

## Deviation of Faith in Malaysia: An Analysis

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**Abstract:** *The main objective of this paper is to analyse the issues on deviation of faith in Malaysia. The problem relating to deviation of faith needs to be urgently addressed as it directly affects Islamic theology and Muslims. Although Malaysia has witnessed a rapid development in the field of Islamic understanding and da'wah missionary among the Muslim community, the heretic movement is still rampant. This scenario has raised questions on factors that contribute to the movement of deviation of faith among the Muslim community. These questions encourage the researcher into researching the subject in order to come forward with answers and solutions. In order to arrive at the answers, the researcher has conducted a research by adopting two research methods namely library research and field work research. For library research, past literature and relevant views about the issue of cultism were collected. The field work research involves observations and surveys is done through interviews. The facts and relevant information are obtained directly from the people concerned and also from the current situations of Muslim society. All data is analysed inductively and deductively to expose the important factors that contribute to the movement of deviation of faith in Malaysia, as well as the solutions and actions taken to combat this problem successfully. The result of this research proves that there are seven factors which contribute to the development of deviation of faith in Malaysia. They are the weakness of enforcement of law, the weakness of Islamic studies curriculum, the influences of western culture, negative contents in mass media, ancient belief, the characteristic of the cults and the weakening of Islamic values.*

**Keywords:** *Deviation of faith, Islamic Theology, Cultism.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Deviation of faith is a dominant issue in a country. Neglecting the importance of preserving faith has a negative impact on human life both spiritually and physically. The increasing collapse of an individual's faith is due to the presence of negative elements that weaken their faith. Every Muslim should be concerned about elements that can weaken our faith in Allah S.W.T. If ignored, one's faith will be damaged, and their thinking will be controlled by deviant leaders.

Deviation of faith is part of the forbidden deviation of faith that contradicts the Quran and Hadith. According to past studies and statistics from responsible authorities, deviation of faith occurs in newly emerging teachings, leading to the deviation of faith. This issue arises from ignorance of Islam. According to Engku Ahmad Zaki, one's ignorance can be detected when their soul is devoid of spiritual values due to ignorance in religious knowledge. This problem is considered serious in Islam because it involves the faith of a Muslim. Therefore, the peace and harmony of the community are disrupted if teachings contrary to Islam exist and spread. Abdul Fatah Haron defined deviant teachings as teachings and practices that are incompatible with Islam and violate the discipline of faith knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Despite various measures taken by the authorities to curb this problem, these groups are still active. Therefore, it is a priority to address this problem to preserve faith and national harmony. Society needs to be cautious in seeking knowledge and should at least learn the basics of Islam. With a foundation in religion, they will be wise in distinguishing between true and false knowledge. Today, deviant teachings are actively spreading among Muslims in Malaysia through social media channels in cyberspace. Some people are more inclined to express disagreements on faith-related issues without considering the consequences. Hence, the objectives

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<sup>1</sup> Engku Ahmad Zaki Engku Alwi (2007), Cabaran-cabaran Semasa Umat Islam dan Penyelesaiannya Menurut Agama. The Malaysian Journal of Social Administration. Vol. 4. Jabatan Pentadbiran dan Keadilan Sosial, Fakulti Sastera dan Sains Sosial, UM.

and purposes of this study include several aspects, namely identifying deviant teachings in Malaysia and identifying the development of faith deviation groups in Malaysia.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Faith Deviation

In today's era, various deviant teachings have emerged and clandestinely taken root in our society. Although their followers are not numerous, this scenario can pose a threat to the future of Islam and the unity of Muslims in our country. To date, deviant teachings are evidenced by their popularity under various names.<sup>3</sup> Among them are known as Ilmu Hakikat, Agama Taslim, Mengenal Roh, Ilmu Bungkus, Ilmu Sejati, and many others. These are composed of various elements such as Animism, Dynamism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Ancient Greek Philosophy, Batinism beliefs, and Wahdat al-Wujud, among others.<sup>4</sup> According to Mohd Aizam in his book "Diskusi Isu Aqidah dan Pemikiran Semasa di Malaysia" (Discussion on Issues of Faith and Contemporary Thought in Malaysia), the emergence of deviant teachings and practices in Malaysia is not a new phenomenon. This scenario has long begun through beliefs in animism, dynamism, and Hindu-Buddhist teachings. To date, each state in Malaysia has deviant teachings that are categorized as deviating from the true Islamic faith. Among the deviant teachings examined in this book are al-Arqam, Shia teachings, al-Mansur teachings, and Ilmu Hakikat.<sup>5</sup>

In Malaysia, the deviation of faith became more pronounced with the emergence of a teaching known as Ilmu Hakikat, which appeared around the 1980s. This teaching was pioneered by Haji Ahmad Laksamana bin Haji Omar, who became well-known through his writings in the book "Hakikat Insan." Much of the book's content shares similarities with "Hidayatul Anwar" by Syed Jamalullail, the founder of Taslim teachings. In conclusion, the book used in this teaching tries to spread Batiniyyah teachings mixed with wujudiyah teachings, which contradict the principles of Ahli Sunnah Wal-Jamaah. The author also recommends individual action plans to remain alert and concerned about current religious issues, especially those reported in newspapers, television, and the internet regarding faith deviation phenomena.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Deviant Teachings Groups in Malaysia

To date, several deviant teaching groups have been detected in Malaysia. Consequently, each year, cases of deviant teachings continue to increase and are successfully identified by the authorities. These teachings often have characteristics such as esotericism and interpretation, gnosis, and existentialism. An example of teachings with these characteristics is the Taslim teachings.<sup>7</sup> The Taslim teachings are among the earliest in Malaysia. Additionally, the Bahai and Qadiani teachings have also established themselves in Malaysia. Recent teachings have been found to all contain existential doctrines. Unbeknownst to many, our country is also significantly influenced by deviant teachings from both abroad and within. The government takes the issue of deviations that disrupt the faith of Muslims in the country seriously. This indicates that deviant teachings are indeed growing in our country, and strict actions must be taken to prevent and curb their spread.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Farahwahida Mohd Yusoff (2011). *Fatwa Dan Keberkesanannya Memerangi Ajaran Sesat Di Malaysia*: UTM Johor Baru.

<sup>4</sup> H.O.K RAHMAT S.H. (1983). *Pencemaran Akidah Di Nusantara*. Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.

<sup>5</sup> Mohd Aizam bin Mas'od. 2013. *Diskusi Isu Akidah dan Pemikiran Semasa di Malaysia*. Putrajaya: Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia.

<sup>6</sup> Abdulfatah Haron Ibrahim, Prof. Dr. (1994), *Ajaran sesat*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

<sup>7</sup> Ahmad Hidayat Buang, Prof. Madya Dr. (2003), "Kebebasan Memberi Pandangan dalam Isu-isu Agama Islam: Kajian terhadap Fatwa-fatwa Jabatan Mufti Negeri-negeri di Malaysia" (Kertas Kerja Seminar Pemikiran Islam Peringkat Kebangsaan I di Akademi Pengajian Islam, Universiti Malaya, 11 Januari 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Engku Ahmad Zaki Engku Alwi (2010), *Ajaran Sesat di Malaysia: Satu Analisis*. Jurnal Peradaban. Vol. 5. Pusat Dialog Peradaban, Universiti Malaya.

Despite certain teachings and their written works being gazetted or declared deviant by the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM), individuals involved with these teachings remain active on social media platforms such as YouTube. Even more troubling is the misuse of available media to spread teachings contrary to the normal course of human life. For instance, the teachings of Haji Shaari Mohd Yusof, which remain active today, preach gnosis that goes beyond human reasoning and are contrary to Islam. Therefore, authorities have been urged to take immediate action to prevent the spread of these extreme faith teachings in the country.

Furthermore, Engku Ahmad Zaki found that the factors contributing to deviant teachings in Malaysia include deficiencies in enforcement and legal provisions, weaknesses in the Islamic Education curriculum, and the influence of Western culture on Muslim life. Additionally, faith deviations also threaten national peace and security. Therefore, JAKIM continuously collaborates with State Islamic Religious Departments to take action on reports involving deviant and heretical teachings and to educate the public to prevent them from falling into these deviations.<sup>9</sup>

Asmady et al. explain the Sabah State Government's actions in gazetting fatwas concerning 22 teachings considered deviant and outside the realm of Islam, which are highly relevant to this research. All these teachings are identified as contrary to the beliefs of Ahlu Sunnah wa al-Jamaah. The beliefs practiced by these groups can undermine national security and political stability. It clearly outlines the Sabah State Government's policies in addressing the development of these deviant teachings. The study employs a comprehensive approach to curb the spread of deviant teachings in Sabah. However, the limitation of this study is that it focuses solely on this issue without listing the specific deviant teachings in Sabah.<sup>10</sup>

Deviant teachings are weapons used by enemies of Islam to destroy Muslims from within. This results in threats in terms of Faith, Society, and National Security. For instance, the Tal Tujuh Group has been confirmed as deviant by the National Fatwa Committee Conference. Among the offenses committed by this group are those related to faith and Islamic law. The impact has been significant, with many Muslims being influenced by these teachings. This group has existed in Pasir Mas, Kelantan since 1973 (Aizan Ali & Siti Hajar, 2018). The leader of this group is Abdullah bin Mohd. Syariff. Among the deviations detected within this group are making decisions based on dreams and claiming the ability to interpret dreams.

Every deviant teaching can be declared heretical if it contains elements of superstition and matters that violate faith. Additionally, the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia (MKI) and the State Mufti Departments have issued several legal opinions and fatwas against practices contrary to Islam due to the presence of superstitious elements in the practices of certain groups.<sup>11</sup>

#### **4. Actions to Curb Deviant Teachings**

Every year, the authorities address this issue seriously as cases of deviant teachings continue to increase. The position of fatwas based on the 1994 Enactment of the Islamic Religious and Malay Customs Council of Kelantan serves as an authoritative reference and plays an effective role in strengthening faith to curb any erroneous teachings that contradict Islamic beliefs.

Jasni Sulong in his journal article emphasizes that a Muslim's strong faith is built on belief in the six pillars of faith and vice versa. Today, the challenge to Islamic faith is significant due to extensive social interactions, internet connectivity, and the availability of information. Consequently, thoughts that contradict Islamic faith, such as secularism, liberalism, and Shiism, are spreading among the younger generation. Therefore, the

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<sup>9</sup> Engku Ahmad Zaki bin Engku Alwi (2023). *Ajaran sesat di Malaysia: Faktor Penyebaran dan Cara Penyelesaiannya*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

<sup>10</sup> Asmady Idris et al. (2020). *Dasar Kerajaan Negeri Sabah Menangani Perkembangan Ajaran Sesat Dalam Islam*. UMRAN –International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies. vol. 7, no.1. pp. 49-67

<sup>11</sup> Mohd Kamel Mat, Muhammad Firdaus Abdul Manaf, dan Mohd Asyran Safwan Kamaruzaman. (2021). "Unsur Khurafat Dalam Ajaran Sesat Di Malaysia: Analisis Pandangan Hukum Jawatankuasa Muzakarah Majlis Kebangsaan Bagi Hal Ehwal Ugama Islam Malaysia." *Journal of Fatwa Management and Research* 26, no. 2 (2021): 144-157.

government has taken actions and enacted special laws to address this issue. This study aims to explore aspects of Islamic faith managed through laws and fatwas to prevent threats. Fatwas have been analyzed using content analysis methodology. This study focuses solely on one state, Penang. Therefore, this research provides a good idea for researchers to continue studies related to deviant teachings in faith and to compile all teachings and fatwas for each state as references for society and state Islamic religious departments.<sup>12</sup>

According to Noor Raihan et al., in the context of Malaysia, based on the fatwas issued by the Islamic states, the practice and adherence of Muslims are in line with the Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah school of thought in terms of faith, law, and ethics. Any Muslim who practices teachings banned by state fatwas is considered to be violating the law and can be punished if found guilty. The phenomenon of deviant teachings will continue to spread vigorously in society if not curbed by specific strategies.<sup>13</sup>

#### **5. Fanaticism in Seeking Knowledge and its Consequences**

Every deviant teaching typically arises from fanaticism in seeking knowledge. This fanaticism leads individuals to mistakenly choose the true path of knowledge. The impact is substantial, especially when it involves the youth. To address this issue, JAKIM has established IPHAM to implement programs that strengthen the faith of teenagers, with the commitment and cooperation of various layers of society, such as family institutions and NGOs. This is to produce youth who follow the true principles of Islamic faith.<sup>14</sup>

### **6. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the findings of this study, it was found that previous research focused on the issue of faith deviation in deviant teachings concentrated in Malaysia. Many suggestions and actions have been proposed by previous researchers to combat faith deviations, given the existence of deviant teachings and new thought currents attempting to mislead faith. Efforts include enhancing the knowledge of the Muslim community through various effective da'wah mediums and strengthening law enforcement.

The findings also reveal weaknesses in the previous research, particularly in the general scope of the studies. Research related to deviant teachings needs to be highlighted more actively and specifically to help authorities improve and refine their management and operations system in combating faith-related crimes. For instance, the research division of the Johor Islamic Religious Department (JAINJ) has analyzed methods to handle cases of deviant teachings. Their contributions will benefit the authorities and Islamic religious departments in reducing the occurrence of deviant teachings cases.<sup>15</sup>

For researchers, every issue of deviant teachings and errors should be improved according to the current year's issues and problems. According to Noor Raihan et al. (2018), in the context of Malaysia, based on the fatwas issued by the Islamic states, the practice and adherence of Muslims align with the Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah school of thought in terms of faith, law, and ethics. Any Muslim practicing teachings banned by state fatwas is considered to be violating the law and can be punished if found guilty. When studying and accepting a teaching, the community must be cautious to avoid mistakes. Any confusion should be immediately referred to those truly knowledgeable in the field. Engku Ahmad Zaki has listed characteristics of deviant teachings in a particular teaching or sect that can cause practitioners to lose faith and go astray.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jasni Sulong. 2016. Pemeliharaan akidah Islam: Analisis daripada sudut penguatkuasaan undang-undang dan fatwa di Pulau Pinang. *Jurnal Afkar* 18 (Edisi Khas): 1-34.

<sup>13</sup> Noor Raihan & Zuliza Kasrin. (2018). "The Propagation of Doctrine of Deviant Religious Teachings in The Cyber Net: Penyebaran Doktrin Ajaran Sesat di Alam Siber", *al-Qanadir: International Journal of Islamic Studies*, 10(1), pp. 42-62.

<sup>14</sup> Nur Aisya Asyikin Mohd Zurita & Engku Ahmad Zaki Engku Alwi, (2022). *Penyelewengan Akidah dalam Ajaran Sesat di Malaysia: Satu Analisis*. *Jurnal Islam Dan Masyarakat Kontemporari* 23(2): 197-206

<sup>15</sup> Engku Ahmad Zaki bin Engku Alwi (2023). *Ajaran sesat di Malaysia: Faktor Penyebaran dan Cara Penyelesaiannya*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Overall, it can be concluded that the characteristics of digression in doctrines or tarikat can cause a void of faith among practitioners (JAKIM 2006), based on the following:

**1). Sources from al-Quran and al-Hadith.**

- i) Believe in the existence of new revelations.
- ii) Change the text and meaning of the al-Quran on purpose.
- iii) Believe in the existence of arcane and apparent meaning in the contents of the Al Quran.

**2). Divinity**

- i) Avow to the incarnation of God in him.
- ii) Believe in the positive and negative impacts of a guru's recital upon an object such as a rock, mountain and others.
- iii) Avow to know things that are occult and in fortune-telling.
- iv) Believe in the existence of absolute power of objects such as wood and stone.
- v) Believe that their teachers can expiate their sins with money.

**3). Prophethood**

- i) Confess that they or their teachers receive revelation.
- ii) Admit that they or their teachers as a prophet or Jesus.
- iii) Believe there are yet other prophets after Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). iv) Admit to receiving qasyaf or the knowledge of laduni.
- v) Claim to be the representative of the prophet himself who can confer syafaat to his students.
- vi) Claim that they themselves or their teachers are divinely protected.
- vii) Claim that their teachers are entrusted with the apostle tasks.
- viii) Claim that their teachers have miracle powers.

**4). Sam'iyat / Mughayyabat**

- i) Believe that the souls of the dead or saints can be incarnated into the body of the living. ii) Ask help from the dead.
- iii) Believe that certain people do not die and will be reborn as Imam Mahdi.
- iv) Believe that the dead can provide assistance when called upon.
- v) Believe that sorcerers can summon the spirits of the dead in practicing witchcraft.
- vi) Predict the emergence of Imam Mahdi and the resurrection.
- vii) Confess that their teachers hold the key to the gates of heaven.
- viii) Confess and believe that one can communicate directly with Allah through the Nur Muhamad found in himself.

**5). Shariat**

- i) Nullify certain obligations in Islam such as prayer, fasting, tithe, pilgrimage and others as well as create new obligations.
- ii) Submit to the teachers spiritually and physically through spiritual marriage.
- iii) Neglect the Friday prayers because of mysticism practices.
- iv) Belief that there is no necessity for congregational prayers as well as no necessity to face the Kiblah during prayers.
- v) Believe that solemnisation of marriage according to shariat is merely a custom, thus, it requires another ritual, that is spiritual remarriage.
- vi) The act of adultery, gambling, drinking alcohol and all forms of sins can be committed by the teachers or caliphs of tarikat and forgiveness of their sins and that of their followers are guaranteed.
- vii) Believe that it is adequate to just have the intention to perform the prayers. viii) Legalize things that are forbidden by Allah.
- ix) Believe that all religions are the same.
- x) Believe that performing the pilgrimage is not necessarily in Mecca. It can be performed in other places as well.

**6). Manners / Morals**

- i) Comply blindly with the teachers' teachings even if they commit sins.
- ii) Believe that followers can receive incredible strength from their teacher.
- iii) Require both male and female followers to be tested in a special room and swear not to tell anyone what happens between their teacher and them.
- iv) Insist that followers keep the teachings confidential, if otherwise they will be afflicted with problems.

**7. Factors Affecting the Spread of Deviation of Faith and its Solutions**

1. Weak and inadequate enforcement related to deviation of faith under the Syariah Criminal Offences, that is, enforcement process is not overtly formal in nature and is bound by the general rules of administrative and departmental procedures. Inadequate enforcement manpower results in the inefficiency of the administration and enforcement machinery. The improvements in professionalism and quality of enforcement officers are not at satisfactory levels. Thus, continuous courses and training should be held to give them exposure of better quality information for a more productive work.
2. Provisions of the enacted law are not fully enforced, even though the current act and provisions are sufficient to eliminate the problems of deviation of faith. Among the provisions of the civil law and others which are relevant (such as article 149 of the Constitution, the Internal Security Act (ISA), Article 11 of the Federal Constitution, the Penal Code and the Sedition Act 1948) should be referred to in cases involving deviation of faith.
3. Faith Rehabilitation Centers do not exist in every state in Malaysia. The existence of these centers is very relevant to the severity of the situation. These rehabilitation centers should be equipped with a complete and appropriate curriculum in matters pertaining to the discipline of faith. These centers should also be in direct contact with the institutions of higher learning in this country in order to provide competent trainers, produce brilliant ideas, and a perfect place to carry out the rehabilitation activities. This is because the Islamic law teaches that the death penalty must be carried out against apostasies due to deviation of faith. At the same time, their faith should also be restored in order for them to repent.
4. Missionary movements and refinement of faith are not widely practised by various agencies and educational institutions in the country. Refinement and reinforcement movements must be integrated into education at all levels, primary, secondary and higher education. An appropriate curriculum with the current developments on the question of faith should be included. This refinement movement of faith must also be extended through sermons at the mosques in the country. The clerics and religious scholars should produce more writings, researches and publications related to the Islamic faith and deviation of faith as a useful source of information to the Muslim community. This information should be disseminated through mainstream newspapers and magazines and other media for a wide and effective dispersion. These religious scholars must also conduct continuous studies on matters relating to refinement of faith, deviation of faith, and missionary strategies.
5. Mass media whether electronic media, print media or information technology are not fully utilized as an effective medium of propagation of Islam in strengthening the Islamic faith besides revealing the signs of the existence of deviation of faith in the community. This is because the mass media channels are channels that are easily accessible by the public. Thus, they are the most desirable and appropriate channels to be utilized by the authorities as a means of propagation of Islamic values. Religious authorities in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs should tighten surveillance, censorship and impose bans on the distribution of literature that is superstitious and deviant in nature which is detrimental to the Muslim community. To punish the people who insult the sanctity of Islam, the current Islamic Criminal Law Enactment should be enforced.
6. Lack of cooperation between Muslim communities and the religious authorities. The authorities should mobilize forces to enhance public awareness of the importance of preserving the sanctity of Islam and encourage them to engage in refinement and strengthening of faith movements in their respective

manner and capabilities. In this case, all Muslims should urge one another to enliven and fully utilize the mosque and other Islamic institutions. In one aspect, the mosque committee, village committee and parents, should train their youngsters to acquaint themselves with the mosques and musollah on Islamic education to strengthen the faith, as well as train them to attend religious activities held in their area. 4.7 Finally, the task of combating the spread of deviation of faith, abolishing the ignorance of faith and strengthening the faith is the duties and responsibilities of all Muslims. It should not be shouldered by a certain party only, but it should involve the participation of all segments of society right from the individuals through to the authorities that assume the trust in strengthening strategies of the Muslim faith.<sup>17</sup>

## 8. CONCLUSION

The issue of deviant teachings must be given attention by all communities in Malaysia to avoid long-term effects on faith and future generations. This issue also requires further research on existing teachings and more in-depth studies on strategies to combat them. A more holistic and integrated approach should be taken, involving authorities, educational institutions, families, and the community as a whole.

The issue of faith deviation is a serious threat to the stability and sanctity of Islam in Malaysia. Many heretical teachings have been identified to contain elements contrary to the Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah doctrine. The findings of this study indicate the need for tighter monitoring and enforcement of laws against heretical teachings, as well as the importance of strong religious education for all levels of society. Immediate and firm action must be taken to ensure these heretical teachings do not continue to develop and affect the faith of Muslims.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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