“Latah” phenomenon: a review within Malay Culture and Islamic Spiritual
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ABSTRACT
This paper discussed regarding latah phenomenon in communication practice. The objectives of this review is to identify the causes and the implication to the people who having it, either it is a Malay culture or in Islamic practice. Modern studies viewed latah phenomenon as an emotional behavior that happen involuntarily. A serious form of this behaviour can gave a deep impact till they can do abnormal thing extremely. Latah behaviour are belief to be associated with neuron function, psychology and culture-bound. Varies definition by Psychologists and Physician to define latah for example psychosis, hysterical psychosis, arctic hysteria, reactive psychosis, starle reaction, fright neurosis, hypnosis state and psycho dramatic shamanic. Latah behaviour did not show the true personality of the effected person. Studies showed latah behaviour found in south east Asian especially in Malays. Islamic prospective describes latah as syatahat. Syatahat phenomenon happened to Sufism experts such as Mahyudin Ibu Arabi, Al-Hallaj dan Abu Yazid Bustamir had created a polemics among Islamic religious. The Islamic experts’ from Sunnites member did not accepts this Sufism views due to latah problem.

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Wilkinson (in Winzeler, 1995, Roslina, 2008) had written about “The Queen had latah and acted like a crazy women without her consciousness”. The record from Wilkinson showed latah phenomenon already exists long time ago in Malays society, even within in royal palace. Study from H.A O’Brien reviewed latah was not exists in Chinese, India and Bengali society. According to Kenny (1978), latah is a psychology phenomenon that happens in South East Asian community due to colonization by western colony. It’s created a fearful surrounding and shock towards foreigner authority.

Within a Malay culture, thus individual affected by latah had been categorized as entertainer to others. Their spontaneous response such as jumping, hitting or word as “oh pocot”, stupid “, ‘oh mak kau” can make people laugh. They also will obey any command to act as old lady, healer and popular artist (Masittah, 2008). According to Mohd Ali (2008), not all will latah bad words, some people used prayer words repetitively when being startled. However some cases may cause danger especially when they are holding sharp object.

Generally latah in South East Asia is a form of spontaneous response, and lose their self control when they are startling or receiving any sudden shock. Because of hypersensitivity to sudden fright, latah happen either in echopraxia, echolalia or command obedience. Latah phenomenon in Malay society had their own culture evolution.

Latah In Islamic Spiritual

Abdul Fatah Haron (1984) wrote, latah phenomenon or syatahat also occurs within islamic experts, without being control by mind and sense, they had spontaneous inappropriate words. Mustafa Muhammad al-Jiyasi from his book “Recognised our self & Allah executor” said when the sufi had fana’, he will lose his self control and to surrounding creatures at that moment repetatatively latah (syathah) with ittihad (combine with GOD) words such as:

1. Ma Fill Jubbatti illallah (Nothing in my robe excepts Allah)
2. Ana al Haq (I’m the truly god)
3. Ana Man Ahwa, Waman Ahwa Ana (I’m the loved God and God that I love is me)

Mustafa (2009) explained the reasons of latah among Islamic sufi because of sense of enjoyment jizbah that occurs during fana’. Unconsciously they speak “No GOD excepts me” or “I’m the truth GOD” and “GOD don’t eat rice is me”. According to him, the spontaneous words actually discrIBE the true about ALLAH; not mean to be a GOD.

Latah by Islamic Sufi

Among latah words which were recorded by Islamic intellectual for example are:

i. Ibnu Arabi

His words in al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah:

“A slave is a GOD and GOD is a slave”. I hope I will know, to whom I have to give responsibility. If I said to a slave he is a slave or slave is a GOD, What the type of: work that I have to do for-HIM (Ibnu Arabi)

ii. Al-Hallaj

Al-Hallaj expressed his word in a poem:

“I is U, no doubt"  
Glory be to Allah, Glory be to me  
Tauheed Allah is mine

Muslim Scholars and Latah

Muhammad Asrie (2009) explained syatahat (latah) among sufi creates a problems such as in fana’ lead to ittihad (combine with GOD), Hulul (combine GOD with other creatures) the wihdatul Wujud (combine with GOD and creatures).

Usuluddin expertist from Sunnist group did not accept sufism of Ibnu Arabi Al Hallaj and Abu Yazif al- Bustami because of latah. A reasons is, is it acceptable to human who always had latah speaks infidel words?. As an example, Ibn Arabi, writer of al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah, Fusus al-Hikam, Insan Kamil ect., wrote the kitab in latah situation till we had to give excuses?. Can a human that having latah and under emotional control can wrote with a beautiful sentences?. Most of sufi did not accept al-Hallaj concept and create an anger among fuqaha’.

According to al- Qardawi (2009) a view from sufi has changed. A changes from behaviour and soul concepts to a new concepts that beyond normality. The extreme one was Al-Ghaulu bil Halul wa Wahdatul-Wujud (Allah and his server united) from al-Hallaj, one of the sufi that hanged to death in 309 H due to his words “I am a GOD”.

Nurcholish Majid in Islamic Media Info (2008) recorded about 37 islamic experts from various branch of Islamic knowledge such as Aqidah (Faith), Tasawwuf (Sufism), Hadits (Prophetic Traditions), Usul Fiqh, Islamic history and sociology against sufi Ibnu Arabi concepts due to syatahat. They were Ibnu Sayyid An-Nas (wafat 734H), Ibnu Daqieq Al- ‘led (w 702H), Ibnu Taimiyyah (w 728H), Ibnu Al-Qayyim Al-Jauzi (w 751H), Qadhi ‘Iyyadh (w 744H), Al-Iraqi (w 826H), Ibnu hajar Al-Asqalani (w 852H), Aluddin Al-Bukhari, Abu Zurah, Al-Udh (w 757H), Al-Jurjani (w 814H), At-Taftazani (w 792H), Muhammad ibnu Ali bin Yaqub (w 814H), Abi Hayyan (w 654H), Taqiyuddin As-Supibi, Isa Ibnu Mas‘ud Az-Zawawi (w 743H), Ali Ibnu Yaqub Al-Bakri, Al-Baalisi (w 829H), Ibnu Nuqas (w 763H), Ibnu Hisyam (w 761H), Syamsuddin Ibnu Muhammad Al-Azari, Lisanuddin Ibnu Khatib (w 766H), Muhammad Ibnu Ahmad al-Bishati, Ibnu Khayyath (w 811H), Ismail Ibn Abi Bakri Al-Muqri (w 875H), Izzuddin Ibn Abdissalam (w 660H), Ibrahim Ibnu Daud Al-Amidi (w 797H), Abu Bakar Ibnu ‘Ashim Al-Kinani, Sulaiman Ibnu Yusuf Al-Yusufi (w 739H), Ali Ibnu Abdillah Al-Ardabili (w 746H), Musa Ibnu Muhammad Al-Anshari (w 803H), Burhanuddin Al-Biq‘ai (w 858H), Ibnu Khalidun (w 808H), An-Nawawi (w 676H), Az-Zahabi (w 748H), Al-Bulqini (w 805H) dan Al-Maushili.

However a study by Zakaria Stapa (2001) revealed an islamic experts such as Ibrahim Bayyumi Madkur, Abd Wahhab al-Sharani, Abu al-Ula Afisi dan M.M Sharif, Abu Nashr as-Siraj al-Tusi said latah from sufis needs a deep understanding. Al-Siraj defined syatahat as a unique expression that happen due to a deep feeling of love to GOD. It is a special, unique, imaginative and sometimes unratational. Physically it looks extremely mislead however emotionally it a true belief.
According to Mukhlis (2002), it is difficult to understand sufi words especially by al-Hallaj and Ibnu Arabi because their spiritual feelings expressed in words. To understand syatahat sufiyah, we cannot use in literal way because it can be misleading. Sufi is a group of Allah lover and their life and soul truly for Allah.

Muslim scholars that against the sufi who had syatahat and did not accept Sufism concepts from them was decreasing when al-Ghazali explained the sufi concepts still can provide a assured guidance. Al-Ghazali legitimate the sufiism till ma'rifah level and agree of fana', baqa' and ittihad. He also heathened Abu Yazid and al-Hallaj in view of syatahat but heathened al-Farabi and Ibn Sina in a few things regarding philosophy.

Conclusion

Latah had it own influence and strength in Malay culture. Its existence among Malays makes a difference to other culture. It makes Malays as a unique race and has it own identity. While latah within the Islamic spiritual create a polemics among scholars of Fiqh and sufism. Latah is a phenomenon that contains complex emotional facts and needs careful understanding. More empirical study are needed to analysis in broad concepts such as psychology, language, medical and religious view so the mystery will be revealed.

Rujukan