INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND THE ROLE OF MOSQUE: A CASE STUDY OF KLANG VALLEY'S MOSQUES

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Abstract— Today interfaith dialogue is a necessity. Personal culture is translated into social culture and eventually there is no longer a homogeneous culture but develop to be heterogeneous or global culture. It is necessary for nations to participate and to be involved through dialogue in making that global culture and identity in line with their religious conviction. Indeed, interfaith dialogue is a complex matter and if not properly handled will lead to atrocity between the followers of different religions. This writing intends to study the premises and etiquette for interfaith dialogue and how mosques particularly in Klang Valley contribute to its awareness. The method employed is to examine the speeches from 5 selected mosques; programs organized and interview with the committee members by 10 selected mosques and 200 questionnaire surveys from 20 mosques.

Index Terms— Interfaith Dialogue, Muhibbah, Global Culture, Identity .

I. INTRODUCTION

Interfaith dialogue is a complex matter and it needs to be cautiously handled or it leads to atrocity among people. Therefore, clarity of the premises, objectives and etiquettes of interfaith dialogue are crucial so that it is well received, accepted and effective for all. The bases for interfaith dialogue are mutual understanding, barrier breaking and non-stereotyping and tension preventive deeds (M Ayoub 2011). In this contact mosque as a center for community development is expected to play its role to inculcate the spirit of *muhibbah* or peaceful coexistence with others. The focus of this study is to find out if the respondents attribute their consciousness of *muhibbah* and their participation in community development activities to the lectures and speeches they listen to in mosques.

II. OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

a) To find out how social problems are addressed by the mosque;
b) To understand the mosque's voluntary participation in activities which enhance a community's social health; and
c) To discuss what initiative could be taken to enhance the mosque's performance on social developmental issues.

III. METHOD

This study will collect information from multiple sources by employing various methods.

a. From 5 selected mosques, *lectures and speeches* during a full month will be recorded and transcribed for *content analysis*.
b. Existing programs and practices of 10 selected mosques will be *reviewed*. Committees of these mosques will be *interviewed* face-to-face for understanding their *thought of the mosque's social role* and *the future planning* for its performance.
c. Around 200 people, who listen to the lectures and speeches, will be selected from 20 mosques for *questionnaire survey*.

IV. FINDINGS

Out of 28 talks transcribed, 13 talks transcribed from 5 rural mosques and 15 from 4 town mosques it is observed that speakers dealt with 8 main topics; parenting, poverty, character building, family disintegration, religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue. The finding finds as more talks presented by mosques to public, more people be exposed to current issues raised by community.

Interestingly these issues are further elucidated in the interview sessions with the committee members from the selected 10 mosques. The findings suggest that an association exist between higher levels of involvement in mosque activities and participation to deal with current issues raised by community. It is also noted that several interviewees mentioned on the need to amicably resolve the interfaith issues particularly related to pig heads found in mosques. (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific) and the offensive photo of Alvivi couple inviting Muslim to breakfast in Ramadan with *bak kut teh*, posted on *Facebook*
(http://www.thestar.com.my/search/?q=%22Bak+Kut+Teh)

The results obtained from the survey conducted supplement the above finding. A total of 200 people from 20 mosques participated in the survey. Male

were 57% and female 43%. The respondents fairly represented different age groups. Youths (up to 30 years old) were 38%; respondents in the prime of their life (31-50 years) were 32%; and the rest 30% were elderly people (above 50).

A pertinent question was asked - Does listening to the lectures/discussion at the mosques increase knowledge and consciousness of the respondents about the social issues? The respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement (Scale: 1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=disagree; 4=strongly disagree) with five (5) items reflective of social importance and interest. The mean score of their responses (1.58), well below 2.00, is an affirmation that lectures and discussions organized by mosques help them becoming conscious about contemporary social issues such as interfaith dialogue. In specific, 2 mosques namely Masjid UPM, Serdang and Masjid al-Azim, Taman Tun Dr Ismail have outlined the action guide in nurturing the spirit of *muhibbah.* And this action guide will be briefly clarified in the following discussion. This finding in fact, signify that mosque have a very productive role in bridging the differences between people, in particular between the Muslims and non-Muslims. And it is also observed that this finding is consistent with other researches that religiosity has been proven to result in higher social engagement and transformation.

V. DICUSSIONS

What are the premises for interfaith dialogue? There are three important premises, namely:

a) unity and diversity (Muzafar, Chandra 2006),
b) universal and common Ethics
c) human dignity (Abu Nimir, Mohammed, 2008) and
d) relating and accommodating others(Kamar Oniah 2013).

a. Unity and diversity

One of the principles of interfaith dialogue is to accept unity and diversity. Religion means different entity to different people. Islam accepts the fact that people are different and that they being created different. We have different communities and cultures. Thus, diversity is not a problem in Islam. Harmonious and peaceful co-existence means unity in diversity. Although there are differences among people yet they are united as a society and as a nation. Islam accepts diversity within the human family. Differences and similarities are part of our common humanity (Muzaffar, Chandra 2006). To promote pluralistic society, differences and variation should not create disputes and tension but should be acknowledged and accepted as part of social landscape (Kamar Oniah 2013).

b. Universal and common Ethics

Although at the level of theology, religions do not concur with each other for each religion has its own specific and exclusive approach however, at the level of ethics, religions do concur. Many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have identified universal ethical values and principles that can be applied by all. In Islamic view such universal values are regarded as praiseworthy and transcend other religions. To mention a few; love, compassion, forgiveness, generosity and empathy are among the universal values which are interconnected to peace building process. At the level of ethics human beings function as fellow beings, as members of human family. And it is at this level therefore, which needs to be developed and improved if human beings are to live in peaceful co-existence with one another (Kamar Oniah 2013), clarified in the following.

c. Human Dignity

Universal humanity beliefs in equality of origins, equal right, treatment and solidarity among people. The protection of human life and respect for human dignity are sacred in the teaching of Islam. Promoting and preserving dignity becomes an important motivation in resolving conflict on equality. The value of equality among all members of the community is prevalent in the Islamic values. It is promoted and acknowledged as a basic value because of the oneness and common origin of people. Everyone is equal in Islam (except their faith and good deeds) and should be treated fairly (Abu Nimir, Mohammed, 2008). And this is not exclusive for Muslims only but extends to non-Muslims as well.

Protection of human right and dignity and promote equality among all people regardless of race, ethnicity, or religious affiliation of the people should be highlighted as important principles in harmonious co-existence. Without peace and justice between different religions, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. (Abu Nimir, Mohammed, 2008).

d. Relating and Accommodating Others

All religions teach it followers how to relate to others and how to accommodate people of other religions and beliefs. In promoting harmony in pluralistic society we do not dilute our fundamental religious belief system when we relate and accommodate others (Kamar Oniah, 2013) so that the spirit of *muhibbah* can be nurtured among us.

The next question is how do we nurture *muhibbah*? There are a few amiable formulae that can be applied by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

a. The Principle of non-interference and intrusion
b. The Principle of Deference and Decorum
c. The Principle of Sympathy and Empathy
d. The Principle Communal Cooperation

e. The Principle of Unity and Diversity (Kamar Oniah, 2013).

The formulae remain useful as and handy long as they are applied. Since harmony and peaceful co-existence is the natural order of the universe and the world of nature, so likewise should it be in the worlds of humanity. For the human world, for a peaceful, harmonious and happy co-existence, it is essential to observe proper social ethics and etiquettes such as acknowledgement and respect, acceptance of others as they are and are to be appropriately practiced among each other. And it is widely acknowledged that education plays an indispensable role to build a more peaceful world. (Sachedina, 2001). Community, institution, civil society organization and international global agencies have organized educational activities to address issues related to peace building in plural society. Mosque is one of the crucial civil society organizations, indicated in the above finding, plays a significant role towards promoting peaceful co-existence, particularly through creating awareness and understanding what inter religious dialogue is.

CONCLUSION

Interfaith dialogue is to build bridge between different groups who co-exist in the same society, communities or country. The set of values and principles identified in this study constitutes a framework for Islamic peace building. The adoption of this principles and frameworks can have significant implications on various aspect of Muslim community such as increasing solidarity among community, bridging the gap of social and economic injustice, relieving the suffering of people and sparing human lives empowering people through participation and inclusivity, promoting equality among all members and community and last but not least encouraging the values of diversity and tolerance. All good works and development can only be realized if there is peace and stability in the society.

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