

The Involvement of Muslims in the Festivals of Non-Muslim Community in Malaysia from the Islamic Perspective

¹Basri Ibrahim, ¹Ali Mohd Mohd Yusuf, ¹Muhamad Zaid Ismail,
¹Wan Mohd Yusuf bin Wan Chik, ¹Wan Saifudin bin W. Hasan and ²Yendo Afghani

¹Faculty of Islamic Contemporary Studies,

²Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Terengganu, Malaysia

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the involvement of Muslims in the festivals of the non-Muslim community in Malaysia from the perspective of Islam. The reason being is this issue has given rise to different perceptions within the Muslim community in Malaysia, between those who allow it because they assume it was no more than celebrating the customs and culture of non-Muslim community and those who forbid it because they believe it resembles the religious practice and creed of the non-Muslims. This study is based on a literature review by collecting data from the books of siyasah (policy), fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), tafsir (exegesis) and Hadith lectures which were analyzed and then a conclusion was drawn. This study found that Muslims are strictly forbidden to participate in a festival that involves the faith practice of the non-Muslims but are allowed to participate if it involves the aspects of culture and tradition as practiced by the non-Muslims in their festivals in Malaysia such as attending an open house and congratulating them either by words or by card. However, the Muslims are required to abide to some specified regulations. In both of the above issues, there is no resemblance with the non-Muslim citizens in terms of faith which is forbidden by Islam rather it was more in the form of celebrating the customs and traditions of the community only which does not contradict the teachings Islam.

Key words: Perception, tradition, creed, non-Muslim celebration, resemblance

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is an Islamic country whose citizen consists of a wide variety of people. It is not just made up of the ethnic Malays who constituted the largest population, it also involves other race groups such as the Chinese, Indians, Kadazan, Iban, Melanau, Sulu and others. The interracial relationship has so far worked well and filled with peacefulness, in fact they even help each other in developing the country through various areas and each fields of expertise. Racial riots due to religious differences have never happened in Malaysia to this day although its people comprises a wide variety of different religious believers because the requirement to respect the religious rights of the non-Muslims has been clearly stated in the constitution. Ethnic diversity and religious affiliations among the Malaysian population has made Malaysia a unique country in the world and as an example to other countries not only in the Southeast Asia but also at international level.

Because, the population is made up of various ethnic range and each ethnic group has their own religious

affiliations, naturally there will arise questions in terms of interracial affairs, especially those that involves religious rituals up to attending an open house and extending congratulations for their celebrations as celebrated by the related people. Moreover, the recent trend of the Malaysian society whether Muslim or non-Muslim is to attend the open house organized by people with different faiths involving the giving of gifts and festival greetings to the followers of different religions. It has become commonplace and is not seen as an odd thing by the Malaysians, especially for those with higher educational backgrounds.

However, for the Muslims, a visit to the open house and the festival greetings to friends with different religion in conjunction with their celebrations raises the question of whether it is allowed or not allowed by Islam because so far the views among the Muslim intellectuals differ. Some do not allow it because it resembles the practice of non-Muslims which is forbidden for Muslims to imitate according to the Islamic legislation while some permit it but the Muslims must observe the conditions laid down by Islam itself.

From here, the question arises, can citizens who are not Muslims celebrate their celebrations in an Islamic country? Can the leaders and the Muslims visit the open house held by leaders and national figures who are not Muslims which was held in conjunction with their religious festivals? Can Muslims extend certain greetings such as merry Christmas and others to the non-Muslims in conjunction with their celebrations? These are some questions that often arise among the Muslims and these questions create many positive as well as negative perceptions among the Muslims themselves.

This study aims to explore and analyze the issues related to the Muslims' involvement in the festivals held by the non-Muslims, especially in terms of attending open house and giving certain gifts. The purpose is to clear the Muslims' views on the extent of interaction between the Muslims and the non-Muslims with relate to their festivals that can be done because they are all citizens of an Islamic country while maintaining the spirit of mutual help and cooperation between the Muslims and the non-Muslims citizens and move together to build the country into a progressive, excellent, distinctive and brilliant Islamic nation.

Literature review: Literatures about the Islamic views of the celebrations of the non-Muslims in a Muslim country have been elaborated indirectly in the works of earlier as well as present scholars. Among, the scholars who touched on this issue was Ibn Qayyim in *Ahkam Ahli al-Dhimmah* in 1961, Abd Al-Karim Al-Zaydan in *Ahkam al-Dhimmiiyyin wa al-Mustamanin* in 1982, Al-Qaradawi in *Ghayr al-Muslimin Fi al-Mujtama' al-Muslimin* in 2001 and others. Among, the literatures found in Malay language was the literature written by Redzwan Ahmad in 2006 "effect of local law against visiting the open house celebration of non-Muslim in Malaysia", Ahmad Nizam Abd Kadir in *Fiqh interact with non-Muslim* in 2008, the researcher himself in *Fiqh issues halal and haram current* Vol. 2 in 2009 and others. However, a complete literature in the form of a book in Malay language about the non-Muslim festivals in an Islamic country and the Islamic views on the issue has yet to be found by the researcher.

This study is not based on field research but based on literature research in which the data was collected from the numerous views from the past and present scholars which were included in various works especially those related to siyasah and fiqh and then these information were analyzed. Later, a proper conclusion was made by honoring the passages from the al-Quran, al-Hadith, maslahah (things that bring benefit to the people) and mafsadah (things that can cause harm to the people), legal maxims and the views of the past and present scholars.

Non-Muslims celebrations: The celebrations of the non-Muslim citizens celebrated in an Islamic country especially in Malaysia, cannot be viewed from one angle only which is solely from the religious standpoint because there are also non-Muslim celebrations that involve the customs and traditions of the non-Muslims and the element of tradition is more than the element of religious rituals contained in it. Accordingly, the festivals of the non-Muslims can be divided into two parts, the religious celebrations and non-religious celebrations.

Religious celebrations: A religious celebration is a celebration where there are more and more prominent religious rituals. The term "religion" in the *Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka* dictionary means a belief in God, its nature and teachings and the acceptance of its teachings and commandments.

Therefore, when religious celebration is mentioned, it involves the worship ceremony and customary practices and traditions associated to the worship ceremony in a certain religious celebration which is required by the religion itself. This includes a specific attires such as the special attires to attend a church or a temple or the cross symbols worn around the neck by the Christian Kadazan and so on.

Some examples of religious celebrations are Christmas which is celebrated by the followers of Christianity, Wesak which is celebrated by the devotees of Buddha, Chap Goh Mei which is celebrated by the Chinese community as the celebration that marks the end of the Chinese new year, Deepavali which is celebrated by all Hindu believers, Thaipusam which is celebrated by Hindu people around the world in order to honor the Hindu God, Lord Murugan or also known as Lord Subramaniam as well as the ghost festival which is also celebrated by the Chinese community in the form of ancestor worship where the obedience of the descendants are descended from the ancestors, even after their death.

NON-RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS

A non-religious celebration is a celebration where there are more and more prominent customary practices and traditions than religious ceremony. The phrase "custom" refers to the regulations which have been practiced for generations since the ancient times within a society until it became the laws and rules that has to be followed. The term "cultural" means a civilization, evolution, the progress of the mind, intellect, the way of thinking and behaving and so on while the term "tradition" refers to a normalities such as the customary beliefs and others maintained from generations to generations and has become a practice deeply

ingrained in a society. Therefore, when mentioning the non-religious celebrations among non-Muslim citizens, it refers to certain ancient beliefs inherited from their ancestors. The elements of belief contained therein include those termed as superstitious and made up things in the Muslim community. For example, a lion dance held in conjunction with the Chinese new year where it is believed that the house that hold such ceremony will gain a prosperous year. Among those included in this kind of festivals are the celebration of Chinese new year which is celebrated by the Chinese community, Gawai festival celebrated by the Iban and Bidayuh ethnics to celebrate the end of the harvesting season and the celebration of ghosts, Harvest festival which was traditionally celebrated by the Kadazan-Dusun ethnic for ages upon the completion of paddy harvest.

PUBLIC CELEBRATIONS BY THE NON-MUSLIM CITIZENS

The earlier Islamic scholars did not allow the non-Muslim citizens to celebrate their religious celebrations publicly in an Islamic country because it is considered as underestimating at the Muslims (Ibn al-Humam, nd and Al-Shirazi, nd).

According to Zaydan (1982), the prohibition for the non-Muslim citizens (members of Dhimmah) to publicly celebrate their religious celebrations was not based on the unIslamic nature of the religious affiliation itself rather it was done by the Islamic rulers at that time for the purpose of maintaining peace in the country so that the actions of the non-Muslim citizens would not cause slander or anger among the Muslims which at the same time may cause tension and instability in the Islamic country.

Therefore, the permission to publicly celebrate the non-Islamic festivals among the non-Muslim citizens solely depends on the authority's discretion by taking into considerations the benefits to be gained by the Muslims and the extent of harm that might befalls them, befitting to the legal maxim that states: the government's management of the Muslims depends on public's benefit or interest (Al-Suyuti, 1995).

It also shows that the Islamic government's view on this issue may change and are not fixed forever as with the passages of Qat'i (certain) laws such as adultery, the prohibition on gambling and such. This change is due to adaptation on the changing times and places in accordance to the legal maxim: do not deny the law changes following the change of time, place and situation (Al-Sadlan, 1417H).

With relate to that in a country like Malaysia where the society is a pluralistic society and the interracial relations have existed for so long where each parties

contribute to the development and stability of the country, in addition to good connections established among them and they have managed to create a culture of harmony which is not against the teachings of Islam such as mutual help, visiting each other, exchanging gifts and the like, it is no longer appropriate for authorities and the Islamic scholars in this country to hold on to the opinions of the early scholars who did not allow religious affiliations and celebrations related to the religion other than Islam to be celebrated publicly. However, these celebrations must not offend the feelings of the Muslims and still within the scope of respecting the law enforcement in the country, especially in Malaysia where religious freedom and practicing religious teachings were enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution Article 11 (1) and 11 (5).

THE MUSLIMS INVOLVEMENT IN CELEBRATING THE NON-MUSLIM FESTIVALS

The involvement of the Muslims in the celebrations of the non-Muslims takes many forms. Among the obvious ones are in these three forms, namely:

Attending and celebrating the Non-muslim festivals: The Muslims are strictly forbidden to engage in religious festivals celebrated by the non-Muslim citizens as is done by them such as visiting houses of worship, wearing clothes with their religious symbols and the like. This is because doing so means there are signs of agreement for infidelity whereas an agreement for infidelity is prohibited and strictly forbidden by Islam. Allah says:

If you disbelieve (not being grateful) of His blessings, indeed, Allah is free from need (of faith and gratitude) of you (for His perfection and He does not approve for His servants disbelief and if you are grateful, He approves it for you (Qur'an 39: 7)

It also contains the definition of giving supremacy and love to the non-Muslim in the form forbidden by the Islamic laws. Allah says:

The believers may not take the unbelievers for their allies in preference to those who believe. Whoever does this (prohibition) has nothing to do with Allah (from His protection) unless he does so in order to protect himself from their wrong-doing. Allah warns you to beware of His power for it is to Allah that you will return (Qur'an 3:28)

In addition, it resembles the sense of belonging to the infidels as forbidden by the Prophet (SAW). The Prophet said in a Hadith issued by Abu Dawud narrated through Ibn Umar RA: whoever imitates a people, he belongs to that group of people (Abu Dawud no: 4033).

The Islamic scholars forbid the Muslims from attending religious festivals of the non-Muslim citizens and from celebrating it with them. Among the scholars who forbade it was Imam Malik who believes the government should forbid the Muslims from attending the non-Muslim festivals. Similarly, Imam Ahmad (ibn Taymiyyah and Ahmad, 1988) applied the arguments from the words of Allah (SWT):

And, they (the true servants of Allah) are those who do not attend places where they do things that are prohibited (al-Quran 25:72)

In addition to these prominent figures, other figures who also banned the Muslims from attending the festivals of the non-Muslims in the form described above is Imam Al-Tabari (1962), Qayyim and Bakr (1962), Baihaqi and Al-Husayn (1992), Taimiyyah (1988) and Al-Suyuti (1995).

Attending the non-Muslim open house: It is customary for religious believers in our country, especially the officials of the country to hold an open house on their festivals and they receive a lot of guests on the day, consisting of people from various religious backgrounds. Even, the Muslims also hold an open house and receive guests from among the non-Muslims who were having a feast and so on.

The previous Islamic scholars banned the Muslims from attending the open house organized by the non-Muslims or the Muslims from organizing an open house to celebrate the non-Muslim religious festivals. They reasoned with the prohibition for the non-Muslim to publicly practice their religion in an Islamic country as discussed earlier. This is to prevent the element of the Muslim's resemblance to the non-Muslims in their celebrations. When non-Muslims are prohibited from disclosing their religious affiliations, it means all things and events that could lead to religious expression is illegal. Therefore, in an effort to prevent the disclosure of non-Islamic religions in an Islamic countries and to prevent the Muslims from resembling them, the Muslims were not allowed to join their celebrations including attending the open house held by them. Among the prominent scholars who believed so were ibn Taimiyyah (1420H), his student Imam Qayyim and Bakr (1961) and Al-Suyuti (1995).

Among the modern scholars who ruled that it is illegal for Muslims to participate in the event organized by

the non-Muslim in conjunction with their religious celebration even in the form of attending open house, exchanging gifts, holding banquets, declaring a public holiday and the like is Muhammad Uthaymin, a prominent cleric in Saudi Arabia, for the same reasons stated by Ibn Taimiyyah above. In fact, he went even further by stating that the Muslims who attended the open house organized by non-Muslims as a sinful act, regardless of whether it is done to show tolerance, to strengthen the close ties between Muslims and non-Muslims by the feeling of shame towards the non-Muslims and other reasons because it is considered as belittling the religion of Allah, strengthening the spirit of those non-Muslims and encouraging them to express their pride in their religion (Said and Mahmud, 2006).

If observed, the ban on Muslims from engaging in any activity that could contribute towards a non-Muslim religious expression at that time was strong as a result of the policy conducted by the government and the reason they do so is logical because the practice is linked with the religious rites of non-Muslims which the Muslims cannot get engage with it. Moreover, in Islam, the government is the guardian of religion. If the government provides an opportunity for the non-Muslims to do so, it means that the government has also contributes towards the non-Muslim in their religious expression and has put aside their own religion. If this happens, it means that the government is involved with treachery to Allah, His Messenger and the whole Muslim community.

However, the above reasons is less suitable for practice in Malaysia because of the time, place and customs already changed and the laws also changed in accordance with the changing times and places.

This is because holding an open house in Malaysia is now more in the form of traditional practice by the multi-religious community and is no longer considered as the non-Muslim religious practices. In fact, it ceased to be their religious affiliations. Only, it is done in conjunction with major celebration of their religion. Because, it involves the traditional practice of the community, the involvement of Muslims cannot be considered as resembling the non-Muslims and contributing towards their religious expression which is prohibited by the Islamic scholars in the previous discussions. Moreover, based on the history record, A'isyah RA was asked about Zoroastrian followers who give gifts to Muslims, on their festivals. She allowed the Muslims to accept those gifts if they are in terms of fruit but prohibited to accept slaughtered animal meat. Furthermore, Imam Ahmad was asked about the Islamic rulings on taking a wage from digging the graves for the non-Muslims and he ruled it as permissible because taking a wage from digging the non-Muslim graves is

not a religious rituals. However, he forbade the Muslims from making coffins for the non-Muslims (Ibn Taimiyyah, 1420H) because it is clear that making the coffin was closely related to the non-Muslim religious rites. The legal maxim clarified:

Customs practices and contemporary practices (current situation) are considered as the same with the words that are *sarih* (obviously) in specifying general things and binding absolute matters and others

The people who attend the open house consists of a circle of close friends whether colleagues or neighbors. Their attendance is based on respect towards the neighbors and friends and not respect towards their religious beliefs. The standings is similar to the actions of an Islamic government that provides a public holiday in conjunction with the non-Muslim celebrations, approves land to be used as graveyards of the non-Muslims and others. These actions should not be construed as honouring and supporting the effort of the non-Muslims to celebrate their religious festivals publicly rather it is more of a tolerance act which should be considered by the Islamic authority for their non-Muslims citizens.

In an open house, meals, drinks and pastries served are *halal*. In fact, even in an open house held by the Hindus serve beef to the guests who are not Hindus, even though in Hinduism it is forbidden to slaughter animals that breathed.

An open house is not held at the houses of worship of the non-Muslims, on the contrary, it is held at the house of certain figures, especially dignitaries and heads of state. Among the people who attend the open house are the subordinates who work in his office. It has been debated before that the resemblance towards the non-Muslims is prohibited in terms of the resemblance faith and religious ritual. In the customary practices that do not conflict with Islam, it is not wrong to follow or engage with it.

Islam does not forbid his followers to do good to the non-Muslims who do not fight them, especially the non-Muslims who work together in developing the country. Allah says:

Allah does not forbid you to be kind and equitable to those who had neither fought against your faith nor driven you out of your homes. In fact, Allah loves the equitable. Allah only forbids you to make friendship with those who fought you on account of your faith and drove you out of your homes and backed up others in your expulsion. Those who will take them for friends are indeed the wrongdoers (Quran 60: 8-9)

Allah (SWT) has created human composed of various tribes and nations for them to get to know each other. The relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is originally a relationship between two human beings, each of which are Allah's creatures who have a common interest in the worldly affairs, religion, humanity, community and so on. We have to live in cooperation and harmony whether for the benefits of an individual, social or country.

The status of law changed when it involves the heads of state when there is an element of neighborhood and colleagues who hold open houses. A slander will arise if a Muslim leaders do not visit the open house of the non-Muslims or when a Muslim does not attend his neighbor's open house held in conjunction of their festival. All of these need to be taken into account when considering the aspect of public's greater benefit and to avoid harm. The feeling of respect for a friendship, the national integration for the sake of strengthening goodwill feelings that will shape the harmony and well-being of the country, burying all anxiety, worry and suspicion.

Therefore, the Muslims can attend an open house held by the non-Muslim from amongst their friends, employers and others and it is not stated as a cooperation in the non-Muslim religious expression and attending their festivals which was forbidden by the scholars in the previous discussion.

FESTIVE GREETINGS IN CONJUNCTION WITH A NON-MUSLIM FESTIVAL

Festive greetings on the occasions of the non-Muslim festival is an issue that led to different opinions among the Islamic scholars. Some prohibits it while some allows it. Among those, who ban it is *Afanah* (2007). He argued among others: the Muslims already have their own festivals thus, they do not need to imitate the festivals of the non-Muslims which is against the Islamic teachings. Festivals in Islam are derived from the *al-Quran* and *al-Sunnah*.

The best example is the example from the Muslims who lived in the first three centuries and they never extend festive greetings on the celebrations of non-Muslims in their time. This is according to a Hadith issued by *Al-Bukhari* narrated by *Imran bin Husayn RA*: the best of you are the ones who live within the same century as me then those who follow them and then those who follow them (*Al-Bukhari*, no. 2457).

Islam forbids the ritual that imitates religious rites of a certain group of people as found in a previous hadith narrated by *ibn Umar RA* (*Afanah*, 2007). Other notables who forbid the Muslims from expressing festive greetings to the non-Muslim citizen in conjunction with their festival include *Muhammad Uthaymin*, on the grounds that the act was considered as an act of submission to a

non-Islamic religion and its affiliations which is forbidden in the al-Quran as mentioned before in surah al-Zumar, Verse 7. Moreover, all laws prior to Islam was annulled with the revelation of Islam (Said and Mahmud, 2006) as contained in the words of Allah SWT:

And, whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted from him and in the Hereafter, he will be among the losers (Qur'an 3: 85)

Uthaymin likened the Muslims who wish congratulations or others to the Christians, in conjunction with the celebration of Christmas which encourages bowing to the cross and according to him, the sin to those who do so is much larger than the people who commit adultery, drink alcohol, commit suicide and others (Said and Mahmud, 2006).

On the contrary, according to Yusuf (2002), the rulings on such act is permissible and he argued among others: in the chapter Al-Mumtahanah, Verses 8 and 9, the Muslims are allowed to do good and be fair to the non-Muslims who do not wage war against Muslims. Not only Muslims are required to do good to the non-Muslims, they are even allowed to marry a woman of the Book, Allah SWT says:

This day all good things have been made lawful to you (to eat). The (slaughtered) food of the People of the Book is permitted to you and your (slaughtered) food is permitted to them. And permitted to you are chaste women, be they either from among the believers or from among those who have received the Book before you, provided you become their protectors in wedlock after paying them their bridal-due, rather than go around committing fornication and taking them as secret-companions. The work of he who refuses to follow the way of faith will go waste and he will be among the utter losers in the Hereafter (Qur'an 5: 5)

When a marriage is allowed, there definitely will exist the feelings of love between a Muslim husband and a non-Muslim wife. Yet love of this sort is not prohibited. Allah (SWT) says:

And among His signs of power and mercy is He has created mates for you (O men) from your own kind, so that you may find peace in them and He has set between you (husband and wife) the feelings of love and mercy. Surely there are signs in this for those who reflect (Qur'an 30: 21)

If marrying and eating the food of the people of the Book is allowed then a mere festive greetings in conjunction with their festival should not be forbidden. Actually, wishing congratulations are not prohibited. Especially, if the non-Muslims themselves always extend their greetings to the Muslims in conjunction with Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Muslims are commanded to return kindness with kindness and to answer to a congratulations greeting with a better greeting or at least equivalent to that greeting. Allah (SWT) says:

When you are greeted with a salutation then return it with a better one or at least the same. Surely Allah takes good count of everything (Qur'an 4: 86)

The phrases commonly used in conjunction with the festivals usually do not contain any recognition towards their religion or signs that indicate someone is pleased with their religion. Quite the contrary, the verses are common expressions used by the people when celebrating their festivals. Other than that, it is not a problem to accept gifts from them and give them gifts because the Prophet (SAW) himself as stated earlier, accepted a gift from the king of Muqawq is as long as it does not involve a haram substance such as alcohol, pork and so on (Yusuf, 2002).

Therefore, it is not wrong for an individual or an organization, to extend their well-wishes in conjunction with the celebration of the non-Muslims whether verbally or by using a card, provided that the greetings does not contain any religious affiliations or recitals which are contrary to the principles of Islam such as the cross, because Islam denies the crucifixion of Jesus as a prophet. Allah SWT says: In fact, they had neither slain him nor crucified him but the matter was made dubious to them (Qur'an 4: 157).

Undeniably, there are some Muslim scholars like Syekhul Islam ibn Taimiyyah who takes a strict stance on matters associated with the celebrations of the non-Muslims and the people of the Book and in joining their celebrations. We support ibn Taimiyyah's stance who opposes the Muslims from celebrating the festivals of the musyrikin (the people who made ally to Allah) and the people of the Book as can be seen in the celebration of Christmas. There are Muslims who celebrate this holiday in a similar way as they celebrate the two eids or even more than that. There is no doubt that this is prohibited and not permissible. We have our own festivals as they have their own festivals. Nevertheless, it is not an offense to extend greetings in conjunction with their festivals, especially for those who have relatives,

neighbors or friends which involves community relations that can strengthen the relationship which was recognized by good customs (Yusuf, 2002).

THE CRITERIA OF THE NON-MUSLIM CELEBRATIONS THAT CAN BE ATTENDED BY MUSLIMS

Amongst the criteria that have to be followed by the Muslims during their visit to the non-Muslim festivals are as follows. The event was not accompanied with ceremonies which are contrary to the Islamic creed. The meaning of “contrary to Islamic creed” is certain things, actions, words or situations where if it is done, it might contaminate the Muslim’s creed. For example: when you are greeted with a salutation then return it with a better one, or at least the same. Surely, Allah takes good count of everything (Qur’an 4: 86):

- Including religious symbols such as the cross, lighting up lamps, candles, Christmas trees and so on
- Singing religious songs
- Putting any religious mark on the forehead or any other marks on the body
- Giving a speech or a signal that credits the non-Muslims
- Bowing or performing acts as if respecting the religious rituals of the non-Muslim

The event was not accompanied with actions that contradict the Islamic laws. The meaning of “contrary to the Islamic law” is certain things, actions, words or situations which if it is done, it contradicts the teachings of Islam which is practiced by Muslims. For example:

- Dressed in red like the Santa Claus or other clothings that symbolize religion
- Serving intoxicating drinks or food and the like
- Making sounds or decorations such as church bells, Christmas trees, temples or breaking a coconut
- Creating an event that consists the elements of gambling, worship, cults, superstitions and such

The event was not accompanied with “the act contrary to the moral and cultural construction of the Muslim community” in this country. The “conflict with the cultivation of moral and culture of the Muslim community” here means certain things, actions, words or situations that by doing so would contradict the values? and norms of the Muslim community in this country who are faithful to the teachings of Islam based on the ahl

as Sunnah wa al-jama’ah (people of the tradition of Muhammad and the consensus of the people). For examples:

- Promiscuity with no limits and no good manners
- Dressed in indecent clothing
- Singing songs that contain obscene lyrics and the elements of worship
- Organizing programs such as beauty pageants, animal fights and such

The event is not accompanied by actions that could “hurt the sensitivities of the Muslim community”. The meaning of “sensitivities of the Muslim community” is certain thing, acts, words or situations which if done will offend the feelings among the Muslims about their faiths and practices. For examples:

- Speech or songs in the form of the non-Muslim religious propagandas
- Speech that insults the Muslim
- Speech that insults the religion of Islam
- Shows aimed to ridicule the Muslims’ religious faith

Organizers and the public are advised to obtain the opinions from religious authorities before organizing or attending a religious celebration of the non-Muslims.

CONCLUSION

In an Islamic state, the non-Muslim citizens can celebrate their religious festivals, long as it does not offend the feelings of the Muslims does not disturb public’s tranquility and does not neglect the state laws. This opinion is more befitting to the conditions prevailing in Malaysia whose citizens consist of people from all races and nations, who together contribute to the national development. This is based on the actions and rulings of the companions of the Prophet (SAW) himself such as Caliph Abu Bakr, Umar, Khalid bin al-Walid and others. According to Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah adhering to the rulings of the companions is more important than the adhering to the opinions and rulings of the scholars who came later because the rulings of the companions are closer to the truth, since the time of the companions was close to the days of the Prophet (SAW). The rulings of the companions held more importance than the rulings from the tabi’in (generations after the Companions) while the rulings set by the tabi’in are more important than the rulings of tabi’ tabi’in (generations after the tabi’in) and so on and so forth (Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, tth).

However, the Muslim citizens are strictly prohibited from celebrating the non-Muslim festivals as the way they do it or from being involved in their religious ceremonies of worship. This is based on the past arguments because it involves the resemblance to the non-Muslim in their religious rites and express of love to them in a form which is forbidden in Islam.

Attending an open house held by non-Muslim citizens consisting of colleagues, friends, employers and others has caused disagreements among the Islamic scholars between those who ban it and those who allow it. The opinion that says it is allowed is more suitable to be applied in the Malaysian context as it has been the tradition and customs practiced by the inhabitants and contains no elements of resembling the non-Muslims, which is prohibited. Open houses are held not only by the non-Muslim citizens but also by the Muslim citizens in their celebrations and it is a common practice to visit these open houses, regardless of religious background.

Muhammad Uthaymin whose views is pretty strict on this issue had reviewed the concept of the resemblance of the non-Muslims which is forbidden by the Islamic law. For him, the measure that qualifies someone to be considered as resembling the non-Muslim is when a person does things that are specific to the non-Muslims but if those things have spread widely within the community and they cannot be distinguished from those made by the Muslims and the non-Muslims or if those things have become customary then doing it is no longer considered as resembling the non-Muslims and the rulings is no longer banned from that perspective (Said and Mahmud, 2006).

He enforced his arguments with the evidence produced by Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani who explains that some of the early scholars ruled that it was makruh (not encouraged) to wear Burnus which is a long robe with a hood usually worn by the Christians. Imam Malik was asked about wearing such a garment in his time and suggested that it not a violation to wear it for the Muslims. When told that the long robe is the attire of the Christians, Imam Malik stressed that such clothing was worn by most people until it can no longer be distinguished between those who are Christians and not Christians (Ibn Hajar, th). He also used the arguments of Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani with relate to the use of horse saddle lined with silk fabrics which were common among the non-Muslims. According to Ibn Hajar, the prohibition is to take care of the interests of Islam. The wearer resembles those of the non-Muslims because such clothes have become the symbols of their religion at the time. However, at present (during his time) such clothing is no longer the symbols of their religion and the rulings

that it was discouraged to wear such clothing was changed to it is allowed to wear such clothing. However there are a few rules to be observed, namely:

- The presence at the open house does not expunged a Muslim's creed or dignity
- The open house was not held at the house of worship or near the house of worship
- The attendance at an open house is to celebrate the social connections such as with the neighbors, colleagues and others. The Muslim who visits the house is used to going to that non-Muslim house. If it is not a normality and it is done only when they hold open houses then it is makruh. Maintaining good relations between the Muslims and the non-Muslims, besides creating a situation of harmony, peace and prosperity are among the values advocated by Islam
- No elements of religious gratifications or religious rituals at the open house
- No physical elements of immoral and forbidden things such as the serving of liquor, amusement that makes a person becomes neglectful in their religious practices, disturbances to the Muslims religious affiliations and such
- No element of insult towards the Prophet (SAW) the holy book of the al-Quran and such
- No religious rituals of their religion in that open house, just a banquet
- Not bringing gifts to be given to them on that day as opposed to giving gifts in a wedding, birth of a child, a sick wife and so on which contain no element of exalting their religion
- The open house was held by non-Muslim people themselves and not held by the Muslim leader. A Muslim leader is required to tolerate the non-Muslims but not to the extent of organizing the open house itself as it contains the elements of expressing the non-Muslim religious practice in an Islamic countries. If one insists on organizing an open house, it shall be made not in conjunction with the celebration of non-Muslim religions but selected on some other days and named with appropriate name such as the banquet for the people of various races and so on

If these conditions do not exist, one should not attend their function as a step towards closing the door that could lead to slander to the Muslims. Festive greetings in conjunction with the non-Muslim celebrations also gave rise to disagreement among the Islamic scholars between those who allow it and those who prohibit it. However, the opinions that allow it is

more befitting in the Malaysian context because it is not considered as resembling the non-Muslims which is forbidden because usually such greetings did not include the notion of being pleased with their religion. Expressions used in conjunction with their festivals usually do not contain any recognition of their religion or signs that indicate someone is pleased with their religion rather those expressions are commonly used by the public in conjunction with each of their festivals. Other than that, it is not a problem to accept gifts from them and give them gifts because the Prophet (SAW) himself received a gift from the emperor of Muqawqis as long as it does not involve a banned substance such as alcohol, pork and such.

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