

UNDERSTANDING THE ISLAM HADHARI AND ETHNIC RELATIONS: A NON-MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

Sarjit S. Gill¹
Charanjit Kaur²

ABSTRACT

This piece of writing highlights an analysis of the ethnic relations in Malaysia based on the Islam Hadhari concept which is mainly aimed at fostering the spirit of goodwill and peace in Malaysia society. The idea of Islam Hadhari has so far been believed to play an important role in the development of human capital as it emphasizes individual development, especially in the aspect of religion (spiritual). This idea is meant to increase the competitiveness and endurance level of an individual to a more progressive in terms of mind and behavior, especially in the face of globalization wave today. However, the implementation of Islam Hadhari still vague and needs some more efforts in order to strengthen the spiritual ties among ethnic communities in the Malaysian society. Three questions are proposed in this case, those are: are non-Muslims willing to accept Islam Hadhari openly in their lives? How are the response and support of non-Malay community toward this Islam Hadhari concept? What important steps need to be done by certain agencies as an effort to empower Islam Hadhari especially the interest and participation of non-Muslims? These three questions should be taken into consideration because they concern with problems which emphasize the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims ethnics in Malaysia. Thus, the discussion will be based on the social reality that is through experience and observation in daily life of Malaysia society in general and non-Islam society in particular.

Key Words: *the Islam Hadhari, ethnic relations: Malay Society*

Introduction

The implementation of Islam Hadhari has been considered to be important in the realization of good values in the Malaysian society. It is believed that this approach emphasizes the values of Islam as its basic principle. This idea of Islam Hadhari is mainly aimed to realize and strengthen the Islamic concept based

¹ Sarjit S. Gill, Ph.D is a lecturer at the Anthropology and Sociology Department of Science and Social Development, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia. He is also an associate researcher at the Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia and a member of Scholars program undergraduate on Ethnic Studies Institute (WE) at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

² Charanjit Kaur, M.A. is a Sociology lecturer at the Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University Tunku Abdul Rahman. He is also a Ph.D candidate at the Program of Anthropology and Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and a member of The Malaysian Social Science Association

on Islamic values. As it is known, within the society there are many types of institutions such as politic, education, constitution, economy, security, religion and so on which have to reflect the nation values or principles (Wan Mohd Nor 2006:29).

To the writers' observation, the issue of Islam Hadhari is getting vague and weak in the middle of Malay society. This condition triggers a misconception especially among those non Malay society on the idea of this Islam Hadhari implementation as proposed by his majesty Datuk Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmafd Badawi agenda. The real example could be seen on the fact of unfamiliarity of those minority groups like Native, Sikh, Baba-Nyona, Chitti, Gurkha, Sindhi and Portuguese toward the ideas of those ten principles in the Islam Hadhari. Interestingly, many of them are aware that there is one important principle-the seventh one- which support the issue of woman and minority group right defense in Malaysia (Sarjit Singh, 2005;49).

What is interesting is the fact that in some other countries, the concept of Islam Hadhari has been well known. This is proven by the appreciation given to this Islamic approach by the president of the United Staes, George W Bush in APEC conference. In his speech, he gave a warm welcome and appreciation to Islam Hadhari concept done by his majesty in empowering social economic, moderate society as well as limits the militant movement in Malaysia. Bush added that "the prime minister has clearly stated that an Islam country could be a modern, democratic, tolerant and economically competitive (Daily news, September 8th 2007). Whether or not this perspective is accepted by the society or simply a "role play' is still in question.

The writers believe that this Bush perspective should be reflectively considered by the Malaysian society because to their opinion this idea is quite important to be well understood especially by those the National Front Line (BN). This seems to be important because, in reality, most of those non Islam parties leaders find this concept unclear. As a result, there is no a willingness to spread this idea to those non Islam societies. Is Islam Hadhari only for those Malay societies and therefore many leaders of non Malay seem to be skeptical in responding this proposed idea by his majesty prime minister? What is interesting is the fact that, this idea of Islam Hadhari has been introduced by the prime minister to countries all around the world. However, an ironic fact is found in the home of Malaysian society in which this idea is firstly introduced and disseminated. This is proven when only a few people who seriously study this concept and spread this out through out the country. This fact should therefore be part of our concern.

In the general conference of UMNO 2007, a representative of one federal territory, Datuk Moh Yusof Abd Hamid suggests that the government review the understanding of both sides of society and even the government themselves on the nature and principles of this Islam Hadhari. He further added that the government should make it clear on what to achieve through the Islam Hadhari by both those Islam and non Islam societies. Moh Yusof Abd Hamid who is

also a leader of Umno of the Bathu territory, said that the enhancement of the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) as the Islamic Approach secretariat should be strengthened at any level (Daily News, November 9 2007). The writers, then, would suggest that the ideas shared by his majesty Moh Yusof Abd Hamid above should be taken into consideration by those Umno leaders. This is partly because the concept of Islam Hadhari should also be well understood by the non Islam society in order to reach an advanced and prosperous life.

Other interesting concern is on human capital development which has shown its positive progress and has also attracted many sides attention especially those academic society. The concept of human capital has so far been regarded as the first class among the society and be a source of pride for many people. However, unfortunately, the concept of this human capital development is not well integrated to those religious values and the importance of unity of the Malaysian society with the world community. This reality tends to make people are getting more realistic and show a lack of interest on immaterial (religious values). It should be noted that the human capital should be comprehensively developed indicated by holistic, great willingness, and integrative to the realization of both the 2020 vision and national mission.

In general, this piece of writing is divided into three important parts. The first part will deal with the epistemology of Islam Hadhari and Human Capital development. The second part will be focused more on response and support of the society especially from those the non Malay groups toward Islam Hadhari concept. The last part of this writing will concern with some suggestions toward the implementation of Islam Hadhari and strengthen the Malaysian society which is multiethnic and culture. It should be cleared up here that the writers are not an expert on Islam Hadari. They are both a social anthropology experts who simply would like to see the non Islam people's response toward the ideas of Islam Hadhari implementation in Malaysia with its ten potential principles.

Islam Hadari Epistemology and Human Capital

The Islam Hadhari, according to Wan Mohd Nor 92006:5) is not a term which refers to a new religion; it is not a new sect of Islam and not also refers other sects of Islam which have come into existence for thousand years. If it is a new religion, it should have had a new structure, faith, *syariah* and its own *ahlak* which could be different from those included in Islam as accepted by most Islam scholars and knowledgeable moslem society. This is explicitly stated by his majesty the prime minister in his statement:

“Islam Hadhari is not a new religion. Islam Hadhari is not a new teaching. Islam Hadhari is not a new sect. Islam Hadhari is merely an effort to return muslims to their basic-to the fundamental values. The basic and fundamental values as explicitly stated in the Qur'an and Hadits which are the core building of Islamic

society. If well understood, the concept of Islam Hadhari will not mislead for the muslims”

The goal of Islam Hadhari is to produce individual and Islam society who has spiritual strength, *ahlak*, intellectual, material, independent, competitive, future oriented, innovative and efficient in addressing current challenges in a wise, rational, practical and peaceful way (JAKIM 2005: 14). The writers consider that the purpose of Islam Hadhari is robust, comprehensive by nature and ideal. Therefore, the purpose should be given a good attention in the community regardless of religious background because Islam Hadhari itself is purely based on positive values and norms that shape a religion based personality.

The writers see that Islam Hadhari emphasizes various humanitarian and social values. So, this is not impossible for the non Islam followers to also understand the Islam Hadhari based on their religion perspective and make their religion as their guidance in understanding values the Islam Hadhari offers. It must be stressed that all the teachings of religion emphasize purely on human and social values (Sarjit S. Gill 2006: 15). In this case, Islam Hadhari emphasizes the development of the whole society of various aspects of progress and social welfare which are based on the teachings of Islam. It is therefore urgent for Malays, especially, to share the information with non-Malays who are still not familiar with the concept and the ten principles set forth in Islam Hadhari. Further, Malaysia community needs to understand all the principles shared in this concept, those are:

1. Faith and piety in Allah
2. Just and trustworthy government
3. Independent society
4. Mastery of knowledge
5. Balanced economic development and komprehesnif
6. The quality of life
7. Defense the rights of the minority group and women
8. Cultural and moral integrity
9. Environment preservation
10. Cultural and moral integrity

The combination of those principles outlined above have to be well shared in order to avoid a misunderstanding and confusion among parties in the Malaysian society who are multicultural and religious. This approach is also aimed to empower Muslims society in order to face current challenges of the world. To make everything clear about this approach, it is suggested that those ten principles should be studied thoroughly by the community so as to understand the importance of Islam Hadhari itself to be implemented in their daily life (Sarjit S. Gill 2006: 15)

According to Abdul Rahman Embong (2006), the concept of human capital development is part of the concept of human development, which has so far been adopted by the United Nations in the beginning of 1990. Mahbub ul Haq (1995), one of Pakistan’s economic experts who pioneered this concept, explained that

human development is people-centered development, where people become agents of development and thus, the human him/herself as the ultimate objective of the development program. For the purpose of filling or implementing this concept, human development has been divided into four interrelated components—equality, productivity, empowerment and sustainability (Haq 1995, Isaac 1999). To refine this concept, there are scholars who add aesthetics as another dimension that is considered very important. They ensure that this also should be a target in the development program. When this fifth component is integrated in the human development agenda, those people could be benefited from the development program in such a way that they can have a better life quality and prosperity markedly (Abdul Rahman Embong, 2003).

Overall, the human capital here refers to an individual who is not individualistic rather he/she is a part of community of Malaysia who are: knowledgeable, confident, have a pure conscience and high moral values, ethical, liberality character, polite, family stable, disciplined, dynamic, highly resilient, innovative, creative, healthy, enthusiastic on patriotism and nationalism spirit, justice, progressive attitude, determined, integrated, and competitive. Finally, it should be noted that this human capital is an important asset because it offers an excellent personality in order to determine the direction of national development in the future.

Malaysia Community Response towards the Islam Hadhari

This part will discuss the Islam Hadhari from the perspective of non-Malays. To the writers' opinion, a discussion on Islam Hadhari is relatively sluggish among the Malays which eventually causing of non-Malays confusion toward the concept of Islam Hadhari itself. There are several reasons that led to the non-Malay misconception on Islam Hadhari so far. First is on the fact that not many country leaders in Malaysia understand fully this concept. The evidence is on the rare discussion on this concept in national agendas involving those country leaders like opening ceremony and some others. This brings a more confusion among non Malay societies because they seem still find this concept unclear. Bringing the concept of Islam Hadhari, to the writers' opinion, is important for them because Malaysian society, especially non-Malays require continuous information clearly and accurately about Islam Hadhari.

According to Mohd. Kamal Hasan (2005), the approach of Islam Hadhari is a new policy and has not significantly gained its success. However, the implementation of this idea has to face the mischievous attitude among Muslims themselves especially on its conceptualization and implementation. The writers argue that, the conceptualization can be preserved in terms of Arabic side or Islamic theology as the Islam Hadhari approach views the current perception in the west and in Malaysia about Islam and Muslims which are interpreted and perceived differently by each party narrow interpretation. Among all, the most important thing, to the writers' opinion is actually on this concept implementation.

It is known that the Islam Hadiri is a big project of the prime minister. This implies a responsibility for both society and government to really understand this concept and spread this out to all people all over the country including those non Malays ethnics. They deserve to get a comprehensive explanation about this idea. Further, it should also be emphasized that not all people can access this in the internet due to its limited access (Sarjit, S. Gill 2006: 15).

Facing this phenomenon, the role of Islam organizations such as Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (Jakim), Institute of Islamic Understanding of Malaysian, Islamic Da'wah Foundation of Malaysia should be strengthened by the agents of information transfer about the concept of Islam Hadhari. The fact has shown us that non Malay ethnic have different interpretation toward the concept of Islam Hadhari. A serious effort in promoting this Islam Hadhari is therefore so much demanding.

To the writers' observation, institution like MCA, MIC, *Gerakan* and PPP should have put the Islam Hadhari into their concern. This is proven by the fact that many of their discussion is far from this topic. The question might arouse, do all the leaders of those institutions really understand the ten principles in the Islam Hadhari concept? The writers believe that this concept should be brought into discussion in order to fully understand it. This is important because the Ninth Design of Malaysia (RMK-9) and the national mission are focused on implementation of Islam Hadhari especially the human capital development it suggests.

The emphasis on Human Capital development by the Prime Minister is meant to show one way of implementing the concept of Islam Hadhari. By this, he wants to bring about the people of Malaysia to the 2020 vision of the country. He emphasizes the importance of human capital development as he said: "For me, the human capital development from the society perspective is that those good people are who are mentally, physically and spiritually strong. Many are intelligent but they are mentally corrupt, power malpractice actor and are greedy. I don't want it to happen. If you are an intelligent, you must be a good person". The writers would agree to say that good quality of human capital is much more influenced by their outstanding personality and religious belief. This is necessary because those who are mentally, physically and spiritually healthy will be able to help to determine the national goal in the years to come.

To the writers' perspective, the idea of Islam Hadhari is good. This is clear as this concept promotes the human capital development which is a key factor in determining the nation development. This human capital development as suggested by the Islam Hadhari emphasizes the individual and community character building. By this effort, it is hoped that it can give a positive impact in the progress of their life. This is reasonable since an individual awareness on the importance of a better life would be a start for them to change and reach the goal outlined. Departing from this, it is highly suggested that the ten principles included in the Islam Hadhari concept to be practiced in the Malaysian society.

The Importance of Islam Hadhari in Controlling the Social Problems

Malaysia is a highly multicultural country. This is a reality which can not be neglected or ignored. This pluralism of the country develops from time to time due to the development of the world. This fact is much more influenced by, especially, the advancement of this country in the post-modern era (Shamsul, 1997). In addition to that, other supporting factor for this pluralism enhancement is the development of the country. It is therefore, the Malaysian social system cannot be separated from the process of industrialization, Urbanization and bureaucracy matters.

Today Malaysian society is very materialistic and hedonist. This could be the negative effect of the modernization in the world today. A bad impact of this condition is the fact that their social relationship is much more material oriented and make it simply as a means to get things they need. As a result, their relationship is not meant to build a good and harmonious relationship with others. This phenomenon is a reflection of a low commitment to the implementation of their religion values in their daily life.

The materialism has led the people to only concern to a worldly life. This brings them to be more hedonist than before. This concept seems to be a doctrine of the modern society that happiness lies on things. The worst thing of this kind of reality is when those people seek for happiness but ignore the religion values. The hedonism is not only causing the identity crisis but also leading those people from doing good things to their family and others as suggested by the religion. This social problem by which is commonly done by the young is much related to the hedonism fact in their society which tends to ignore the religion values.

The social problem and value system above have made the relationship among people in the society getting worse. It is a fact that the relationship tends to be more individualistic and each of them just prioritizes his/her own need. The fact that their relationship is so instrumental is not only among people in the society but also among members of the family. If this happens, the condition would even be worst especially among those people from different background of culture, race and religion. And this fact, seems to happen in the Malaysian society recently as we can easily watch through out the television every week.

Answering those problems above, the eight principles in the Islam Hadhari are the integrity of Culture and Moral. These principles are relevant to the effort of solving the social problem occurs in the middle of Malaysian society. The enhancement of moral and culture integrity is so urgent in order to strengthen the mentality of Malaysian society particularly in facing this globalization era where by secularism and liberalism dominate the place. As it is known, the Malaysian society is built based on the religion principles and local culture but by contrast, the globalization has put them aside. In the name of human right and freedom, those religious and local culture values have been ignored by the Malaysian society both in big cities and even in rural areas. The values believed are more measured by

logical only, as a result, the prosperity of Islam society in particular and Malaysia in general ignore the values of religion and moral. The development of permissive attitude which does not respect the religion values and politeness culture would make the community leaders find it difficult to create good relationship and moral in the society (Moh. Kamal 2005: 6). In this case, the fifth principle on pillars of the nation which are politeness and good moral are important to be taken into account in our daily life.

Suggestions for Islam Hadhari Empowerment

The writers agree to what Mohd. Kamal Hassan (2005) said about the empowerment of the Islam Hadhari. He said that “The implementation of Islam Adhari would be long lasting if it pays attention some integrated and strategic steps: well arranged and is derived from a respected source. These steps were once realized in the basic accomplishment of “Islam Values Implementation” in the year of 1980s. Those steps would guarantee the consistency and uniformity of meaning articulation of Islam Hadhari principles and the efforts to understand and practice those principles (Mohd. Kamal Hassa, 2005).

In addition to what has been mentioned above, the writers would also suggest some potential steps to improve the non- Malay society comprehension on the concept and principle included in the Islam Hadhari. Those steps are dialogue about Islam Hadhari; essay writing competition about Islam Hadhari among students at schools, collage and university; bill board containing the ten principles (some have been found in the main streets); websites, electronic and printed media like television and newspaper. Debate in both television and radio on Islam Hadhari by inviting competent scholars; adding a ten minute program in the television by inviting some ministers to have a talk on the concept, brochure to be put in bus station, airport, hotel, supermarket, bank, hospital and worshipping places.

Those steps above could be strategic ways in our effort to disseminate the Islam Hadhari idea. It should be stressed here that the non Malay society deserves to know about the principles offered through the Islam Hadhari concept. Doing this, it is hoped that all people return to their religious values. This is not impossible because the majority of society in Malaysia believes in God and be followers of a certain religion and this is the main pillar in the country. To sum up, it could be said that the non Malay has the right to take some advantages as well as to understand the concept of Islam Hadhari.

Conclusion

In general, Malaysia as a multiethnic country needs to strongly united, has a highly confident society, strong moral and ethic, live in a democratic atmosphere,

liberal, lovable, fair and has a competitive economic. Thus, over all, the most important goal should be focused more on the enhancement of a harmonious relationship among different background of ethnics in this beloved country. The writers would suggest that the Islam Hadhari to be responded openly by people of any level or rank in order to promote a high quality and progressive human capital. This effort will surely need the openness of those the non Malay society to also learn to understand the concept and principles offered through the Islam Hadhari as a special approach for whole life aspects better accomplishment.

REFERENCES

- Berita Harian. (2007). *Bush Puji Pendekatan Islam Hadhari*. 8 September.
- Berita Harian (2007). *Memperkasa Islam Hadhari*. 9 November.
- Embong, A R. (2007). *Pembangunan, Negara, Komuniti dan Insan Melampaui 2020*. Bangi: Institut Kajian Malaysia dan Antar Bangsa.
- Embong, A R. (2006). *Pembangunan dan Kesejahteraan: Agenda Kemanusiaan Abad ke-21*. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Haq, Mahbub ul. (1995). *Reflections on Human Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ishak Shari. (1999). *Bumi Semua Manusia*. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
- Moh. Kamal Hasan. (2005). *Harapan dan Cebaran terhadap Penerapan Islam Hadhari dalam Membina Kesejahteraan Sosial*. ISM Minda, Jun, Jil. 3:3-7
- Sarjit S. Gill. (2005). *Islam Hadhari: Dari Perspektif Orang bukan Melayu*. Dewan Masyarakat. Disember: 48-50.
- Sarjit S. Gill. (2006). *Pemantapan Wacana Islam Hadhari*. Berita Harian. 16 Disember, hlm. 15.
- Sarjit S. Gill dan Lee Yok Fee. (2007). "Islam Hadhari dan Pembinaan Modal. Insan: Perspektif Bukan Melayu. Prosiding Persidangan Antar Bangsa Peradaban Melayu III, Tema" *Modal Insan Bersepadu Teras Bangsa Terbilang'* Hlm, 520-526. Anjuran Institut Peradaban Melayu, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 2-3 Februari.
- Shamsul, A.B. (1997). The Making of a "plural' Malaysia: a brief survey. Dlm. D.Y.U. Wu, H. MacQueen and Yammamoto Y (pnyt) *Emerging Pluralism in Asia and the Pacific*, hlm 67-83. Hongkong: the Chinese university of Hong Kong.
- Shamsul, A.B. (2007). *Modul Hubungan Etnik*. Shah Alam: Pusat Penerbitan Universiti (Upena)
- Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud. (2006). *Masyarakat Islam Hadhari: Suatu Tinjauan epistemology dan kependidikan ke arah penyatuan pemikiran bangsa*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.