

A Study of Jamāʻah Tablīgh in Malaysia and Indonesia

Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad

From Islamic Revivalism to Islamic Radicalism in Southeast Asia

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By Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-7239-3 ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7239-3 From Islamic Revivalism to Islamic Radicalism in Southeast Asia The book is dedicated to Prof. Joel S. Kahn
as my Guru in Anthropology,
Haji Bustamam-Ahmad (my father)
and Haji Budiman Muli (my grandfather)
who have showed the spirit of life in seeking of knowledge

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	or mastin fath, and five pinars of Islam

GLOSSARY

ABIM Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia

AICC Association of Indian Chambers of Commerce

Amīr Head

amīr saf leader for khuruj

baju koko traditional Muslim clothes for praying

Barisan Nasional National Front, one of the coalition parties in

Malaysia

Bayān hidayah religious sermon before khuruj

Bayān tangguh religious sermon before returning home

Bidadari beautiful woman in Paradise

Bumiputraof Malay originChillahretreat for forty days.Da'īIslamic preachersDa'waIslamic missionary

Dalīl guide

FIO Federation of Indian Organisations

Fitnah gossip

Halagah local headquarters

gast inviting people to mosque

HMI Islamic University Students Association

IAIN State Institute of Islamic Studies

'Ibadah worship

Ijtima'ipublic activitiesIkrām al-muslimrespect for MuslimsImāmmosque prayer leader

IPB India, Pakistan and Bangladesh

IstiqāmahconsistencyIstiqbālreception

JAKIM Department of Islamic Development Malaysia

JAWI Islamic Religious Department of Federal

Territory

Janggut beard

Jorh regional meeting

KAMMI Indonesian Muslim Student Action Union

Kampung village

Karguzari report of da'wa activities

Karknū colloquial name for a member of the Jamā 'ah

Tablīgh in Malaysia and Indonesia

Kenduri traditional feasts
Khawwas intellectuals
Khidmat voluntary service

Kopiah cap/hat worn by Muslim men and by

Indonesian men in general as a symbol of

national identity.

Kota pelajar city of students

khātib Muslim who delivers khutbah during Jum'ah

prayer

Khutbah religious sermon during Jum'ah prayer

Khuruj going out

Khusūsi inviting respected people

KLIA Kuala Lumpur International Airport

Labi-labi traditional form of public transportation in

Banda Aceh

MAIM Islamic Religious Council of Melacca

Martūrat female karkūn

MECA Malayan Employer's Consultative Meunasah Acehnese term for a small prayer hall.

MIC Malaysian Indian Congress

malam markāż weekly gathering
Markāż headquarters
Masjid mosque

Miswaks twigs of a tree used to clean teeth

Mohalla a term to describe a neighbourhood or locality

in the cities and towns of central and south

Asia.

MMI Indonesian Mujahidin Council

Muftī Islamic jurist consult Mu'āsyarat social relationship

MUI Indonesian 'Ulamā' Council

Muhrim A close member of the family, man or woman,

whom a Muslim cannot marry

Mushawarah meeting
Najis dirt, pollution

NCCI National Chambers of Commerce and Industry

NEP National Economic Policy

Niyyat intention

Nizamuddin International headquarters of Jamā'ah Tablīgh

in India

NU Nahdlatul 'Ulamā'

PAS the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party
PII Indonesian Muslim Students

PERMIM Malaysian Indo-Muslim Organization
PKPIM National Association of Malaysian Islamic

Students

PKS Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, Prosperous Justice

Party

PMII Indonesia Islamic Students Movement

Purdah veiling/screening of women Pondok Islamic boarding school

Rumah Putih White House Sangatan consolidation

Sarong traditional sheath dress for Muslim

Satpam security guard Suddhi purification

Sultan king

Shalāt Muslim prayer five times a day, from early

morning until late of night. The name of

prayers are shubuh, dhuhur, 'ashar, magrib and

'isha.

Tafakkud interview Ta'āruf introduction

Ta'lim study request

Teungku Imūm religious leader in Acehnese village

Tukang becak trishaw driver Tukang bangunan labourer

UKM Malaysian National University

Ulil amri leaders

Ummah Islamic community

UMNO the United Malays National Organization

Umrah a small hajj

Unjank small wallet that hangs on the neck

Ustāż teacher

Warung traditional restaurant

YADIM the Islamic Da'wa Foundation Malaysia

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Banda Aceh, 17 September 2014

KBA

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

This book presents an ethnographic study of the Jamā'ah Tablīgh¹ in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Jamā'ah Tablīgh (JT) is reputed to be the largest of the numerous movements and organisations dedicated to the revival, reform or revitalisation of Islam that emerged in the twentieth century. It was founded by a charismatic Indian 'alim (religious scholar) Mawlana Ilyas (1855-1944), from his base in the Dar ul-'Ulum, a reformist Sufi madrasah (religious school) in Deoband near Delhi. From its base in India, Jamā'ah Tablīgh grew rapidly so that now it is active in "almost every country with a significant Sunni Muslim presence" (Sikand, 2007: 129).

Among the places to which Jamā'ah Tablīgh has spread and has had a great deal of success in attracting new members – initially from members of the South Asian Muslim diaspora and subsequently from among the majority population of ethnic Malays – is Malaysia. JT has also managed to establish a significant presence in neighbouring Indonesia, the country with the world's largest Muslim population.

It is often said that Islamic revivalism in Southeast Asia came from the Middle East and in recent years a number of studies of Islamic revivalism have stressed the connections between the two regions (Abu Bakar, 1991). Most such studies are particularly concerned with uncovering the roots of so-called Islamic radicalism in Southeast Asia by linking Islamic revivalism to the perceived growth of Islamic political agendas (based on the implementation of Islamic law and the establishment of an Islamic state), tracing these back to developments in Middle Eastern Islam.

My interest in studying Jamā'ah Tablīgh stemmed in part from my sense that, although it had perhaps become the largest movement for

¹ Jamā'ah Tablīgh is variously known as the "jamā'ah" (party), "tahrīk" (movement), "nizām" (system), "tanzīm" (organisation), "tablīgh" (missionary), and "tahrik-i-imān (faith movement).

Islamic revival in Malaysia, and attracts steadily increasing numbers of followers in Indonesia, it did not fit what was becoming the dominant model of a Southeast Asian Islamic movement, including its South Asian rather than Middle Eastern roots. This led me to a number of questions about the relationship between JT and the general understanding of Islamic organisations in the region. What are the sources of their views and beliefs, and who and what are the main influences on their ways of life? How do members see themselves as Muslims? To what extent do they identify themselves instead as members of a transnational Islamic community? What social networks have been formed among members of the Jamā'ah Tablīgh in Southeast Asia? In other words, how do they negotiate their transnational activities, such as travelling to preach Islam, while maintaining their group membership and family ties? And how are their families supported economically while they devote themselves to their religious activities?

There is quite large literature on Islamic revivalism and Islamic radicalism in Malaysia and Indonesia (Salleh, 1999: 39-64; Abu Bakar, 1980; Anwar, 1987, 2003; Baharuddin, 1983, 1998, 1999; Dobbin, 1974; Hafez, 1997; Mansurnoor, 1997, 2003; Eliraz, 2004; Lim, 2005; Thomas, 1988; Hamid, 2000; Azra, 2004; Jamhari, 2005; Sirozi, 2005; Effendy, 2004; Zada, 2002; Federspiel, 1999; and Crouch, 2005; Nagata, 1980, 1984, 1983, 2006; and Jomo and Shabery, 1992). Of these works, only a few deal peripherally with the role of Jamā'ah Tablīgh (Nagata, 1980 and Jomo and Shabery, 1992) while two focus almost exclusively on it: the first, by Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah (1992), which compares JT with Darul Arqam,² and the second, by Abdul Aziz (2004), who studies the movement in Indonesia by looking at its nature and history in some certain provinces in Java.

Particularly important for my study is the book edited by Muhammad Khalid Masud (2000) which gives rich data on the nature of this movement, already transnationalised from its emergence in 1926. There are also some studies of JT which treat it as a fundamentalist, radical, Sufist, missionary and/or terrorist organisation (Ahmad, 1991; Rashid, 2006; Sikand, 2007; Reetz, 2003, 2005). My study therefore does not aim primarily to fill a gap in the literature. As we shall see, the case of Jamā'ah Tablīgh challenges this way of characterising Islamic movements. My aim in analysing this movement is similar to that of Charles Taylor, who sought to characterise the Reform Master Narrative (RMN) within

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² On Darul Arqam, see Seng (2005, 2005b); Nagata (2004); Hamid (2004); Salleh (1994); and Hassan (2006). This movement was banned in 1994 in Malaysia; see an analysis in Meuluman (1996: 43–78).