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## SPECIAL ISSUE

***Hannbal H. Bara***

Islamic Discourse on Hula-Bangsa-  
Agama: The Tausug Concept of State

***Meltino J. Sibulan***

Sultanate of Sulu: A Legal Discussion

***Allen I. Talikan***

Enhancing Transparency and  
Accountability on the Use of School  
Funds

***Sayyid A. Hannbal***

*Social Issues in Sulu and Its Islamic  
Solutions: The College Students  
perspective*

## **SOCIAL ISSUES IN SULU AND ITS ISLAMIC SOLUTIONS: THE COLLEGE STUDENTS PERSPECTIVE**

*By Sayyid A. Hannbal*

*Mindanao State University-Sulu*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Sulu is known as the bastion of Islam in the Philippines: the heartland. Despite being Muslims, the present inhabitants of Sulu are considered to be one of the poorest people with high illiteracy rate. The Tausug are facing social issues ranging from financial and spiritual troubles that are more detrimental than terrorism itself. On the other hand, Islam is being discarded by the majority rendering them unable to mend their lives.

Islam was brought to Sulu in 1250 by Arab missionaries. After two hundred years, Sulu was fully Islamized and the Sulu Sultanate was formed. The Sultanate represented the Golden Era of the Tausug where prosperity was widespread and more importantly, Islam was well-executed in the society. Description about vintage Sulu were mostly good. But it was the arrival of colonialism that disrupted Islam's grip on Sulu. Secular education became widespread and the leadership of the golden days was replaced. Islam had become a memory of a distant past.

This paper anchors on the idea that the eradication of social Issues of Sulu can still be attained through Islam. To attain this, leaders must employ Islamic principles and solutions in managing Sulu which would free the Tausug from foreign ideas that plunge the province under false ideology. This would consequently restructure the government and solve issues. Furthermore, Islam would be able to reach the Tausug more effectively, particularly the youth, as their lives would now be surrounded with Islamic principles. This study is based on survey. The principal research instruments are questionnaire, 100 random sampling mostly college students, statistical analysis, community immersion, and library work.

### **II. SOCIAL ISSUES CONFRONTING SULU**

A sampling size of 100 respondents of MSU-Sulu of the school year 2021-2022 were randomly invited to answer the questionnaire. The objective is to unravel the social issues faced by Sulu, the response of the local government unit and the solutions of Islam through the perspective of the youths.

Social Issues are predicaments that makes the flow of the society difficult for the normal everyday man and higher ups. In the case of Sulu, such statement is true and devastating. Furthermore, it affects the youths, which are the future of the society, and turns them into liabilities through the crippling circumstances. Now, there should be a codified documentation for aiding not just the youth but the entirety of Sulu and finally remove the effects of social Issues. The students are asked with this question:

#### **A. What are the social issues Sulu is facing?**

<b>Social Issues</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
1. Lack of understanding in Islam	2.56	Agree
2. Lack of Education/Illiteracy	2.38	Disagree
3. Inflation of prices	2.89	Agree

4. Income Gap	3.09	Agree
5. Lack of job opportunities	2.92	Agree
6. Insufficient basic needs	2.75	Agree
7. Healthcare Availability	2.90	Agree
8. Inequality	2.95	Agree
9. Instability	2.65	Agree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	2.78	Agree

The 2.78 mean suggests that the social issues presented were viewed as legitimate predicaments being faced by Sulu. The results implied that the following problems are being faced by the majority of the students:

#### **Income Gap**

Sulu's denizens are divided into groups: the rich and the poor. The separation between the two is wide because of income gap. A common story in Sulu's streets is that the poor works throughout the day for below average income of wage while the rich simply dominates the food chain. The said lore could result in demotivating incentives, social tensions and political unrest, declines in demand as a brake on growth (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2015). At present, the people in the poverty line is struggling to strive for a better occupation and secure basic needs. On the other hand, it is feared that the rich could manipulate the society through its money (Bernstein 2013). Such examples are the extending the grip on power, monopolizing the market and hindering the construction of infrastructure facilities

#### **Lack of Job opportunities**

Lack of job opportunities in Sulu harshly deprives the Tausug youth of better life and income. Youths do not feel motivated to pursue and finish education for there are no reward for their hard work. The effects of jobs do not affect the people financially, but in a macro level, it is the building mechanism of the normal citizens. Work is an organized human activity leading to the creation of products and services needed by the society, and on the other, to the acquisition of funds needed for development and improvement of living standards.” (Hajder, 2012) That's why Sulu is not progressing even with abundance of resources in its forests and seas for there are not enough people with jobs to sustain themselves.

#### **Healthcare Availability**

Healthcare availability is scarce particularly in the countryside. Healthy lifestyle is not a personal achievement but a collective advantage if attained by the majority of the population which could help alleviate the focus away from medicinal expenditure and invest in education and other venture beneficial. With that said, facilities and medicine should be accessible to the layman for health care and medical facilities are regarded to

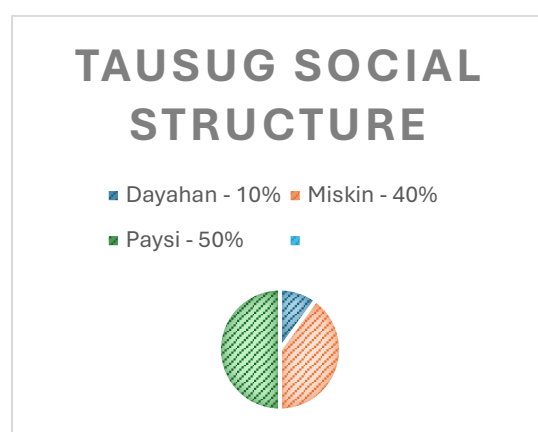
be of utmost significance in promoting health and well-being (Dr. Radhika Kapur). But with only 100 health centers in over 400 barangays of Sulu, the Tausug and its families are deprived of help from authorities. With a healthy Tausug community, it would be easier to progress in a world that requires optimal performance for human beings.

### **Inflation of Prices**

Inflation is a setback to the Tausug and is gaining more grounds with the recent gas crisis. It can bring bad influence on the structure of production costs and the level of welfare. Countries hit by inflation experience disruption in the level of welfare, could lead to social and political instability, and not create the economic growth (Sukarno, 2004).

In Sulu, inflation tends to grow up on a steady trend. The local authorities have no control as the local traders ignore the price regulation of the government. Example of this is the fuel price increase which keeps on worsening and do not experience no roll back. Basic commodities follow suit and result in the weakening of purchasing power of the masses.

### **Inequality**



*Dayahan* refers to the wealthy; *Miskin* refers to individuals who own land or have a job but with low income; *Paysi* refers to those who only have labor, does not own land or have a stable income.

Inequality is also present in Sulu where Jolo, the province's capital, is the only municipality to have considerable improvement over the years. The graph shows how there are only few Tausug who experiences satisfying standards of living and the rest of the Tausug barely prosper. This is evident in the youths and other age groups from *gimba* as they struggle tremendously to cope in education, employment and attaining basic needs. Deficiencies like inequality of opportunity, especially in areas like access to high-quality education, adequate healthcare and decent employment are prevalent in the said groups. Such inequalities can lock in privilege and exclusion and prevent people from poorer families from moving up in society and making the most of their potential (Brian Keely, 2015). The issue with instability is that it limits people and potentially cause division among the population.

### **III. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

With the government/leaders serving as the patriarch of the people, it is fitting that their work should be on point and effective in making the lives easier. However, local leaders have subpar administrative capability as the vying for power is simply a family occasion. Furthermore, there is no foresight or road map for the Tausug and their

predicaments. Social issues must be given utmost priority as they are detrimental to people's welfare. Leaders must be scrutinized not for the sake of bickering but as a form of constructive criticism and bring awareness to the people.

The students were asked with this question:

**B. How is the response of the local government to the social issues? Or Is the local government effective against social issues?**

Social Issues	Mean	Interpretation
1. The local government is responsive to the social issues.	3.01	Agree
2. Social Issues are a top priority of the local government.	3.03	Agree
3. The state of Sulu is improved by leaders.	3.11	Agree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	3.05	Agree

Despite the results in the previous part of the survey, the students' answer suggest that the government is active amidst the predicaments. This is a surprising answer considering the state of Sulu. Nonetheless, the government is able to cope with the issues.

The leadership in Sulu is viewed as a savior for the Tausug considering the state of the said people; being mere political figures would be of no use for the situation. Aristotle (in Strong, 1963) argues that the state (or government) exists not only to make life possible, but also to make life good. But in the case of Sulu, making lives easier is nothing but a reoccurring bliss. Projects are seldom in number, efforts to maximize the population's capabilities is barely present and youths are deprived of support to help in their studies. All in all, the leaders are insensitive to the needs of its people and do not intend to offer solutions. Nonetheless, the support from the people is still overflowing as evident in the results in the conducted study of this paper's researcher. The government should be able to not exert power but improve the citizens' state by making life good (Chambliss, 1954). With that said, social issues must be fixed immediately. Despite the contrasting results, Sulu's leadership actions are viewed in a lens contrasting the actual state.

#### **IV. SOLUTIONS OF ISLAM**

Islam is the religion of the Tausug but has been underutilized in society. This is more evident with the happenings in Sulu as social issues are widespread but the Tausug fail to combat with a solid reversal. This is where Islam comes into play. With it being a complete way of life and an enduring religion, it is filled with solutions effective against social issues. Now, there should be a way to employ Islamic solutions in Sulu and finally bring it as the undisputed basis of life for the Tausug.

Islamic Solutions	Mean	Interpretation
1. Promotion of Islamic Education	3.47	Agree

2. Da'wah	3.39	Agree
3. Institution of <i>Hisbah</i>	3.18	Agree
4. Elimination of <i>riba</i> by the government	3.17	Agree
5. Implementation of <i>Zakat</i> and <i>Sadaqa</i>	3.38	Agree
6. Observance of <i>Salah</i>	3.55	Agree
7. Promotion of Islamic Values	3.56	Agree
9. <i>Uquba</i>	3.70	Agree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	3.425	Agree

### Capital Punishment

With Sulu being under the governance of the Philippine government, capital punishment would be difficult to employ. But in the perspective of Islam, it is vital to neutralize crime and stabilize the nation. The preservation of the following: ... could be attained through Islamic form of punishment. The following aspects allow Muslims to live peacefully and be protected from crime. Furthermore, the purpose of these punishments is solidified in the Qur'an in the *ayat* from Surah Al-Baqarah: "There is (preservation of) life for you in retribution, O people of understanding, that you may become pious." (Quran 2:179) As for Sulu, it will provide an antagonist against criminals to refrain from perform wrong and harmful acts. With the prevalence of terrorism among the Tausug, this could be useful to punish and discourage bandits and criminals.

### Promotion of Islamic Values

Promotion of Islamic Values is vital part of building the proper mentality for youths to be in the borders of Islam. Moral values in Islam aim to determine human activity in a Muslim society, and to promote and control their behavior to the benefit of the whole society and its individuals, and to bring for all individuals a good conclusion in the other life. (Nuriman and Fauzan, 2017). The traditions and values of Islam that are being sidelined at present should be used as a spearhead to reform the youths and entirety of the Tausug. At a personal level, the disruptions experienced by Muslims had stirred the said people at a personal level ranging from lifestyle to morality (Nurullah, 2008). Such issues would cause the nation-building process of the Tausug youth to be stalled or completely fail. With that said, the spirituality of the individuals must be reformed to accommodate the Islamic values that specifically target heart (*qalb*) soul or self (*an-nasf*), spirit (*ruh*) and intellect (*al-'aql*); The spiritual meanings of these four terms refer to the same spiritual entity (*latifah ar-ruhaniyyah*) (Ghazali, 1980). The importance of the reformation of the soul in the issue is due to its divine origin and function; the body is just a shell that houses the soul, while the latter serves as the commandeering mechanism for the former.

### **Salah**

The next is *salah*, the second pillar of Islam and vital to the Muslim's life. It is a way to have connection to Allah and strengthen that bond. Abdullah Yusuf Ali noted, "Man in his ignorance or haste...desires what he should not have. The wise and instructed soul has patience and does not put its own desires above the wisdom of Allah...and prays to be rightly guided in his desires and petitions." The prayer is a way of improving man and fending off vices. Prayer is a constant reminder for the devotee, and as a result, it improves the manners which is vital for the societal issues being faced today which should be crucial in the youth. In addition, prayer strengthens the unity of Muslims through the coalescing in the masjid. The charities and communities molded in the *masjid* are a result of this forte.

### **Promotion of Islamic Education**

Fourthly, Promotion of Islamic Education was recommended by the respondents. With the advent of western culture, Muslim youths are in a being pulled from different directions. Islam is becoming more of an afterthought with such happening. With that said, Islamic Education is needed to provide guidance and awareness. In Islamic tradition, in addition to the *fitra* of the newborn child, the Muslim has to accept a covenant '*mithaq*' to recognize and acknowledge God as his or her absolute Lord. After the child reaches puberty, he/she has to take the responsibility, '*amana*', of the covenant, thus making Islamic education imperative for the fulfilment of the trust (Hanson, 2001). With deviation looming in any corner of the world, a need for proper education for youths are vital to solidify their grip on the religion and actuate it on all of life's aspects.

### **Da'wah**

Since Islamic Education was tacked, it is fitting to explain one of the siphons used for it: *Da'wah*. The purpose of *da'wah* is to invite people, Muslims and non-Muslims, to understand the worship of God as expressed in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.S.) and to inform them about Muhammad. The importance of spreading the message and safeguarding it is expounded in the Qur'an, "Mankind was one single nation, and Allah sent Messengers with glad tidings and warnings and with them He sent the Book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed." This verse of the Qur'an points out the great responsibility of this community regarding the guardianship of the message of Truth. The act of preaching is vital to remind the people of the grave circumstances of the past and how to avoid and prevent them. Azad Hussain Aakhon (2018) elaborated the scope of *da'wah* which are the following aspects: a). Inviting people towards the Islamic faith and its practice; b). Witnessing in favor of the ultimate truth Islam, giving witness by words and deeds; c). Warning people against the dreadful consequences of rejecting the truth or neglecting it; d). Advising people to accept Islam and to practice it; e). Conveying the message of Islam to every member of mankind; f). Giving people glad tidings about the beneficial results of accepting and practicing the truth; g) Reminding people of the forgotten reality that their real success and salvation lies in accepting the way ordained for them by their Creator. These are a vital need for the youths as the majority are influenced by outside variables that could stray them from Islamic values. Continuously preaching the message of truth to the youth would bring awareness to their actions and result in an improved perspective and actuation.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study determined the social issues being faced by the Tausug in the perspective of the youth. The participants of the study were randomly picked from among the MSU-Sulu College students.

The study used a survey questionnaire to gather data. The research instrument utilized was the validated researcher-made questionnaire composing of the questions regarding social issues, response of the local government and Islamic solutions. The statistical instrument employed was weighted mean.

Based on the data gathered, the following are the findings:

1. The students agreed that there are numerous social issues in Sulu such as poverty, social injustices, poor governance and lack of services.
2. The students view the local government as efficient in combatting social issues.
3. Islamic solutions were widely encouraged to be used in fixing the social issues of Sulu.

This fact runs like a motif in all Islamic teachings. As we will concentrate on *zakat* in this paper, we see that *zakat* on one hand, purifies the giver's soul and take him closer to Allah, while on the other, produces in him feelings of love, brotherhood and generosity towards humanity.

Based on the data gathered, the following are the results:

1. The students agreed that social issues are present and serve as an antagonist against Sulu's welfare. The social issues are the following: income gap, lack of job opportunities, inflation of prices, healthcare availability, inequality, insufficiency in basic needs, and lack of understanding of Islam. The results implied that the social issues are present in Sulu and hinder Sulu's progression and welfare.
2. The respondents agreed that the local government is efficient in mending social issues. The results suggest: the government has improved the state of Sulu, that social issues are a top priority of the local government, and the local government is responsive to social issues. The results implied that the students view the local leaders as effective personalities in leading the government. This perception is based on the current improved peace and order situation in Sulu wherein most of the respondents are not exposed to the situation of Sulu decades ago.
3. The students agreed that the Islamic solutions provided were needed in Sulu. The Islamic solutions are the following: Implementation of capital punishment, promotion of Islamic values, observance of *salah*, *da'wah*, institution of *hisbah*, implementation of *zakat*, and elimination of *riba*.

The results implied that the youths view Islam as still relevant solution to address social issues and wished to be employed by the local government.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following are recommended:

1. The social issues of Sulu should be documented intensively for them to be known by all Tausug age groups and not just the youths.
2. The local government should be more intensive against social issues.
3. The local government should integrate Islamic solutions and practices in governing and leading the Tausug.

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