

Preaching and Humanity: A Special Reference to the Indian Community in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT: *There are an effort of dessiminating the message of Islam among the Indian Muslim in Malaysia. This attempts have been performed by Malay and Indian Muslim themselves. However, there is no clear involvement of the government activities of preaching to this community, particularly in assisting some Indian Muslim organisations. Apart from PERKIM, who purposely established for uplifting the welfare of newconverts, it is noted that no massive effort attempted by the government in order to solve many problems among this community. Until now, there are no serious effort to discuss the problem of Indian Muslims in the national level initiated by the government. In fact, the cooperation between non-government preaching organisation are loose pertaining to this matter. Nevertheless, such activities which were practiced by these group would at least maintan the slow but continuous process of preaching among Indian community in the country. One may also predict that there might be several preaching organisations would emerge to lead the India community into Islam if they are able to maintain and upged their activities from time to time.*

KEY WORDS: *preaching, humanity, government and non-government preaching organisation, and Indian Muslim in Malaysia.*

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable fact that from the perspective of Islam, preaching (*dakwah*) is firmly stand for the development of humanity. This is due to the fact that preaching has obviously offered salvation in the worldly life and in the hereafter. Therefore, Muslim who view this task as an obligatory and holy has largely involved in such activities of preaching, especially towards non-Muslims all over the world.

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In Malaysia, preaching which was perceptibly observed to be a force of social change, particularly in the seventies has involved many outreach activities towards non-Muslims including the Indian community. Actually, Islam is not new for this community since Indian people has already known the religion since it was spread in their motherland, Indian subcontinent. However, such attempt to convert them into Islam is not as easy as usually presumed. As a community who has its own identity, Indian has also struggled to preserve its humanistic tradition.

The paper will discuss this issue which focuses on two important questions, namely: (1) how preaching is being conducted among Indians; and (2) how do they response towards this so called humanistic approach of preaching?

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 centred in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Perak, Penan and a few other states. They migration to Malaysia before independence had formed a community with its own identity. Their existence have 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 (*Persatuan Kebijakan Islam Malaysia* or Islamic Welfare Organisation of Malaysia), Islamic Outreach-ABIM (*Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* or Young Muslim Brigade of Malaysian), Indian Mosque (*Masjid India*), PERMIM (*Persatuan Muslim India Malaysia* or Indo-Muslim Federation of Malaysia), 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 discribed 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 as *Suverarnabhumi* or "Golden Land". The modern migrants came during the British colonial period and worked as rough labourers 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 economy 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 labour that was easily available and cheaper as compared to the locals.

The date of Indian migrant labourers to Malaya was said to be circa 1786, after the British took over Penang. They were brought in to work either as servants or labourers 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 2,532 Indian labourers were brought in through Penang. In 1921, the number of labourers coming in increased and was estimated to be around 100,000 people.

According to 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 organised system of kidnapping". This system worked between 1910 and 1938 and was known as a contract labourer 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 labourers to work in these plantations. For example, in 1957, 54% of Indian labourers worked in palm oil plantations and this number increased from year to year (Sandhu & Mani, 1993:164).

Apart from their migration as labourers, 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 on in Malaya.

PREACHING TO THE INDIAN COMMUNITY

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

A. PERKIM (Persatuan Kebijakan Islam Malaysia)

The acronym for PERKIM is the Islamic Welfare Organisation of Malaysia. It was initiated by the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra around 1960. As a welfare body, it was not surprising that PERKIM successfully attracted non Muslim Indians to convert to Islam. Among the welfares handed out were support letters to apply for houses, trading licences, 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).

B. Islamic Outreach-ABIM

Islamic Outreach-ABIM is a preaching agency under the patronage of ABIM (*Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia*). IOA (Islamic Outreach-ABIM) 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 sevices and set up a a village for converts as in Banting, Selangor.

The Banting project was one of the efforts of IOA for the Indians who live in estates. Among the main objectives of this project is to promote Islam to the Indians who work in the estates, making it a basis for efforts to propagate other Indians 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 converts. 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.

C. Indian Mosque

This is the symbol of 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 stop over for Indians who have just arrived from India and are looking for employment in Malaysia. It is also a place for socialising 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, we find 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.

D. PERMIM (Persatuan Muslim India Malaysia)

PERMIM is the acronym of the Indo-Muslim Federation of Malaysia, started in 1973. The movement is active in preaching 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.

Realising that education will change and pattern lives, PERMIM holds *fardhu 'ain* (individual obligation) classes almost everyday except on public holidays to the Indian Muslim community in all of its divisions which is 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 organisation also sponsors courses such as Islamic undersanding courses and these courses are usually given by staff of the Islamic Religious Department where these courses are held Islamic education also spread wide information to this community through the reading materials such as the magazine of *Nam Kural* and the book titled *Holy al-Quran-A Scentific Perspective* by Moulouvi Hasan.

To prepare Indian Muslim students to face government exams such as SPM (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*) and STPM (*Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia*), PERMIM organises examination workshops. Among the subjects given importance are *Bahasa* Malaysia, English, History, Mathematics and Science. According to Anver Hussein (interview on 29/12/1997), 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 organisation allocates five loans to five students annually. Islamic education is also done through the electronic media by this organisation through the programme *Uswah* which is organised by the *Da'wah* Section of Radio Televisyen Malaysia or RTM2 (Ahmad Redzuwan Mohd Yunus, 1998:65).

The role of PERMIM in the economic field to develop the Indian Muslim community 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 organised by them. The consciousness of the organisation 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 organisation also provides assistance to the unfortunate and this noble deed is also extended to the international level by providing assistance to the Bosnian Fund, which is provided for by the community.

Through social aspects, the organisation 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 organisation also holds relationship strengthening functions between themselves. These functions are held with feasts. The objective of these functions is to enable the Indian Muslim community of 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 programmes 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), Moulovi S. Sheikh Nuri, Moulovi Abdullah Bukhari, Moulavi Abul Qasim, and others.

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES FACED IN PREACHING ACTIVITIES TO THE INDIAN COMMUNITY

There are a number of challenges and obstacles that have been identified in the efforts to spread *da'wah* (preaching) to the Indian community in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the writer would only describe two important factors which are believed to be the great challenge for the process of preaching among Indians in the country.

First is about Missionaries. It is realised that the most obvious problem faced by the preaching movement to spread Islam to the non Muslims is the shortage of missionaries among the communities themselves, what more the experienced and experts. Therefore, the organisation occasionally invites foreign missionaries when 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 Indian Muslim community. 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 organise functions although the target is the Indian Muslim community. Since the language used in Malay, the Indian community cannot properly follow the activities although they are from those highly religious educated and very credible (interview with Anver Hussein, 29/12/1997).

Second, Challenge of Other Religions. As a new converts, one may realise that the root of the challenge is basically arise from their former religion i.e. Hinduism. Some of them cannot be totally separated from their former customs and culture. They still practising some un-Islamic 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 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 Hindu fellows and their Islamic believe and practice become vulnerable for any reconversion attempts (interview with Maideen Abd. Rahman, 29/12/1997).

It is also noted that the Christianity become another great challenge for both Islam and Hinduism. The missionaries activities among India since the coming of this community in the country have shown the increase number of conversion into this Western religion. Since this religion is closely associated with modern Western religion, many of them are proud to be Christians rather than Muslims who is greatly been portrayed as a terrorist or fanatics. It is also believed that the proactive and dynamic approaches of dialogue 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 become one of the most crucial problem for the activity of preaching. For instance, Anver Hussein has clearly mentioned that many preaching activities, particularly in order to challenge and counter the Christian mission, have faced financial problems (interview with Anver Hussein, 29/12/1997). Many Indian Muslim association have relied on donation or *sadaqah* to run their programs. Financial helps from other government or dominant preaching organisations are very limited. In general, Indian community who mostly suffered economically are keen to look for any assistance from the Christian bodies rather than Islam (interview with Maideen Abd. Rahman, 29/12/1997).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we may say that there are an effort of disseminating the message of Islam among the Indian Muslim in Malaysia. This attempts have been performed by Malay and Indian Muslim themselves. However, there is no clear involvement of the government activities of *da'wah* (preaching) to this community, particularly in assisting some Indian Muslim organisations. Apart from PERKIM, who purposely established for uplifting the welfare of newconverts, it is noted that no massive effort attempted by the government in order to solve many problems among this community.

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are loose pertaining to this matter. Nevertheless, such activities which were practiced by these group would at least maintain the slow but continuous process of preaching among Indian community in the country. One may also predict that there might be several preaching organisations would emerge to lead the India community into Islam if they are able to maintain and upgred their activities from time to time.

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