

## **A SURVEY OF PROBLEMS FACED BY CONVERTS TO ISLAM IN MALAYSIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Islamic conversion is a common daily activity in Malaysia, but there are some problems faced by Muslim converts after their conversion to Islam. These problems could be due to many reasons, such as lack of knowledge, realization, confirmation or confused acceptance of the religion or the sociological complexities or the negative impact of surroundings. Islamic conversion is a voluntary *ruhani* acceptance of Islamic faith. It could be done at any time by a non-Muslim privately or publically by declaring the *kalimah shahadah*. However, the issue of conversion is complicated. The transition period experienced by the converts attests their inner conflicts adapting to their new surroundings. Their parental faith may no longer be relevant, but adopting a new religion and living in the same society with different traditions of the old religious faith could lead to traumatic inner conflicts which are invisible. Consequently, these feelings may gradually direct them to various conflicting feelings towards Islam on two continuum; negative insights or otherwise. Research studies have been done about Islamic conversion and its procedures, challenges of Muslim converts, religious authorities and their responsibilities, religious laws and state enactments, about conversion, welfare of Muslim converts and many more. While every convert is different, and his or her experiences differ from person to person, it can be said that majority of converts conform to certain mould. There are identifiable phases which they go through after conversion; elation, emphatic enthusiasm, fanaticism, disillusionment, weakness, and renewal. This survey is to explore certain problems faced by Muslim converts in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Islamic conversion, problems of Muslim converts, transition period, inner conflicts, process of change.

### **Introduction**

There are many problems Muslim converts face after their conversion to Islam. Some are visible, while others are invisible; some are sociological while some are from the converting authorities themselves. These problems could be due to many reasons such as lack of knowledge, realization, confirmation or confused acceptance of religion or the sociological complexities or the negative impacts of surrounding. This study is intended as a journey through the research files of scholars.

Islamic conversion is a voluntary *ruhani* (Islamic spirituality) acceptance of Islamic faith and hence it is very personal. It could be done at any time by a non-Muslim privately or publically; he or she simply needs to declare the *kalimah shahadah* (The Muslim testimony of faith) after understanding its meaning and accepting its message. The religious condition of the true conversion is the acceptance of the truth of Islam after knowledge, realization, confirmation and voluntary declaration of *kalimah shahadah*; that is to declare that *I bear*

*witness that there is no god to be worshipped except Allah and I bear witness that Prophet Muhammad is the final Messenger of Allah. Once, the converts confirm their inner conscience to the condition of the true conversion then only they can become a mu<sup>c</sup>min(true believer).*

However, the issue of conversion is complicated. The transition period experienced by the converts attests their inner conflicts adapting to their new surroundings. Their parental faith may no longer be relevant, but adopting a new religion and living in the same society with different traditions of the old religious faith would lead to traumatic inner conflicts which are invisible. Consequently, these feelings may gradually direct them to various conflicting feelings towards Islam on two continuum, negative insights or otherwise. It is the impact of the inner conflicts involving the invisible feelings of the converts that lends weight to the concern of this study. The inner conflicts involving the invisible feelings of the new Muslim converts are caused by various factors. Among others are religion, *ruhani* and sociological aspects, or any other self motivated negative feelings or it could also be a real test from Allah s.w.t.

Today there is a dire need for *Islamic ruhani* based solution to solve the problems faced by Muslim converts which will also help to eradicate misconceptions about Islam from the eyes of the Muslims and non-Muslims. Sociological stability and family harmony could be established among the converts with their spouse/family. This study will show to every Muslim convert that “*Conversion into Islam will never be a wrong choice and will never be a cause for regret at all*”.

### **Literature review**

Malaysian scholars have done much research regarding the converts in major local universities such as National University of Malaysia (UKM), University Malaya (UM), University Science Malaysia (USM), and in other institutions of higher studies.

Research studies have been about Islamic conversion and its procedures, challenges of Muslim converts, religious authorities and their responsibilities towards Muslim converts, religious laws and state enactments about conversion, welfare of Muslim converts and their education and many more. Most of the researches are done through library materials of earlier findings and direct interviews with the converts and the conversion authorities at Degree, Masters and Ph.D levels. The key words are *Our brothers, Muslim brothers, Saudara baru, Muallaf Malaysia*.

The scope and focus of the earlier research were mainly about management and administration of Muslim converts authorities, *da<sup>c</sup>wah*, education and steadfastness of Islamic life of Muslim converts, challenges and problems of Muslim converts in respect of their faith, and *‘aqidah* issues such as *murtad*. In addition, implementation and weakness of *syari<sup>c</sup>ah* laws, civil laws of the country were also subjects of research. The following are some of the earlier research works that have been done in Malaysian Universities.

In one study, Suhaila Abdullah (2006) explains certain problems faced by Chinese Muslim converts after their conversion to Islam, especially Malaysian Chinese Muslim converts. Although, this research focused on Malaysian Chinese Muslim converts, the stated problems are similar to that of every convert in Malaysia. These kinds of problems may lead to certain negative invisible feelings from time to time in the converts before, during and after

their conversion. The following are the stated problems in her research; the place of residence, cultural shock and transformation of identity, identity crisis, the impact of being referred to as *mu'allaf*, the weakness of *'aqidah* among the Muslim converts, acceptance by Malay society, financial problems, lack of proper Islamic knowledge, misunderstanding and misconception of Islam, boycott of non Muslim family, confidential or secret conversion, fear of losing Chinese identity, acceptance and usage of Islamic name, confusion of converting to Islam or becoming *Melayu*, ill treatment from Muslim community or racial issues of Islamic conversion, loss of jobs because of Islamic conversion, lack of support from Muslim community, feelings of inferiority complex when with the Muslim community, unwanted attitudes of religious authorities, the challenges during the conversion and with the registration procedures, attending in obligated official Islamic classes or Islamic compulsory courses over an extended period of time .

Malaysian Chinese Muslim converts have been living together with Muslims and non-Muslims in Malaysian multiracial country since their birth, but they still have to face some of the above mentioned problems from time to time after their conversion to Islam. Certain problems may become the subversive emotional inner conflicts which may trigger outburst of anger at unexpected times. Some problems arise mainly from sociological impacts of conversion.

In Islam, how to establish sociological stability of Muslim converts at their cross cultural diversity is very clearly stated by M. Muslehuddin (1999) in his book *A comparative study of Islam and its social system* which says, "Islam takes a theological view of life which has a purpose and design to be fulfilled, the value of Islamic society lies in its morality and its norms of good and evil virtue and vice which are to be strictly observed by the divinely revealed knowledge." The scholar added Allamah Iqbal's (1915) statement in his *Asrar-e-khudi* (The secrets of the self) *exhorts the individual to develop his personality through faith and try to imitate God in His Attributes which are the real spiritual values that impart solidarity to the state and society alike. God is the locus of intrinsic values and the Qur'an is the source of moral law.* ( Allamah Muhammad Iqbal)

However, other religious sociological traditions also may be an established value orientated life style on earth but the Islamic sociological establishments are entirely different from others and other sociological life styles. A Malaysian non-Muslim who converts to Islam may question why he should change his parental religious traditions which are positive, and which are being practiced by many people. He himself had been practicing it throughout his life until his conversion to Islam. He persistently asks why he needs to change his non-Muslim sociological life style.

For the above questions the response of this survey study is that, the operative values undergo a change with the passage of time but the intrinsic values, the ideals never suffer a change and, as such, impart universal character to the moral precepts of Islam and it is such precepts that form the basis of Islamic society. Islam takes a theological view of life which has purpose and design to be fulfilled. Islamic life is a result orientated obedience of Allah's commands. Allah s.w.t says:

أَمَّنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نَفَرَقُ بَيْنَ  
أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

Meaning: "The Messenger believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith. Each one (of them) believeth in Allah, His angels, His books, and His apostles. "We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of His apostles." And they say: "We hear, and we obey: (We seek) Thy forgiveness, our Lord, and to Thee is the end of all journeys." (al-Baqarah 2: 285).

This study concurs with Maziah binti Husain's (1994) research findings where she stated that the lack of knowledge about Islam before conversion is a problem for Muslim converts. The lack of proper knowledge about Islam at the conversion certainly causes the Muslim converts many negative unwanted invisible feelings towards Islam. This fact is very clearly argued in this research work. The scholar showed the convert's level of knowledge before converting in to Islam in the following; 67.5% out of 30 Muslim converts have very little knowledge about Islam. 27.5 % out of 30 Muslim converts have no knowledge at all what Islam is in general. 5 % out of 30 people know much more about Islam. In this research, the scholar could identify what actually encouraged them to convert to Islam: 35 % of 30 people converted to Islam after they confirmed the truth of Islam, 27% out of 50 people converted to Islam just to get mental satisfaction, 20% out of 50 people converted because they love Islam, 12.5% out of 30 people converted because they wish to marry a Muslim and 5% out of 30 people converted because to escape from life's difficulties. Problems after the conversion include: 75% out of 30 people have *'ibadat* problems, 50% out of 20 people have family problems, 42.5% out of 17 people have problems in finding their place of residence, 35% out of 14 people have problems at their work place, 32.5% out of 13 have problems of social interactions and 30% out of 12 people have financial problems to the extent that they even do not have proper food.

In the research done by Shakirah Binti Mohd Annuar (2002) on *The understanding of Islam among the Muslim converts of Pulau Pinang*, she stated certain weaknesses of conversion authorities such as the time schedules for Islamic classes which are not convenient to those working Muslim converts, the untrained teachers or the inefficiency of the teachers to conduct Islamic classes, the disorganized syllabus or irrelevant Islamic books. This research study agree with the scholar when she highlighted the above problems faced by Muslim converts. These problems may also lead the new Muslim converts to uncertainty about their newly embraced religion. Subsequently, this may lead them to a confused stage where they may have some negative invisible feelings towards Islam.

In his research Yusri Bin Abu (2004), interviewed 135 Muslim converts about their understanding of *'aqidah Islamiyah*, but only those studying in JAWI and PERKIM; 80.47% of them could understand basic Islam while 44.44% up to 61.48% could only understand the *tawhidic* concepts of Islam. Yusri found that the Muslim converts could not understand properly about certain important *imanic* chapters of Islam such as the *mu'jizat and karamah, barzakh and yawm al-hisab*, and *sirat al-mustaqim*. Most of the Muslim converts agree that they are not given proper knowledge about the above subjects and they do not know the subjects.

This survey study concurs with the research work of Imanniah Binti Ishak (2002) in her study entitled *For the establishment of true and positive mental stability with tauhidic tasbith of Islamic faith of Muslim converts*,\_when she mentioned that the teacher for the Muslim converts should be professional and creative according to Robert F. Menergency

(1995) “professionals distinguish themselves from nonprofessionals in two important ways: by what they know and what they know how to do.” And also very accurately when she quoted “Creative teaching liken creative learning, capitalizes on the inspiration of judgment, sensitivity and intuitive insight.” (ibid).

Although the scholar stated that the teaching of religion will be done as a guide rather than a mere teacher who teaches the lessons, but he will be able to guide the converts with a divine role model character as Islam is divine truth with revealed knowledge and only accepts the truth. Islam hates hypocrisy or convenient teacher with his flexible moral teachings as anything can be done as you wish at your choice, neither hypocrisy nor false pretence is truth but by the divinely established moral lessons only could be a light to the darkness of heart.

According to Imanniah Binti Ishak (ibid), the teacher must be a *mu'addib*, *mu'allim*, *murabbi*. This research\_study would like to add that there is a need of *murshid* (One who guides or directs with divine light) to guide the *murid* ( Seeker, spiritual seeker ). This will be an appropriate teacher to eradicate all kinds of invisible negative feelings from the hearts of Muslim converts as the light of heavenly *irshad* ( *spiritual* Guidance )of divinely guided *ruhani murshid* will penetrate to the soul of *murids*. The importance of *ruhani* approach is very essential in educating the human soul that this truth is not only in Muslim converts, but also at every level of human society. Amaludin Abdul Rahman (1997) in his research *Pendekatan kaunseling individu dan kelompok dalam da'wah* (*Approach to individual and group counseling in Da'wah*) stated that the lack of Islamic *ruhani* education is a real problem among the 87.5% of students. He also added that the research finding of Noriah shows that the lack of proper Islamic *ruhani* knowledge among the students may lead to a very dangerous social imbalance and conflicts. This also may cause them to be fanatics in the future. Lack of Islamic faith realization within the converts is also a real problem as the faith realization is also the result of *ruhani* education.

According to the research titled “The methodology of *da'wah* to the Muslim converts in PERKIM Kelantan: A research study towards its impacts” by Mohd Sabri bin Ismail (2009) observe two main objectives; the first being the *da'wah* methodology of PERKIM Kelantan and secondly the impacts of *da'wah* activities of PERKIM Kelantan. The researcher selected 79 Muslim converts of PERKIM Kelantan and he found that 35.4% of them could understand Islam properly from the Islamic classes of PERKIM Kelantan. 70% of them agree that PERKIM class and syllabus are suitable and easy to understand but 69% of them requested to have more effective and advanced syllabus and 65 % of them are happy with the the organizers of the class, the number of classes, existing arrangements of the classes, the languages used to instruct the students, and also the hospitality. While in between the PERKIM head office and PERKIM branches there seems to be certain differences in the arrangements of Islamic classes, hence 50% of Muslim converts are happy, 50% of Muslim converts agree or are happy with the teachers and could follow their teacher’s instructions and 50% Muslim converts are happy with the welfare assistances of PERKIM Kelantan. The weakness from the PERKIM branches were also noted. In total 50% of Muslim converts are satisfied with PERKIM’s commitments and proactive approach to help the Muslim converts.

In respect of the challenges and issues faced by Muslim converts, Hery Mazlini Binti Nazri (2004) in her year-long series of research articles in her column *Isu isu Saudara baru dalam Utusan Malaysia*, a local daily news paper revealed few factors such as; why Muslim converts choose Islam as their religion, their challenges. She selected 12 Muslim converts who converted for marriage, 19 converts converted because they mix with Malay Muslims, some of them converted to Islam after they read the life histories of earlier Muslim converts,

some converted because their parents or relatives converted to Islam, some converted because of hearing *azan*, while some, just happen to be Muslims for unknown reasons or through *hidayah* from Allah (swt), listen to al-Qur'an, the true teachings of Islam, the concept of oneness of God in Islam. In her article of 4<sup>th</sup> Jun 2004, she wrote, Br. Muhammad Razali Abdullah's conversion history as he was questioned by a non Muslim about the relevance of Islam. That argument led him to become a Muslim. There are some articles in this research work which reveal the problems of Muslim converts such as objections from their family and relatives, but most of these problems are solved gradually while the Muslim converts deal with their family with Islamic *akhlaq* and wisdom approach.

Some other social problems faced by Muslim converts are also mentioned in her research articles, such as objection from friends, relatives, separation from the husband, wife, or children, banishment from the village, loss of job, imprisonment for conversion in to Islam [an Albanian Muslim convert named Mirush Kanashi (report 12 November 2004) lack of proper education about Islam, lack of hospitality or acceptance by fellow Muslims, inability to register the conversion officially for those below 18 years (considered under age), difficulties or adjustment to a new religion and its traditions and identity crisis.

In the research done by Hafizah binti Azmi (2004), she interviewed 18 Muslim converts aged between 33 and 37. Among those who attended Islamic classes of PERKIM with state of Kedah, 55.6% of them could understand Islam from these classes and 61.1% of them could achieve improvements in their *'ibadahs*. The research work concluded with the findings that these kinds of *da'wah* activities could only give a certain amount of effectiveness while the majority Muslim converts could not develop their Islamic personality and religious steadfastness. The scholar recommended that more effective and meaningful *da'wah* understanding programs be conducted which would be more suitable and will really benefit Muslim converts in the future.

In the research conducted by Juliana Binti Rojikan (2003), she selected 14 Muslim converts as her focus group in collaboration with the religious department of Sabak Bernam on 18 January 2004. She found that these programs (programs organized by the religious authorities) could only bring benefit to the Muslim converts in reforming their *akhlaq*, but their Islamic faith steadfastness and syariah adherence was found to be very weak. 93% of them perform daily prayers and 83% of them were fasting, 79% of them pay *zakat*, 100% of them modestly cover their bodies or observe *hijab* and practice conveying *salam*. 14% of them are performing optional prayers and practice *sunnah* traditions. The researcher could find that 100% of them safeguard their *haram* and *halal* limitations in their life, but tauhidic understanding of Islamic faith is weak with regard to comparative religious understanding.

The study also reveals some of the difficulties faced by the Muslim converts, such as the distance from their residence to the Islamic classes. This problem of distance really prevents 42% of them from attending classes regularly. 21% of them are facing family objections, 14% of them are not able to attend the classes due to their tight work schedules, 14% of them are not able to understand Bahasa Melayu classes, 14% of them are abandoned or neglected by the conversion authorities, 14% of them are facing social interactive problems; 7% of them are not supported by their life partners, 7% of them are confused about *madhhab* differences of Islamic teachings. The researcher found that majority Muslim converts are facing problems of attendance due to distance to the Islamic classes. Those who have been paid can only afford to attend classes and those who are facing real objections of their non Muslim family are also facing difficulties to attend the classes. The class time

schedule is also another factor that defers attendance as class starts at 5 pm and ends at 6pm. This is very difficult time for the working people in the town. The financial problem of Muslim converts is also a factor for not attending classes or not to further their Islamic studies. Often lack of support from the surrounding Muslim society also becomes a clear factor for the failure of Muslim convert's Islamic personality development.

The research findings of Norsa Binti Aziz (2000) reveal the effectiveness of the da'wah programs conducted by *pusat da'wah Islamiah* Negeri Sembilan with collaboration of the district's da'wah offices and other da'wah centre's or agencies of the state of Negeri Sembilan. Main classes include the basic Islamic understanding classes, which are conducted 5 days and 4 nights in a week, the weekend classes and the intensive Islamic courses towards understanding the Islamic culture and civilization for the Muslim converts of the state. The scholar selected 40 Muslim converts of different levels and educational backgrounds. Among those who attend the above classes only 42% of them are interested to attend the classes while 57.5% of them show very keen interest to attend the classes. The research from the direct interviews with the Muslim converts of the state also reveals that the most interesting program for the Muslim converts is the basic Islamic understanding class as it provides them with a clear picture of how to live as a Muslim in a Muslim society. 65% of them love to attend the class voluntarily while 30% of them are encouraged by their families; 5% of them are encouraged by their friends and the majority of participants show their happiness towards this program. According to them, this program contributes to better understanding of Islam.

Research by Zaidah Mohd Nor (2002) found that Indians converted to Islam mostly after comparative religious study and understanding of the oneness of God within their capacity of understanding and through their own readings or assisted by their friends. Even though some of them converted to Islam for marriage, most of them understand Islam from their friends and in some cases their family members are also very supportive of their conversion to Islam. The follow up sessions after the conversion also provide them with better understanding of Islam. The researcher also suggests that there is an urgent need to have help -line desk or special attention care center for Muslim converts as they are facing or may face more challenges in the future.

Halim Mokhtar's (2003) research focused on the acceptance of Islam by the aborigines of Pulau Carey, Banting, Selangor in respect of their knowledge of Islam and tolerant attitude towards Islam. Secondly, about their participation in Islamic programs conducted by JAKIM, JAIS, and JHEOA. This research found that aborigines of Pulau Carey village do not really understand Islam and are not interested in Islam. This could be justified by statics which shows that 92% of the populations of the aborigines of Pulau Carrey still believe in animism. If they understand Islam it will be very easy for them to accept Islam as their faith about their God is also very similar to Islamic *tauhidic* concept of oneness of God. The researcher recommends that *da'wah* authorities do more knowledge- based Islamic introductory programs in this village.

Research by Shakirah Mohd Anuar (2003) explores the effectiveness of *da'wah* and follow up programs for the Muslim converts conducted by the religious department of Pulau Pinang. The research shows that the programs are more focused on the Muslim converts in respect of the limitation period of three years during which they are known as *mu'allafs*. This limitation or duration is decided by the JAIPP and MAINPP and the research revealed that this period is not suitable. The result and feed back of the research questions, interviews and observations shows that Muslim converts are not properly guided or the existing programs are

not reaching the target of the welfare of Muslim converts in order for them to develop their Islamic personality.

This survey study totally disagrees with the idea of certain Muslim converts authorities that set a particular duration for the *mu'allaf*s to be known as *mu'allaf*. This is because the definition of *mu'allaf* is very wide, as mentioned in al-Qur'an, Chapter al-Taubah, verse 60. The name *mu'allaf* is not just for the sake of an identity purpose, but it is more towards the practical realization of Islamic faith and socio-economic stability of the Muslim converts and in particular for the acceptance of Islam by their non Muslim family members, and generally for the Muslim *ummah* as *fardu kifayah* to observe the well being of every Muslim convert. According to their jurisdiction this is a name, but it is an action orientated responsibility not a name to be used as a judgmental term for the others. This research will absolutely agree with the scholar Atikullah Hj Abdullah (2002), who contends that every Muslim convert has different capability to face different challenges and further more the duration for their understanding of Islam differs from person to person. Steadfastness of *iman* and faith also varies from individual to individual; hence the duration of the status of *mu'allaf* has to be different from person to person. That is why Allah s.w.t never sets a specific duration for the status of *mu'allaf*.

According to Atikullah Hj Abdullah (ibid), in Malaysia, it is unfortunate that the duration of the status of *mu'allaf* is decided by certain state religious authorities and also seem to differ from state to state. For example, in Selangor it is 3 years, in Kedah 2 years, Johor 5 years and Pulau Pinang 3 years. All these durations are set according to the office administration of the respective states and certainly not based on Islam. The encyclopedia Islam define the *mu'allaf* as the one whom if we give attention may enter Islam or the one is in need of strengthening his faith in Islam. According to *Kamus al-Istilah al-fiqh*, *mu'allaf* means the one who has been close to Islam but their *iman* is still very weak. They are among those qualified to receive *zakat*. According to Anuar Puteh, *mu'allaf* means the one who has declared *kalimah shahadah* and needs to be guided and assisted by the Muslim *ummah*, while al-Jaza'iri, one of the *muqallid madhhab* Imam al-Shafie, defines *mu'allaf* as those who are weak in *iman* and newly converted in to Islam and qualified for accepting *zakat*. Other non Muslims may be attracted to Islam by their presence in a society and that may lead non Muslims to enter Islam, *mu'allaf*s *iman* will be stronger if they are assisted by *zakat* contribution. Others may not disturb their faith by offering them alms to depart from Islam. *Mu'allaf*'s presence in a society may be attracted to the *zakat* contributors to perform their obligated duty of paying *zakat* at its prescribed schedules.

This survey study strongly disagrees with the authorities when they impose a duration of the *mu'allaf* "because a *mu'allaf* is a *mu'allaf* until he feels himself not a *mu'allaf*; others have no right to impose the status of *mu'allaf*". If the *zakat* authority need to define the qualification for the acceptance of *zakat*, as *mu'allaf* is mentioned in al-Qur'an as one of the *asnaf* to accept *zakat*, this research strongly argues that the *zakat* authority can easily accept the reason "why the *mu'allaf* still need the help" which could be a life long as he is in need of education or financial assistance or is trying to convince his non Muslim family members or he needs to show his non Muslim family that after conversion he is not reduced to become a beggar in the street. Somehow he is qualified to accept the *zakat* being a Muslim convert by the name of *mu'allaf*, definitely so if he is one of the *asnaf* of *faqir*, *misikin*, *mu'allaf*, *fi sabilillah* or *ibn al-sabil*, even though after many decades. How can the *zakat* authority ignore the above mentioned qualification of a *mu'allaf*? He is qualified until his death. Why



should there arise such a meaningless argument concerning the limitation of the name *mu'allaf*? This is their right indeed.

The research work of Aisyah Jami'an (2005) explores the acceptance of Islamic life among Indian Muslim converts and also the level of their understanding of *tawhid*, *ibadah*, and *akhlaq*. She selected 92 Muslim converts as research focus group with questionnaires and interviews and involved Muslim converts authorities. With literature reviews of earlier research works, she found that the main reason for Indians converting to Islam is for marriage. However, there are some Indian converts who are encouraged to convert to Islam due to their own research or due to their friends influence. The research reveals that being poor is an economic factor, which is a real obstacle for them to further their Islamic education after their conversion. Some of them could not even join Islamic classes conducted by JAWI, PERKIM and ABIM. The research study suggests that there is a special need of finding a long term solution for the Indian Muslim converts to further their studies. The Indian Muslim converts also request the authorities to help them to propagate Islam to their non Muslim families. If *da'wah* works are carried out by their own race and in their own effort the effectiveness will be more pronounced.

This survey study concur and reaffirm the above mentioned research works of respected scholars whose works explore mainly two important factors: Firstly the beauty of Islamic acceptance by Muslim converts in Malaysia by various ethnic groups and their success or failure. Secondly, the reason for the Muslim convert's success and the reasons for their failure. The success could be accepted as a gift of Allah and the failure could be the failure in the *da'wah* movement itself. The responsibility of failure goes to the Muslim convert authorities, agencies and Muslim society.

### **Apostasy in Malaysia:**

Apostasy among converts is an issue in Malaysia although statistics show apostasy cases in Malaysia is very minimal. Subsequent impact of apostasy reflects negatively on the image of Islam and its believers. Perhaps, negative invisible feeling of converts toward Islam contributes to apostasy or may be false or insincere conversion or conversion without knowledge about Islam contributes to apostasy. It is not uncommon for conversion to take place due to reasons other than religion for example marriage. Meaningful conversions can only take place through physical acceptance inspired by spiritual light for which the result is spiritual joy. More often than not, conversion marks the beginning of endless problems for a convert because the responsibilities of religious bodies, the Muslim society or the Muslim family are not well defined and fail to meet the needs of converts in terms of guidance and support to acquire true Islamic teachings

For example, the case of Siti Fatimah or Tan Ean Huang as reported in *The Star* (May 09, 2008) when Tuan Othman Ibrahim, Penang Syariah Court judge, said he had no choice, but to allow an application by Siti Fatimah Tan Abdullah, a Malaysian citizen of Chinese origin, to renounce her faith and return to Buddhism. Siti Fatimah or Tan Ean Huang, said she had never practised Islam since she converted in 1998 and only did so to enable her to marry Iranian Muslim Ferdoun Ashanian. The couple married in 2004, but since then her husband has left her following which she filed for the renunciation. Othman said, it was clear from witnesses and the evidence presented that Siti had continued to practise Buddhism even after her conversion. The learned judge rebuked the state Islamic religious council for not

counselling and looking after the *ruhani* welfare of new converts. "In this case, it is clear that the council has failed to live up to its responsibilities and the outcome is clear for all to see," said the judge." That rebuke is particularly interesting as it appears almost as if to shield the inevitable criticism of allowing a convert to return to her original faith, the judge places blame upon the state for not making sure the convert became a good Muslim with true acceptance Islamic faith with its *ruhani* light.

This survey study would like to reject totally the permission for apostasy and disagree with those who say that a Muslim can renounce Islam. This research study agrees with the Judge Muhammad Husseini (Egyptian court 2008) when he told the administrative court, "He can believe whatever he wants in his heart, but on paper he can't convert." This is the criminal freedom inside the heart of a hypocrite. This research argues that Islam grants to every human being the freedom of choice but he is given the *‘aql* ( Intellect) and also the divinely revealed revelations and prophetic guidance to choose. Thus, he is responsible for his own crime to Allah s.w.t, but the social balance of Islamic *shari‘ah* (Islamic revealed laws) based on social life system of a society will not be allowed by any apostate to destroy it. Let no one play with the *shari‘ah* system by saying that 'I renounce Islam as and when I wish' as this is a social crime towards an established balanced society with its *shari‘ah* system based on tauhidic faith with its whole life system within the *shari‘ah* enforcement laws and personal laws of religiously obligated individual submissions.

By the same token as the five articles of Islam, personal *shari‘ah* laws, and *fardu kifayah* laws, *shari‘ah* based enforcement of laws on moral behavioral movements such as penalty for illegal sex, consumption of alcohol, gambling or theft. An apostate is punishable under the law of Islamic *shari‘ah*. For example, a man who breaks the social balance of a country by selling narcotic drug would be sentenced to death, and the death penalty is justifiable in order to prevent the whole nation from an epidemic of intentional spreading of infectious drug by selling, buying or possession of such drugs. Then this study would like to argue that the apostate should also be sentenced to death since he is not willing to regret what he has done intentionally as this person also breaks the existing law of a balanced society. However, Islamic capital punishments are carried out with justice and mercy by giving a person ample time to regret and to return to the truth with proper religious observations, close monitoring and special intensive religious guidance and classes. If he persists in his rebellious, bulldozing mentality to destroy the social balance, what other punishment would be appropriate more other than the decision that he no longer deserves to breathe the oxygen from the bounties of Allah in this world. It is the right of the Creator.

The argument here is, for non-Muslims converting into Islam, it is justified that they should accept the truth and its guidance. Islam is the truth and its teachings are universal. Islam is the way of life prescribed by the Creator of this universe for all human beings irrespective of nation, colour and race. Islam is the truth and is the property of every individual who could accept it with the realization and confirmation and with proper guidance and knowledge. For example, even a primary school student believes and understands that  $1+1=2$ ; this is the truth;  $1+1$  cannot be 3 or 1 or anything else, but only 2. This fact of mathematical truth is accepted universally; it is a truth of justice in mathematical formula, such is the truth of Islam. So, how can a person deny the truth of  $1+1=2$  and how can people with common sense support anyone if he argues against that. Hence, there is no apostasy in intellectual Islamic world. Apostasy is only available in the world of denial. There is an essential need for understanding the emotional transformations of human mental stages in order to understand more about the steadfastness of faith among the converts.

This survey study also would like to quote the words of Asiya N Rodrigo (2008), who is also a Muslim convert from Australia and a counselor by profession who emphasizes the importance of understanding Islam among Muslim converts and the need for understanding their problems. While every convert is different, and his or her experiences may differ to some extent, the majority of converts do conform to certain moulds. There are identifiable phases they may go through after conversion such as elation, emphatic enthusiasm, fanaticism, disillusionment, weakness, and renewal. The factors that contribute to fanaticism, disillusionment and weakness vary from confusion about the multitude of ideologies within Islam to difficulties being accepted as a Muslim, difficulties fitting in with other Muslims and disappointment with the wider Muslim community. Most converts are not sufficiently prepared for the process of change, and few are equipped with the skills one needs to overcome the hurdles one inevitably faces along the way. In many, change happens too quickly, or inappropriately. When no one seems to understand, and when Islam starts to become something it was never meant to be (a lonely torture), it becomes infamously easy to slip out of the fold of a once treasured religion.

### **Conclusion**

The problems of Muslim converts need to be tackled spontaneously as these problems may lead them to have many invisible negative feelings towards Islam. This must be settled through the real *tauhidic* (monotheistic) messages of al-Qur'anic and al-Sunnah in intellectual ways. Therefore, Islamic conversion needs to be studied religiously in all aspects to ensure positive impact of *ruhani* (*spiritual*) in Muslim converts as the basis for sustainable conversion. Religious authorities and surrounding Muslim societies should adhere to their religious obligations towards Muslim converts spiritual and physical welfare fulfilments. Their responsibilities need to become reformed time to time according to the variable situations of Muslim converts.

Thus acceptance of faith does not turn out to be a merely commercial transaction, but rather as a true acceptance of faith in the light of *hidayah* (Allah's guidance) sustainable in cross cultural diversity. In Islam, conversion is an act of acceptance of truth. As the convert could develop the positive tools of emotional, physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of the self, his life changed. There will be no more confusion of different stages and expressions of the self. His real life will vouchsafe him the opportunities that lead toward realizing his fullest health and mental balance, while intellectual and spiritual potentials are being recognized. He acts with a sense of urgency to address each stage as and when needed with his divinely guided way of life. Furthermore, obvious possibilities for positively integrating his body, emotions, mind, intellect, and soul increases. He discovers within him, a part of built-in "design," a complete system to help the development of a spiritual being. He finds that he has all that is needed to free himself at each step of his growth towards the Divine Presence.

The true *tauhidic qalb* (*Islamic monotheistic mind*) of a convert through the light of *Irfan* (*inner-light*) based guidance will help to eradicate the negative invisible feelings from their *qalbs* (mind) at their conversion into Islam to accept Islamic teachings with strong mental stability even in the presence of cross cultural diversity or at any unexpected situations. As he believes there is no other power and shelter except Allah, he will be led to merge with Allah, and as a result, the self-centric ego is completely eradicated and the conventional social self disappears to make station for the destination of the true inner equilibrium of faith in Allah. If an individual could control his character or behaviour, he can indeed arrive at a perfect

destination despite whatever obstacles he may face because <sup>c</sup>*aql* (intellect) can be controlled by true faith.

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