

Islamic Values: Travelling through the Last Laugh

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Abstract:- According to Ahmad Rafiki and Kalsom (2014), religion is one of the most influential social institutions that is significantly associated with people's attitudes, values, and behaviours. In Islam, values are every single thing Allah has prescribed as good, true, and useful. The two main sources and references of Islamic values are al-Quran and Hadith. In the light of faith, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the Islamic values in *The Last Laugh*. This fiction is written by Kris Jitab in his compilation of short stories entitled 'Victor's Last Wish and More Yarns' published in 2004. The author portrays his literary skills in the form of writing. Since he was born in the setting of place of his short story, Sarawak, he successfully shares his knowledge of the environment, culture, and identity. He combines the emotions of desire, ambition, love, rejection, and self-deception through the characters' eyes. He is witty and brilliant enough as he signals the dark sides of following the tradition blindly especially when it is harmful towards the society. Hence, travelling through *The Last Laugh* to highlight the Islamic values will be of a great help to Muslim readers in understanding and digesting the story from the Islamic perspectives.

Index Terms: culture, Islamic values, religion, tradition.

I. INTRODUCTION

Discussions on moral values manage to attract attention from various parties since ages. The main focus of the discussions is mainly on attitude, habit, behaviour, etiquette, and other human activities. Next, with regards to evaluation, by assessing the value of the behaviour, whether it is good or bad and so on. However, the question is on what is the standard in determining whether an action is good or bad, sinful or not? Various answers we can obtain when we analyse and understand the concept of ethics and moral values themselves. Ethics came from a Greek word *ethos* which means law, culture, custom, and etiquette. Meanwhile, Latin which mainly inherits Greek culture also uses the word *mores* for the same concept. *Mores* is a root word for *moral* which is defined as morality, courtesy, politeness, tradition, and many more that determine the standard or norm.

Nonetheless, there is individual who relates ethics and moral values with community rules which consist of manner and discipline of the society. Rules of the common people

are referred to as tradition, norm, habit or custom, value and taboo of the society. Community rules exist not within an individual. In addition, rules exist or emerge, as well as set by authorities in the community [2]. Moral for the non-Muslims is determined by ethics. Ethics are philosophies on axiology (theory on values). Values which seem good by the ethics are known as good values, while the values which seem bad are known as bad values or immoral behaviours.

Islamic values are not a theory. Therefore, the concept is not the same as ethics which were brought upon by the Western world. Islamic values are spiritual attitude of glorifying human behaviour towards Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala (SWT), towards themselves and other creatures, according to orders and prohibitions, as well as guidance from the Qur'an and Hadith. Positive values are known as *mahmudah* and negative values are known as *mazmumah*.

According to Gazalba [3], Islamic values are determined partly by *akhlaq*. *Akhlaq* is an Arabic word in plural form from the word *al-khuluq* which means manner, behaviour, and habit [4]. Imam al-Ghazali defined the term *akhlaq* as attitudes embedded in a person's soul and from there behaviours are shaped easily without the need of prior thinking. When one is in the state of soul, positive and commendable values will unleash in accordance with intellect and Islamic law, it is known as good *akhlaq*. If the other way round, it is known as bad *akhlaq* [5]. The purpose of conducting this analysis is to identify the existence and influence of Islamic values in Kris Jitab's short story. Among the emphasized Islamic values are be kind to others, respect your parents, love each other, have faith, set a good example, visit the sick and elderly, give to the needy, forgive and forget, guard your modesty, perfect your character, maintain unity, practice justice and equality, be grateful, be honest, and be patient [6].

II. METHODOLOGY/MATERIALS

A short story entitled *The Last Laugh* by Kris Jitab was selected and analysed using qualitative approach in this study in order to explore and discuss the Islamic values. Study of this nature in the context of Borneo and literary text is almost scarce. This methodology is employed since one of the good ways in educating readers is through incorporating Islamic education in reading short story. After all, previous researches were mostly and specifically on moral values.

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III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

There are more immoral values rather than Islamic values in *The Last Laugh* if readers simply indulge in the explicit plot of the short story. It is most likely because of the tradition and belief not only of the characters' respective clan, but also of the author's experience or background. Borneo is known for its multicultural society, not only for its different races, but also for its diverse clans, especially in Sarawak. Based on the study, this short story has elements of Islamic values. However, they are presented indirectly through the lessons learnt. Kris Jitab wants his readers to carefully read and try to digest his intended agenda. It would be much better if more short stories from the other parts of Borneo (Sabah, Indonesia, and Brunei) were analysed in this research in order to have a concrete summary with regards to the importance of Islamic values. Besides the small number of Borneo authors, there is another constraint in relation to the availability of short stories within the Borneo setting.

IV. DISCUSSION

In *The Last Laugh*, Kris Jitab clearly portrays five Islamic values including being trustworthy (*amanah*), helpful, polite, responsible, and grateful through the characters (Rok Hasson, Lisbet, Rok's father).

First of all, the lesson of the story is do not make false promises. Lisbet made a few promises to Rok. The first promise is she will marry him if he gets a job. Then, once he got the job, she said she will marry him if he successfully completed his probation and become a permanent staff. The last promise is she will marry him if he becomes a headhunter and manage to get a human head or in other words, kill someone. Lisbet should keep her first two promises. After all, fulfilling promise towards Allah or promise towards other people is by being truthful. Fulfilling promises is one of the Islamic values which makes one a trusted person, hence, he will easily excel in whatever he does. This is an attitude which one can be proud of by those who consider themselves as modern and claim that as one of the factors which lead to success and prosperous society. It is compulsory for every Muslim to keep their promises. One is sinful if he makes promise and he does not fulfil it without a valid excuse, since breaking promise is one of the immoral values of the hypocrite (*munafiq*). Islam considers lying as bad, even worse, lying is considered as an attitude and common among the non-believers. Islam prohibits its believers from lying and threatens them with the worst retribution. However, Rok should not blindly listen to Lisbet just because he wanted her to accept his marriage proposal. Killing one is sinful. Lisbet looked down on Rok, he should realize that Lisbet was just trying to find excuses not to marry him.

Secondly, the story begins with hardworking Lisbet helping her mother by making trips fetching water from the Ensalai River for cooking and drinking. Indeed, every single part of our body has been created by Allah SWT for various functions that have been determined. The sole purpose of living is that human should always do good deeds by being helpful and hardworking. The rights of parents occupy a special place in the Islamic society. Islam has greatly

emphasized the rights of parents and it is given priority over all human rights. It is considered in importance only next to the right of Allah. As a child, Lisbet gave loving and kind treatment towards her mother and they are highly recommended when the parents have grown old, physically weak, and mentally feeble. She pleased and served her mother. The rights of parents include active sympathy, patience, gratitude, compassion, and respect. It also includes support, maintenance, and provision of a reasonable life of comfort according to one's ability [7].

Thirdly, Rok treated Uncle Ramuong, the fortune teller, politely. He used good words, expressions, and actions. Islam has given guidance for man on how to mix around, do business, and communicate with others in the community. Every individual will feel safe, calm, and peaceful, as he knows that he is surrounded by others who are highly civilised, loving, caring, and not wild and savage creatures that only look for opportunities to poach him. Among the teachings encouraged by Islam are one should be polite and soft-spoken in getting along with others, one does not have to use violence or brutality in words or even in action. Rasulullah SAW said, "Indeed, politeness does not stick to one unless one beautifies it, and does not rip from one unless one spoils it". In another occasion, Rasulullah SAW added, "Indeed, Allah is the Most Polite, He loves politeness in any matter" [8]. Being polite and humble does not only happen to certain group of people, however it happens to those who are far or near, regardless of sinful, evil or good. Polite and humble should be shown towards everyone including those who go against the rules and commit sins.

Fourthly, Mr Hasson was portrayed as a responsible father in this short story. He did not hesitate to fund Rok in preparing for his interview and to start his job. He was willing to sacrifice his last few pennies that he saved. Mr Hasson raised Rok by being supportive and believing in his child. A child is a trust from Allah to parents. They are responsible to educate the child with good and proper values. If education makes the child a *soleh* (good) person, so parents also will be rewarded and on the other hand, if proper education is not given, parents will share the same retribution on the Day of Judgment. A hadith from Ibn. Umar r.a., he said, I heard Rasulullah SAW said, "...a man is a leader and responsible towards his family members, a woman is a leader and responsible towards her marriage life, her husband, and her children..." [9].

Finally, Rok was depicted as a grateful individual. When the personnel manager announced that he was absorbed as a permanent staff of Sarawak Shell Oilfields Limited, he was very happy. He shook the personnel manager's hand. Grateful or thankful is a feeling or a positive attitude in appreciating the benefit or bounty. In Islam, we should be grateful to people who make us happy. In essence, we should be grateful to Allah. It is not just by saying thank you, but also in our action and way of life. Being grateful is a must for the servants of Allah. Allah SWT promises to add more pleasures to those who are grateful, meanwhile retribution awaits for those who refuse to acknowledge His bounty.

V. CONCLUSION

To put it briefly, open discussion on Islamic values with Muslim children and students is vital since Islam is a way of life, not a choice. Besides that, parents and teachers should also discuss on immoral values in order to help the children and students distinguish between good and bad, educate, train, and share knowledge (*‘Ilm*), so that they will not forget. By having knowledge, they can practice and strengthen the Islamic values. The Muslim world is facing challenges and obstacles in raising good Muslims especially in this modern era where there are wide selections of reading materials online. Apart from short stories, even poems, novels, dramas, songs, and movies have major influence in the way our young ones behave. For example, based on a research, in a two-hour English movie, there is an average of 11 times of smoking scenes on the silver screen [10]. In *The Last Laugh*, there are a few events on alcohol drinking which is highly prohibited by Islamic law. In time to come, more research of this nature should be conducted on other literary works revolving around Borneo setting or written by Borneo writers to add to the existing effort in introducing Borneo as part of the Muslim world.

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