There are several cases reporting about this battle particularly in the non mainstream newspapers. Apart from the family, the new converts also find that they are difficult to have friends and lovers among Malays. Alternatively, some of them turn to their Hindus fellows and their Islamic believe and practice become vulnerable to any reconversion attempts (Maideen Abd. Rahman 1997: 39).

It is also noted that the Christianity becomes another great challenge for both Islam and Hinduism. The missionary activities among India for the coming of this community in the country have shown the increase number of conversions into this western religion. Since this religion is closely associated with modern western religion, many of the are proud to be Christians rather than Muslims who is greatly being portrayed as a terrorist or fanatics. It is also believed that the proactive and dynamic approaches of being Christian promoted by the church and missionary bodies has contributed to the growth of Indian conversion particularly among the poor estates workers. Moreover, it is accepted by the Muslim missionary that economic factor becomes one of the most crucial problems for the activity of dakwah. For instance, Anver Hussain has clearly mentioned that many dakwah activities particularly in order to challenge and counter the Christian mission have

faced financial problems. Many Indian Muslim associations have relied on donation or *Sadaqah* to run their programs. Financial helps from other government or dominant dakwah organizations are very limited. In general, Indian *Mualaf* who mostly suffered economically are keen to look for any assistance from the Christian bodies rather than Islam (Maideen Abd. Rahman 1997: 87).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we may say that there is an effort of disseminating the message of Islam among the Indian *Mualaf* in Malaysia. This attempt has been performed by Malay and Indian Muslim themselves. However, there is no clear involvement of the government activities of dakwah to this community particularly in assisting some Indian Muslim organizations. Apart from PERKIM who purposely established for uplifting the welfare of new converts, it is noted that no massive effort attempted by the government in order to solve many problems among this community. Until now, there a no serious effort to discuss the problem of Indian *Mualaf* in the national level initiated by the government. In fact, the cooperation between non-government dakwah organizations are loose pertaining to this matter. Nevertheless, such activities which were practiced by this group would at least maintain the slow but continuous process of dakwah among them in the country. One may also predict that there might be several dakwah organizations would emerge to lead the India *Mualaf* into Islamic mainstream if they are able to maintain and upgrade their activities from time to time.

REFERENCES

- Anver Hussein. 2011. Interview on 29 December. Syarikat Saudagar Kertas Kamila Sdn. Bhd. Kuala Lumpur.
- Ahmad Redzuwan Mohd Yunus. 1998. Metodologi Dakwah kepada Masyarakat India Muslim: Satu Kajian di Persekutuan Muslimin Indo-Malaysia (PERMIM). Disertasi. Bangi: UKM.
- S. Sandhu & A. Mani. 1993. *India Communities in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies.
- Laporan Jawatankuasa Kecil Pendidikan. 1996. Mesyuarat Agung Dwi Tahunan Yang Ke Sebelas. Maktab Kerjasama Malaysia. Petaling Jaya Selangor, 24 Nov.

- Mahayudin Abu Bakar. 1994. *Perkembangan Dakwah Islamiah di Kalangan Masyarakat India di Wilayah Persekutuan dan Selangor. Latihan Ilmiah*. Bangi: UKM.
- Maiden Abd. Rahman. 2011. Interview on 29 December. Syarikat Saudagar Kertas Kamila Sdn. Bhd. Kuala Lumpur.
- Tregonning, K.G. 1962. *Malaysian History Sources*. Singapore: University of Singapore.
- Zainal Abidin Abdul Wahid. 1979. *Sejarah Malaysia Sepintas Lalu*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

*Razaleigh Muhamat @ Kawangit
Salawati Saringat
Department of Dakwah and Leadership Studies
Faculty of Islamic Studies
National University of Malaysia (UKM)
43600 UKM Bangi
Selangor D. E.
MALAYSIA

*raza@ukm.edu.my
zaliegh@yahoo.com