

BUDI¹-ISLAM; IT'S ROLE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF MALAY IDENTITY IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the role of Budi-Islam as the source of the Malay community's cultural and identity construction in Malaysia. Budi-Islam is found to play a significant role in defining ideas, progress and actions by the Malay community. The formation of budi was a natural process, and it was further reinforced by the Malay's custom (Adat²) and environment which were influenced by values inspired from the nature of sea and 'spirit' of paddy. The status of budi was further enhanced through its tie with Islam as both shared many similar principles. The interactions of budi, Islam and geographical influence led to the birth of the Malays' highly-esteemed social values such as compromise, respect, cooperation, tolerance, forgiveness, modesty, and patience. The percolation of those values was figured based on studies on the Malay community that took into account the aspects of religion, politics and traditions. The objective of this article is to analyze the nexus of budi-Islam in the construction of the Malay identity. To fulfill the study's objectives, the method employed was library research with the emphasis on textual analysis. The findings from this analysis are crucial as they will reveal factors why the Malays are very tolerant in their dealings with other ethnic communities.

Keywords: *Budi-Islam, cultural values, Malay identity, Tolerance*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Various studies have chronicled the role of *budi-Islam* in the Malay realm such as Zainal Kling's research titled 'Adat (1993a), the Malay's traditional value system (1996), *Melayu Baru: Pencerahan Adat dan Adab* (1993b)'. Even though the writing highlighted the *budi* elements, the focus was more on clarifying the values without linking it to social values that emanating from *budi* like compromise, tolerance, modesty and forgiveness. Lim Kim Hui's (2003) research titled '*Budi as the Malay Mind: A Philosophical Study on the Malays' manners of reasoning and sentiments in perbilangan*³, explained in details on *budi's* role to illustrate the Malays' sentiments through proverbs, however, the study did not relate it to the Malay community's distinct identity. Wan Abdul Kadir (1993) in *Budi*, focused more on values transpired from *budi* among the Malays while dealing with fellow ethnic and the non-Malays. Based on the survey conducted, the writer did not find any study that directly elaborates on the role of *budi-Islam* as the central element in the construction of the Malay's cultural and identity formation. Previous works were more inclined to focus on the Malay community's character, traits and behaviors during interactions with their own community and other non-Malays. The analyzes of the Malay behavior it consistently shows patterns and directions of ideas, manners and actions that are influenced by a combination of these two values. Both values of *budi-Islam* were tightly fused with the social norms of the Malay community's. It led to the birth of more definite social values such as compromise, respect, cooperation, tolerance, modesty, forgiveness, and patience. The focus on these aspects is important as it provides an insight into the influence of *budi-Islam* on the formation of Malay community's identity.

2.0 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BUDI-ISLAM AS THE FOUNDATION OF MALAY'S CULTURE AND IDENTITY**2.1 The role of budi**

The values of *budi* refer to a set of internal values that shape one's mentality and personality. It helps to guide ones manners and actions while forming relationship within family members and the society. The emergence of this internal value differs between societies as it all depends on each community's expectations (Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, 1966: 22-30; Carolina, 2001:1-3).

¹ *Budi* plays a significant role in the Malay social system. In short, the word *budi* could be literally translated as 'being grateful'.

² *Adat* is the System of Law for the Malay community (Hooker, 1970: 69).

³ Hooker translated the word *perbilangan* as customary sayings. For further details see *Adat and Islam in Malaya* (1975: 74)

It embedded in the mind of the community which started from individual and later became the binding principle elements in shaping the Malay community's character. The close association between *budi* and the Malay cultural values is coined in the word *budaya*. *Budi* is spiritual sometime referred to as the soul (*roh*); while *daya* is reflected in physical actions. It is a combination of the words *budi* and *daya* known as *budaya* or culture that shows a manifestation of the action of the Malay soul or the traditions of the Malay. The upmost aim of *budi* is to uphold peace and harmony in their relationship with others (Zainal Kling, 1995: 15).⁴ This is reflected in the Malay *perbilangan*, 'If it is good to you then it is good to me, unanimously agreed, harmoniously discussed, consensually cooperated' (*Baik pada awak maka baiklah pada saya, Seiya sekata, Berunding beriya, Bulat kata kerana muafakat*) (Zainal Kling, 1993a: 11). It is permanent in nature, but has dynamically undergone various transformations to suit the ever-changing environment. If there were external elements that suit the core aims of *budi*, they will be assimilated, however *budi* character will remain intact. The only changes are the actions that were expressed differently. (Wan Abdul Kadir, 2000: 73).

Budi is an outcome of thoughts, feelings and emotions that never ceases in searching for positive elements, mutual benefit and peaceful connections in life. The Malays make intelligent choices based on mores, and conscience that rely on *budi* and social norms, by evaluating their needs and others based on the *perbilangan*, 'Be reminded of the others and listen to their opinions' (*Ingatkan orang lain dan mendengar apa orang lain kata*). The Malays' considerate nature has developed them into a traditional and civilized community that advocates high mores (Zainal Kling, 1995: 4). Meanwhile, their strong values have resulted in turning the Malays into sensitive beings that are gentle in nature. It is reflected in their verbal interactions that are always laced with consideration and sensitivity which showcase of their high intelligence and artistic skills. One's personality is determined by his or her interaction skills, language use and behavior that highlight their decency and modesty percolates into action, language and interaction skills with the goal of upholding harmony (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1993: 26).

It is almost impossible to understand *budi* scientifically as it involves internal values that could only be understood through actions, thoughts, language, body movements, and traditional elements such as songs, lyrics, theatre presentations, dances, carvings and paintings. The abstract nature of *budi* is similar to experiences of other ethnic internal values, which can only be appreciated by the communities itself. This is best exemplified by the Malays' utmost respect for their elders as they refer to their elders as uncle, aunt, brother or sister, and by bending their body (bowing) when walking past the elders. In fact, the *budi* elements are often highlighted in Malay proverbs and *pantun* (Tengku Lukman Sinar, 2001: 225).

The emancipation of *budi* can be identified through its association with the traditional or customary system that functions as the Malays' social norms (*Adat*⁵). The traditional system had existed since the pre-Islamic days of the Malay-Deutro ethnic from Yunan (Hooker, 1972: 13-14). This means that the whole Malay community in the Malay realm, whether they are Muslims or not, have embraced the traditional system in their customs and rites. This includes the ethnics of Bidayuh, Kenyah, Kayan, Iban and Kelabit in Sarawak, the Murut, Kadazan/Dusun in Sabah, Batak in Sumatera, Tarodja in Sulawesi, Malay groups in the Philippines and the Malays in the Malay Peninsula. If there is any variation in traditions, it is due to geographical differences as the *perbilangan* claims, 'Different lakes have different fish, and different fields have different grasshoppers'. (*Lain lubok lain ikan-nya dan lain padang lain belalang*) However, as they share similar cultural values, the differences are not too obvious as the internal values are similar, that is to uphold peace and justice in life (Hooker, 1972: 30-31). The Malay culture system is composed of two main components. The first component involves elements that have overtime undergone adaptations and transformations and normally it is not the principle values. This includes customs and rites (Norazit Selat, 2001: 87-89). The second component is related to the pattern of characters that have been infused in their life for a long time subsequently become part of the traditions. Sometimes it is referred to as the true traditions or *nan sabana adat* or customs that have been customized. These include customary rules or social norms that contain ethical and moral codes that rely on the core elements of *budi* (Carolina, 2001: 13). Most traditions and social values remain intact as they are formed based on decency and forbidden acts.

⁴ The exact timeframe of the emergence of the Malay culture could not be determined, but it was thought to have started with the *budi* concept which could trace to the days of the Malay-Hindu Sultanate era. However, it does not mean that the Malays were without any *budi* element before the arrival of Hindu, as the principle elements were already prominent and could be determined through their unique characters.

⁵ From the linguistics aspect, *Adat* is an Arabic word that means ritual, while from the definition; it means a kind of traditional law that does not have any particular legislative body.

When the main objective in life is to uphold peace and harmony, it will automatically stimulate *budi* that is countable in shaping the identity, personality, actions and culture of the Malay community (Norazit Selat, 2001: 89-91). The cultivation of the values of *budi* have resulted in turning the Malays into an ethnic community that are mild-mannered and highly cultured, that remains strong even during conflicts. If problems crop up, it is important to the Malays that opinions are expressed graciously, without offending the other party (Lim Kim Hui, 2003: 41). In fact, direct verbal or combat confrontations are avoided as much as possible, as they are considered as unbecoming, or rude. This attitude is akin to Milner's opinion that the Malays are one community that is least involved in war or violence (Milner, 2003: 10).

For the Malays, civilized individuals are those who are noble and cultured, that display high standard mannerisms that reflect peace and harmony such as being cooperating and respectful as well as being tolerant, and considerate towards the feelings of others. The concept of *budi* is reinforced with the Malays' helplessness to lead a life in solitude, and the preference for living within a community had trained them to be sensitive and considerate to the needs of others, as expressed in the *perbilangan* ... 'Life should be filled with customs and death should be filled with gratefulness' (*Hidup dikandung adat dan mati dikandung budi*) (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1993: 26 & 2000: 20). Hence, *budi*, as the principle element is highly influential in defining the way a Malay thinks and interacts (Lim Kim Hui, 2003: 8, 28 & 187), and this was further reinforced by the assimilation of Islam into the Malay culture.

2.2 Budi-Islam's Core Values

History shows that the Malay culture only flourished after the arrival of Islam, which was brought by merchants of Arab descent who first settled in Kedah and Palembang. Its position was further elevated when the Sultan of Melaka embraced Islam in 1419 (Syed Muhamad Naquib al-Attas, 1969: 11-22). By inculcating the concepts of *Oneness* and *obedience to God*, rational and philosophical values thrived and began to influence the Malay community. The inclusion of Islamic elements into the Malay traditions resulted in the birth of a brand of Islam that is laced with Malay elements. The principle elements that showed a significant presence of Islam included the aspects of religion, language, politics, education, economy and traditions.

Budi managed to assimilate into Islam as *budi* and Islam's main principles are alike; to attain a peaceful society and protect it from any form of harm. In fact, the Islam's idea of justice matches that of *budi*, as a ruler's main role in meting out punishment and governing the state was to uphold justice and fairness. As a result, the Malays embraced Islam as their religion as the spiritual aspects, mindset, manners, and traditions of the Malays matched that of Islam (Carolina, 2003: 9). It is aptly described in the following Malay *perbilangan* ... 'Adat hinges on religious law, Religious law are hinged on the word of God, If *adat* is strong, religion is not upset, If religion is strong, *Adat* is not upset, Religious law is the offspring of covenant, *Adat* law is also the offspring of covenant' (*Adat bersendi hukum, Hukum bersendi Kitabullah, Kuat adat tak gadoh hokum, Kuat hokum tak gadoh adat, Ibu hokum muafakat, Ibu adat muafakat*) (Hooker, 1975: 76) Islam was not merely welcomed by the society's elites, but by commoners alike, as Islam calls upon its followers to treat everyone equally and fairly (Abdullah Alwi, 2000: 63; Hooker, 1972: 34-35). What sets everyone apart is their faith and obedience towards the Almighty, which can be likened to how the Malays value a person based on his noble stature in the eyes of the community. Both of the values form the main essence of the Malay identity that is known as Malay-Islam⁶ which became the foundation for the ethnic Malays' culture (Carolina, 2003: 9).

The influence of the Islamic faith in the traditional system has elevated its status from just mere customs and rites to the establishment of relationship among human beings and between the humans and their Creator (God). The status of the Islam-influenced tradition was depicted in the Malay proverb '*biar mati anak jangan mati adat*', (let our sons die not our customs) and the tradition mentioned here does not merely refer to traditions, but refers to Islamic rules as well (Zainal Kling, 1993b: 11). The strong bond with God has channeled the '*jihad*'⁷ sentiment into some Malay warriors in protecting the religion from being ridiculed or degraded.

⁶ The sanctity of Islam among the Malays made the affairs of Islam a very sensitive issue among them. Understanding the strong link between Islam and the Malay culture, the colonial rulers and Christian missionaries steered clear from interfering in Islamic affairs and Malay customs and traditions.

⁷ *Jihad* is the Arabic for what can be variously translated as 'struggle', 'effort', 'to strive', or 'to fight', depending on the context. The term *jihad* can refer to the spiritual exercise of opposing the lower self. This is referred to as the greater *jihad* since people spend their entire lives struggling against the base desires within them that can harm both themselves and those

They included Tuk Janggut, Datuk Bahaman, and Abdul Rahman Limbung who went up in arms to protect the motherland from British threats (Ramlah Adam, 2003: 185-221). The link between tradition and Islam had fortified and expanded the Malay identity beyond the borders of the Malay traditions. Through the universal appeal of Islam, the Malays' relations with Muslims from other ethnics were formed, something that was never imagined of before. One of the core elements of *budi* was the emphasis on moderation, which was also an integral aspect of Islam. The elements of Islam were adapted to fit within the elements of *budi* that resulted in the usage of the term 'to become Malays' instead of the correct term 'to become a Muslim' (Mohamad Abu Bakar, 1999: 24; Reid, 2004: 14). This shows just how Islam has intertwined with the Malays' aspects of life. The leniency became more apparent when Islamic values clashed with secular notions that were monopolized by the upper crust of society. A different perception on Islam had caused conflicts between the upper and lower rungs of societies, especially when it came to the implementation of Islamic laws, like the Hudud Law. Many members of the Malay elites did not fully adhere to Islam's positive elements, as they were only keen to celebrate the festivities that highlighted their ruling supremacy. Their ignorance had caused a rift in the society's ties, economic disparity, inequality in educational opportunities, and biasness in the judiciary system, mainly due to the failure to observe the syariah laws. In fact, the failure of the Sultans and the aristocrats in realizing the positive values of Islam had reduced the influence of religion to the Malays (Shaharuddin Maaruf, 1984: 2-4 & 1988: 4). It was this conflict that led to a rift in political ideologies among the Malays, which began since the era of British colonization until post-independent days.

2.3 The Role of Geographical Background (Physical Environment)

Geographical background also plays a big role in reinforcing the principles of *budi*. The Malay realm was acknowledged as a civilization that was strongly influenced by sea and island elements. This geographical setting had emphasized the *budi* elements through the forces of water and spirit of the paddy⁸. Naturally, water is deemed to be gentle and modest; while the paddy spirit demonstrates a humble nature - the more rice that a stalk has, the lower it bows. It is these elements that play a strong influence in shaping the traits and character of the Malay community. In fact, an intellect or wise man who remains humble is highly respected by the Malay community (Lim Kim Hui, 2003: ix & 44). Malaya was bestowed with an ideal climate and geographical location that is well-protected from natural disasters. This situation had influenced the Malays' character to be less industrious (Tunku Abdul Rahman, 1977: 78) as they had easy access to their daily sustenance, whether from the fertile land, the mild seas, or the rich forest that was abundant with provisions that would not make them go hungry⁹ (Swettenham, 1965: 44; Winstedt, 1925). The circumstances provide them with the convenience for amusement, and leisure. It also allowed them the opportunity to be lackadaisical. The peaceful and tranquil surroundings had sparked a sacred bond between the Malay community and their environment, identified as *budi*, which made them eternally grateful towards nature. The sowing of the *budi* elements that formed the foundation of the Malay mentality was fortified with the aim of achieving harmony and peace. It guided the Malays into maintaining peace and harmony by being respectful and cautious towards their nature and environment to ensure that any misfortune would not strike them whenever they were trying to eke out a living (Zainal Kling, 1993a: 7). The high respect for nature contributed significantly to their prosperity, therefore making them cautious when clearing land for new settlements, farming fields or mining lands. This precautionary act was to ensure that the 'force of nature' in the area was pleased, and the appreciation shown would avoid any mishap from troubling the whole community. Their respect towards the contribution accorded by nature was bound by the belief that calamity would ensue as a bad omen, such as landslides caused by land clearings, hence the people need to ensure that Mother Nature (or spirit) was not perturbed in any way. However, the belief held by the Malays since time immemorial was in conflict with the Western values who needed to clear huge tracts of land for development needs.

around them. *Jihad* also can be referred as armed struggle against an enemy from the outside for it includes constant struggles within both oneself and one's own society.

⁸ According to Lim Kim Hui, the main element of *budi* is a construction of culture that had been accumulated and expanded through the philosophies of water - representing the physical aspects of sea culture, and worshipping the paddy spirit - represented the mindset of the Malays. This opinion is formed based on evidence collected from various sources, like history, etymology, geography, sociology dan philosophy. For more information on *budi*, please refer to his thesis.

⁹ Life in the Malay Peninsula was easy, and this was acknowledged by the writers. The properties included the fertile land for cultivation of the staple plants like paddy, tapioca, and vegetables. Meanwhile, the mild and plankton-rich seas made it ideal for fishing activities.

In fact, the Westerners ridiculed the Malays' belief and labeled them as weaklings and cowards (Aminuddin Baki, 1971: 38-39). In fact, the amount of leisure time that the Malays had on their hands had led them to be branded as an indolent (Swettenham, 1965: 136-141), passive (Wheeler, 1928: 23, 98 & 211-212), change- and progress-resistant, and unreliable (Vaughan, 1857: 115-125) community. The perception became indelible when progress made by the British administration led to massive changes in Malaya's landscape, especially when an influx of Chinese and Indian immigrants were brought in to be employed in the tin mines and rubber estates owned by the British to meet demands of the new industrial world in the 19th Century. Strained relations became more apparent, as the British used their negative perspective of the locals to justify their recruitment of the foreign labor force to ensure that their progress in the economic sector was not affected. However, the perspective also inadvertently led the Malays into believing that their failure to compete with the immigrants was due to the principles and values that they had been holding on so faithfully.

3.0 THE INFLUENCE OF BUDI-ISLAM IN FORMING THE MALAYS' DISTINCT AND UNIQUE IDENTITY

3.1 The Malay Political System

The emergence of the Malay ethnic from a similar origin, who were the descendants of great Malay empires of the past such as the Srivijaya, Majapahit and Melaka-Islamic kingdoms (Newbold, 1839: 193), had united them socially and politically. The Malay social structure was segregated into two tiers of society, the upper-class aristocrats and the lower-class commoners or peasants who were mainly farmers from villages. One's birth right would automatically determine his status or standing in society. The differences in upbringing, social and educational background had caused rifts between the two tiers of society and became more apparent during the British rule, when non-Malay immigrants began to arrive and still continues till today (Rustam A. Sani, 1983: 15-30; Gullick, 1958: 78).

The influence of the *budi-Islam* values was demonstrated by the Sultan's concern over his subjects' well-being. This resulted in the subjects' gratitude towards their Ruler and it was expressed by pledging their loyalty to the rulers. The act of loyalty is consistent with the requirements of Islam as stated in the holy book and according to the *Waad* principle (Chandra Muzaffar, 1979: 3-4), which proclaims that rulers or kings must be just to the subjects, in order to be revered by their subjects. If the ruler was unjust or tyrannical, God will destroy the kingdom as what had been demonstrated since ancient times (Reid, 2004: 12). The *Waad* principle was said as a result of a treaty between Sri Tri Buana, the first Malay ruler who was a descendant of Alexander The Great, with Demang Lebar Daun, the representative of the commoners. The principle declared a ruler's responsibility to his subjects and vice versa. The loyalty of the subjects conformed to the *budi-Islam* principle values, and the people were expected to show loyalty to their rulers as long as it did not go against the principles of *Waad*, with the agreement that the people were not neglected (Hanapi Dollah, 1996: 55). It was from here that the Malay's political power was cultivated, as both rulers and the subjects were aware of their roles, and hence the Malay-Islamic values were protected.

Therefore, the concept of absolute devotion from the common subjects towards the Ruler was an act that had been nurtured since the days of the Malay political feudal system (Chandra Muzaffar, 1979: 1). With the faith towards absolute power control by the ruler and the Sultan's domination of the Malays' mindset, it inadvertently caused the Sultan to believe that it was his right to demand his loyal subjects to obey to his every command without any objection. As a result, there were Sultans who abused their authority and committed sinful acts that contravened to the teachings of Islam and humanity itself, for example Sultan Mahmud, Your Highness took pleasure in many illicit affairs with various maidens. He even went to the extent of denouncing the death penalty upon Bendahara Seri Maharaja whom he felt had intentionally hidden his beautiful daughter Tun Fatimah, to be married off to Tun Ali. He was accused of wanting to dethrone the Sultan and as a result the death penalty was sentenced upon the Bendahara and his son-in-law. Once both were sent to the gallows, the Sultan married Tun Fatimah (Shaharuddin Maaruf, 1988: 14). Today, the concept of devotion towards a ruler is proclaimed as 'a just king is obeyed, an evil king is dethroned'. This concept leads to the nurturing of collaboration, cooperation and respect towards each other, while the core values of *budi* had generated a sense of loyalty towards the ruling party of the government. However, if the party goes against the principles of *Waad*, then they will no longer deserve the people's support.

3.2 The Malay Language

The Malay language reflects the identity of the Malays and it is through the language that other ethnics recognize the Malays' personality, character, mentality, level of progress and philosophy (Alias Sidek, 1999).

A language that could reveal the essence of the ethnic community is called the language of the soul and normally it is articulated through metaphors and proverbs. According to Wilkinson (1925: Part 3), the Malay proverbs reveal the characters and identity of the Malays. Through them, the feelings and sentiments of the Malay community are laid to bare, as they unveil the people's character, on issues like religion, traditions, political ties, economy and social aspects. The elements of *budi* are expressed through the beautiful use of language in proverbs, similes, idioms and *pantun*.

With guidance from the *budi-Islam* values, the Malays were taught to express themselves figuratively rather than being forthright to avoid from being labeled as uncouth or rude (Zainal Abidin Ahmad, 1965: 163), as they are deemed as polite and non-aggressive society. From the aspect of socio-linguistics, the courteous and gracious manner of the Malays is best reflected in their interaction skills. Daily conversations would adopt the indirect approach in expressing any wish, such as by scolding own son in hinting at the wrong-doing of the daughter-in-law, which is done in order to avoid any confrontation. Even if there were conflicts, they would usually resolve without escalating into anything serious. In fact, the Malays steered clear from giving metaphorical labels to other ethnics like the Chinese or Indians based on their food or character. However, if there were any metaphor targeted at certain groups of people or ethnic, it shows that the Malays' patience was at a critical stage (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992: 175-186).

Through metaphors and proverbs, the Malays expressed their perception towards religion, faith, human relations, and resentment. Their feeling of acquiesce towards God through their faith in *qadha'* and *qadar* (cause and effect) when eking out a living is revealed in proverbs like 'a small fated size sustenance will not become a bigger fated size sustenance' (*rezeki secupak tidak akan jadi segantang*). The same goes with wealth, where the *perbilangan* that 'wealth cannot be dragged along to the grave, only the white cloth will accompany one to it' (*harta tidak boleh dibawa mati, Kain putih sahaja yang dibawa ke kubur*) (Chew Hock Thye, 1975: 56). The guidance of both values had taught the Malays from being greedy in amassing wealth as one's worth is not based on his prosperity, but on his nobility and grace¹⁰. Political awareness and patriotism towards the motherland was reflected in the *perbilangan*, 'Rain of stones in our land is better than the rain of gold in other people's land' (*Hujan emas di negeri orang, hujan batu di negeri sendiri*). The Malays' work ethics require one to accomplish his or her work goals by doing it in a safe manner albeit, slowly and steadily 'Even incremental work, over time it will become hilly amount' (*Sedikit demi sedikit lama-lama jadi bukit*) and 'that it is better late, as long as you are safe' (*biar lambat asalkan selamat*).

Meanwhile, friendships were valued more than riches, as in the proverb 'debt in gold can be paid, however debt in gratefulness will be carried to the grave' (*hutang emas boleh dibayar, hutang budi dibawa mati*) However, the Malays' amok character would come to the fore when provoked by any party, whether among the Malays themselves or other communities extremely provoked them (Razha Rashid, 1990: 15-20), as reflected in the *perbilangan*, 'likes nut forgetting its pods, when we give leg they requested for tight and when it is cheaper more haggling done' (*seperti kacang lupakan kulit, diberi betis hendak peha*' and '*makin murah makin menawar*') (Lim Kim Hui, 2003; 62). The arrival of Islam had led to massive changes in the Malay's educational system that previously focused on folk tales, compared to the Islamic teachings that stressed more on spiritual aspects, such as the preaching's of tawheed (Oneness of God), *fiqh*¹¹. Lessons were held in madrasah, mosques, palaces, and developed into *pondok* schools. As a result, Islam had influenced the Malays to become rationalists and intellects that not only involved the elites, but commoners as well. The focus on nurturing these Islamic values led to the birth of a number of Malay Islamic scholars such as Nuruddin al-Raniri, Shamsuddin al-Sumaterani dan Hamzah al-Fansuri. This group of scholars was responsible in fostering the Malay-Islamic identity among the Malays through the teachings of al-Quran and al-Sunnah¹² that were tailored to suit the Malay values (Syed Muhamad Naquib al-Attas, 1972).

¹⁰ Being affluent could accord an easy life to anyone, but in the Malay community, only the rich that accumulate their riches honestly and being generous are respected by the society. Any wealth that is gathered through unscrupulous means which is coupled with snobbery, will not earn any respect from the society as it clashes with the Malays' generosity that is revered in the *budi* concept.

¹¹ The meaning of the word *fiqh* is understanding, comprehension, knowledge and jurisprudence in Islam.

¹² *Al-sunah* refers to the way of life prescribed as normative in Islam, based on the teachings and practices of Muhammad and on exegesis of the Koran. It also called as *al-hadith*.

With the rapid growth of the Malay-Islamic scholar system, the Malay language became prominent as the preferred language in the teaching of Islam, science and philosophy. This led to the recognition of the Malay language as the lingua franca and language of scholars in the Malay kingdom during the 15th to 17th Century. As the Melaka Sultanate Empire was an international port visited by traders and missionaries from around the world, the Malay language became the lingua franca in all trade and business dealings, and was the official language for more than 100 million residents in the Malay realm (Syed Muhamad Naquib al-Attas, 1972).

Apart from reinforcing the Malays' culture and identity, Islam managed to improve the Malays' writing system by incorporating the Jawi script, which had a strong link to the Arabic language used in the al-Quran. The advent of the Malay language that used the Jawi script led to the growth of printed Malay literature. The verbal literature of the olden Malays was more confined to entertaining the masses, but printed literature was more scholarly. During the Malay-Islamic Melaka Sultanate era, the focus of the scripted literature was on three main themes – sufism and philosophy by Hamzah al-Fansuri; religious and stately matters by Nuruddin al-Raniri and Bukhari al-Jauhari.; and Islamic icons of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him-PBUH) and Muhammad Ali Hanafiah. These themes highlighted the Malay-Islamic identity which shaped their spiritual strength, hence character and mindset.

3.3 The Malay's Economy

The economic standing among the feudal Malays depended upon their social status. For the elite few, their wealth and economic domination through commercial and agricultural activities were important to secure their political clout. This was a common practice by the aristocrats which had been inculcated since the era of the Srivijaya Empire and the practice continued in the Malay kingdoms in Malay Peninsula and Sumatera Empire as well. In fact, the supremacy of a Malay kingdom depended much on the strength of their international trades with the Chinese, Indian, Arab and Persian traders. Trading deals with non-Malay ethnics brought a lot of dividends to the Malay political powers as the traders acted as power brokers in shielding the Sultan from being threatened by the aristocrats. Under the feudal system, a Sultan could continue holding on to his power as long as no aristocrat managed to surpass his wealth. To ensure that the Sultan's rule was not affected, the state's Head of finance was often entrusted upon the non-Malays who had no significance to the Malay political system, like the Melaka Sultan appointed Kling Koromandel to the post and the Aceh Empire entrusted the job to the Gujerat community. The Bendahara, Laksamana, Temenggung and other officers had to seek their own means of economic resource (Afifudin Omar & Shafie Salleh, 2004: 83-84). In fact, any officer or citizen who accumulated more wealth than the Sultan had to surrender them to the Sultan, or their wealth would be confiscated (Milner, 1982: 27). There was also the fear of slander, which led to death penalty. Apart from that, peasants were also prevented from accumulating wealth, and the reason given was that it could lead to a waste of state's resources (Johannes, 1990).

For the Malay commoners, there were two major reasons that thwarted them from amassing wealth. The first one was due to their environment which was peaceful, and abundant with natural resources. As most of the Malays populated in rural areas, their livelihood mainly depended on farming and fishing. If anyone took part in trading activities, it usually did not last long as they were often taken over by the Sultan or state officials. However, these did not lead to any riot or confrontation towards the aristocrats as the Malays then did not have the intention of amassing wealth and riches in their life. Sadly, it was this principle that prevented the Malays from being industrious compared to the non-Malays. The British's divide-and-rule policy provided more economic opportunities to the Chinese ethnic to dominate Malaya's economy, which allowed them and the ruling British to control the business, industrial, agricultural, farming and mining sectors (Afifudin Omar & Shafie Salleh, 2004: 85). The Malays' dependence on agricultural-related vocations, the indebted feeling and loyalty to their rulers held them back from seeking riches in their own motherland (Roff, 1975; 9-10).

In fact, the sufficient farming produce made them complacent and satisfied with what they had. However, it did not mean that they did not place any importance on wealth at all, for there had been many disputes over family inheritance among the Malays. The second factor why the Malays were contented with what they had was the Malay rulers' concern over the welfare of their people. In a Malay state, even though the citizens were loyal subjects to the absolute monarchy, but as mentioned previously there was a mutual respect between the ruler and his people. This was exemplified in a will addressed to Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah from his father Sultan Mansur Syah which stated that the 'subjects are like root of a tree while the king is the tree itself; and if there were no roots, a king would cease to exist – that is what a king is to his subject' (Shellabear, 1975: 170-171).

A Sultan's generous, caring and protective nature of his people had taken root since the olden days and it continues to the present. The Sultan would usually lavish his subjects with gifts such as clothes, food and presents during certain events like a king's installation, officers' appointments, circumcision or ear-piercing ceremony. During these festivities, the elites and peasants would mingle freely and took part in merrymaking after a week of grueling labor.

Even though the Malays placed emphasis on tolerance, respect, and cooperation, but changes to their native land's landscape with the arrival of the British and the exodus of immigrant laborers in the early 20th century had sparked awareness in protecting their economic rights. Their firm stand became more obvious after the independence, as the nation's population had become a multi-racial society while the feudal political system had changed to Constitutional Monarchy and Democratic Parliament. The political and economic power was no longer under the monarch's jurisdiction, but in the people's hand - irrespective of one's status in society. However, as the target was to uphold peace and harmony in the multi-racial society, the Malay commoners did not have much opportunity to improve their livelihood. The opportunity only materialized after the 13 May social unrest through the New Economic Policy (NEP) which was launched by the second Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein in 1971 (Faaland, 1991).

Even though the incident had reinvigorated the Malays' economy through a series of restructuring exercise (Rustam A. Sani, 1983: 20), but the main aim was to sustain peace and harmony in a multi-ethnic Malaysia. After undergoing decades of humiliation by being labeled slothful, naive, cowardice and in-competitive, the Malays proved their detractors wrong with their ability in administering the nation peacefully and harmoniously, while improving the country's economy, especially the Malays, without marginalizing the non-Malays. The method implemented was not by 'robbing Peter to pay Paul' (Tunku Abdul Rahman, 1977: 243), like Robin Hood who robbed the nobles to help the peasants, or like Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe who confiscated the whites' farms to be distributed to the blacks until the extent of crippling the country's economy (*BBC World News Website*, 13 Desember 2002). Instead, the Malaya leaders stressed on compromise, patience and wisdom in governing the nation. In the early days, *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (MARA) and Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority (FAMA) were formed to eradicate poverty among the Malays and increase their economic equity, but both agencies had not succeeded in meeting their objectives due to the incompetency, lack of experience in management and lack of support from Chinese ethnics and their associations in the business sector (Faaland, 1991: 3; Ariffin Omar, 2003: 13-31)¹³. The Rural and Industrial Development Authority's (RIDA) was established to assist the Malays in the business sector, while Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) was formed with the aim of allocating agricultural land for the poor Malays.

In the early days, the efforts did not seem to bear much fruit, but after 50 years, it had become an established agency, with operations spanning in countries as far as America and Canada (*Bernama News*, 22 January 2008 & 8 Julai 2008), with plans to expand their operations in Kalimantan, Aceh, Papua New Guinea and Brazil. The Malay leaders' efforts in providing education and scholarship to the poor Malays had bred a new generation of Malays that could compete successfully in any given sector - economy, industry or professional (Mahathir Mohamad, 2002: 1). The Malays' true potential came to the fore when they showed their capabilities in helming government-linked-companies (GLCs) like *Petroleum Nasional* (PETRONAS), a multi-national company that has operations in 32 countries and was the 8th-most profitable company in the world in 2007 (*Fortune Global*, 25 August 2008: 87, F-2; Mahathir Mohamad, 2002, 1-2). The Malay ethnic formed the bulk of the company's management, including the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). However, their sense of compromise, respect and cooperation continued to dominate the Malay ethnic's mindset and character, even if they had succeeded in international businesses. For instance, the Petronas' operations in Sudan channeled parts of its profits to benefit the locals such as by funding Institute *Sakinah*, hostels and schools (*New Straits Times*, 7 November 2000), and by providing scholarships and education grants. This sense of social responsibility is carried out in any country Petronas runs its operations. This practice is in stark contrast with a European company that had been operating in Nigeria since 1958 in Ogoniland.

¹³ The Malays' poor economic performance was due to propaganda from non-Malay ethnics that looked down on the Malays' values by labelling them as uneducated and lazy. In fact, they did not speak the Chinese and Tamil languages. According to Faaland, even though National Economy Policy (NEP) was introduced, the non-Malays were still far ahead as they were the ones who inherited the vacancy of businesses left by the Europeans. Hence, the Malays' economy worsens, as the Chinese and Indians' economic domination continued.

Apart from various environmental destruction and alienation, the Ogoni ethnic did not get a taste of many benefits from the multi-billion gases and Oil Company. This treatment had led to protests from the locals, which culminated in violence, that left the company with no other option but to shut down its operations in Nigeria in 2008 (Johansen, 22 Julai 2008).

4.0 THE ROLE OF BUDI-ISLAM IN SOCIAL RELATIONS

In social relations, whether involving people from similar ethnic, race or civilization, or within a multi-ethnic setting, the Malays' main objective has always been to uphold peace. To achieve it, the values of *budi-Islam* play a role in guiding and shaping ideas, manner and actions. This could be discerned based on conducts and actions taken by the Malay community when they interact with other non-Malay communities.

4.1 The Malay community's interaction with the Chinese and Indian communities

Around 3 A.D, the Chinese traders made their presence felt at the Malay Peninsula, and they started to form social ties with the native Malays. When the Malay Peninsula fell under the British colony in the 19th century, the influx of Chinese and Indian immigrants was due to the shortage of labor force required by the British government. Through the Malays' tolerant and cooperative attitude, social relations with the Chinese and Indians were formed, and they were not ill-treated by the Malays (Cushman & Milner, 1979: 6). The ethnic Chinese also held the post of treasurer to protect the welfare of its community. Politically, social relations that had been formed also stressed on peace and harmony. By fostering the sense of compromise and avoiding conflict, Malacca kingdom received protection from the Ming Emperor of China from enemy threats. An alliance between the two empires was formed after the Melaka Sultan agreed to pay protection taxes either by sending it himself or through envoys. The Sultan's willingness had encouraged the Ming Dynasty to send an army of 37,000 personnel to the port of Melaka. With the protection accorded by the Ming dynasty, the threat from the Javanese empire was dealt with, and it made trading businesses with the international community more harmonious (Wang Gungwu, 1968, 11-22 & 34-62).

The importance of maintaining harmony in political relations with the non-Malay has always been a priority since the pre- and post-independence days. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj (Tunku) showed his tolerance and non-confrontational stand during the infamous Baling meeting with Malayan Communist Secretary, Chin Peng in 1955. The meeting was to fulfill one of British's independence conditions, which were to end the war with China Communist Party (CCP). Tunku's aim was to call for a truce, and that he was ready to pardon Malayan Communist Party (CMP). But he was wrong, as CMP was adamant in upholding their Communist ideologies, which went against the nation's objective of maintaining peace and providing safety to the people of Malaya without any discrimination, irrespective of race. As Chin Peng felt that peace and chaos in the nation was his call, Tunku reiterated that the government would continue to fight and stamp out CMP for the sake of the nation (Barber, 1971: 230-236), which finally succeeded after the independence. The Malay community's tolerant and respectful attitude continues as long as they are not overly threatened or provoked. History has shown that, conflict would only erupt if there were threats from the non-Malays that could undermine the Malay's supremacy and challenge Islam's status as the official religion. This could be seen from several incidents that took place during the British rule until the post Independence days.

They included the Naning battle that that was led by the Dol Said chieftain against the British when they tried to threaten the Malay's political supremacy by interfering with the rule of law and politics in the territory (Abdullah Zakaria, 2001: 10-21). Another incident was when the British Resident of Perak, James Wheeler Woodford Birch (Birch) was murdered. He had incited hatred among the locals when he brazenly intervened in the local administration by forcing them to adapt to the British law. His reason was that the Malay culture was not civilized, that the judiciary system in practice would not improve the Malay's political and economic supremacy, or solves the rampant piracy problems threatening the safety of merchants in the area. The conflict between the Malay community and MPAJA which was also known Three Star guerilla who received undivided support from the Chinese ethnic culminated during 14-day occupation of Malaya after the Japanese surrendered in 1945. During the period, the guerilla murdered and tortured many Malays, mocked Islam by smearing mosques with pig excrement, and even attempted to force the Friday prayers to be performed on Saturdays. In retaliation, the Malay ethnics – Malays, Jawa, Banjar or Minangkabau went up in arms to fight against the Three Star guerilla/Chinese. Their strong willpower to fight in protecting the sanctity of Islam had led to the decision to label the Chinese as *harbi*¹⁴ infidels, which must be lawfully fought.

¹⁴ Kafir *harbi*, (literal meaning the infidel in war) is a non-Muslim who fights against Islam and must be fought back.

This is because the CMP was mainly made up by the Chinese ethnic (Cheah Boon Kheng, 1983: 25-100). This was caused by the communist brutality that was heralded by MCP which received a lot of support from the local Chinese. 90% of the members were Chinese (Carnell, 1953: 105- 109), and it worsened the conflict between the Malays and Chinese that continued until Malaya gained its independence in 1957. Government's efforts to totally annihilate CMP's activities were difficult as they failed to receive full support from the Chinese community which led the Malays into believing that they were not wholeheartedly supporting the government's efforts. In fact, many of CMP's members ran off to Indo-China. As a whole, the Malay community holds a high regard towards other ethnics as they are a peace-loving people. Hence, to uphold peace, the non-Malay communities must respect the Malay's sensitivity towards their religion and traditions to avoid any controversial acts such as the Malay supremacy or by mocking any of the Islamic aspects that could ignite the Malays' wrath.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Budi-Islam is the source of culture and identity elements of the Malay community. By aiming for peace and harmony, the sense of compromise, cooperation, and assistance had been practiced by the Malay leaders when protecting their community from the threat of British or Japanese. With guidance from *budi-Islam* the Malays form social relations among themselves and with non-Malay communities in Malaysia, ties which would no doubt persevere well into the future. In short, it reveals that the arrival of Islam to the Malay realm and Malay Peninsula had indeed given a huge impact to various aspects of the Malays' life. In fact, Islam had restructured the Malay identity that had evolved from being a solely Malay-tradition based into a Malay-infused Islam.

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