

Revitalizing HAMKA's Philosophical Thought in Riau Society: Integrating Islamic Thought and Malay Cultural Values

Jamaluddin¹, Andi Saputra²

State Islamic University Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau

jamaluddin@uin-suska.ac.id, andisaputra.bm@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper describes Hamka's philosophy on the importance of understanding the philosophical language in religion for every Muslim in accordance with the holy Qur'an. The Malay society, being identical with Islam, used to have a scientific culture that was full of philosophical values. However, the philosophical nuance that has become a source of pride for the Malay people has been debated to this day. Hamka himself had his own philosophy dealing with this controversial issue. This study is undertaken by looking deeply into all his works so that the essence of his philosophy can be disclosed in this paper. According to him, understanding religion through philosophical approaches cannot be avoided, and even studies that use rational elements have been illuminated by Islamic teaching and have become an important lesson that has been made public so that they could provide good results with more values. Such a pattern of thought in the history of mankind is able to bring human beings to become the master of the world. At the same time, the rationalization of thought that is desired in Islam goes hand in hand with the enrichment of soft feeling that is also the substance of human identity.

Key Words: Revitalizing; Philosophical Thought ; Integrating; Riau Society, Malay culture ; Islam;

1. Introduction

History has noted that the Malay archipelago (*Melayu Nusantara*), including Riau had hundreds of big kingdoms and thousands of small kingdoms that generally became the centers for science and culture in their times. This reality implies that the culture of science has existed in the history of the nation. The revolution of science on the Malay land was marked by the existence of Islam as a faith and the philosophy of life (religion) for the Malay people. Science and civilization in this context are closely related to common sense and reasoning. For example, Raja Ali Haji, the man of letters and composer of *Gurindam Dua Belas* alongside *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, whose view of life in both works contains philosophical values.

However, as time goes on and changes, many have refused the existence of scientific dimensions based on this philosophy in Islamic studies. This fact gives a picture of the position and philosophical values believed by the Muslim society in Indonesia in general and in Riau in particular. This is supported by the fact that the existence of the discourse, which, to this end, can develop someone's ability to think, is being questioned in terms of its legality, including its epistemological basis in the holy Qur'an and *al-Sunnah* as the key references for Muslims.

Another reason for the refusal from some parties, for instance, is based on the argument that philosophy is a discipline originating from outside Islam; that is, Greek philosophy. Therefore, those who believe that it is evil to think that philosophy is an illegal discipline to be learned; moreover, when it is treated as a special discipline in Islamic studies. Interestingly, in line with this context, there appeared a contradiction from a well-

known and highly appreciated Muslim scholar in the country, Hamka, from the western part of Sumatra, with his expression "*Islam is the defender of philosophy*". Hamka was an intellectual whose competence should not be questioned.

As a writer who has written and produced *Tafsir al-Azhar*, the first exegesis of al-Qur'an written in the Malay language, his perspectives related to the existence of philosophy need to be observed, understood, and paid attention to. This aims to review the issue from the perspective of religion as an effort to remind the Malay people of his biography.

2. Hamka: Muslim scholar dan Intellectual

Hamka, born and raised by the banks of Lake Maninjau, West Sumatra province, on 16 February 1908 (13 Muharram 1362.H), was one of Indonesia's most prominent Islamic scholars. He lived in three eras: pre-independence, independence, and the era of Indonesian independence, which has special meaning for the nation. As a person who very much loved his country, he gave invaluable teachings in the struggle to defend national dignity. His love for science should not be questioned, as he has left a lot of his works to the next generations. As a Muslim, he had shown outstanding behavior in the way he behaved in his capacity as a man of letters or a man of state.

As a composer, a preacher, and a motivator, Hamka spent most of his time for himself and his family, as well as for the whole people in the country, as could be seen from all the works he left as a result of his learning achievement and his ideas of the importance of understanding the values of life. In addition, he was actively involved in a number of Islamic and national organizations. When referring to "*Hubb al-wathan min al-iman*", Hamka was one of the well-known scholars who prioritized the importance of struggle on behalf of Islam and the nation where Islam is, on the one hand, a belief and the nation, and on the other hand, a national dignity.

As a Muslim activist, for instance, Hamka dedicated and involved himself alongside other national figures such as K.H. Ahmad Dahlan in founding the Islamic social organization, Muhammadiyah, in 1912 in Yogyakarta as a signal of the importance of spreading Islam, the only religion sent by God to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the latest prophet (*Khatam al-Anbiya'*). As an Islamic scholar, his dedication to the country could be seen from his bravery in opposing the policies of the ruler, which he thought were against the truth. From his struggle, it was clear that he and other Islamic scholars were standing firm to defend the truth.

When the above 'truth' is associated with the truth that has become the essence of the intellectual description among philosophers, this indicates that Hamka's personality in his capacity is not different from other philosophers' in general. The personality of a philosopher who keeps on seeking, putting into practice, and preaching the 'truth' he has gained is clearly noticeable in Hamka's personality. On the other hand, a person who is brave enough to shout for the truth, whatever the risk, clearly shows his vast knowledge and thinking as a Muslim. In short, a knowledgeable person not only considers the truth as a collection in his head but also puts what he has in his head into practice in all aspects of his life.

In general, a number of Hamka's works are concerned with the importance of self-realization as true human beings who are always concerned with others. Studies on human beings and the truth are in the place in the philosophy of science (epistemology) and gets spacious room in Hamka's philosophy. It means that Hamka was one of the Muslim

intellectuals who paid much attention to things related to the existence of mankind. His attitude could indirectly be seen from most of his works, which concern the issues in human life. That is to say, Hamka showed the importance of philosophy itself.

Hamka's intellect was proven by being honored with a professorship and *Doctor Honoris Causa* by some foremost higher education institutions, including Al-Azhar University, an oldest university in the world. Although he did not complete his formal education, he deserved getting the highest university degree. He was the first chief of the Indonesian Council for Muslim Scholars (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) from 1975 until 1981. His success in managing this organization made MUI an independent, respected body to represent Muslims. Meanwhile, his ability to read facts became a breakthrough that led him to dedicate himself in this Islamic social organization. He was active in the Islamic political movement, which was named *Partai Sarekat Islam (Islamic League Party)* at that time.

3. The Malay Society and Rational Culture

Since the fourteenth century, the Malay Muslim scholars have arranged many agreements (wa'ad) about legal and philosophical issues that could strengthen the dynamics of Islamic intellectuals. But Aljuneid added that the power of colonialism at the end of the seventeenth century had paralyzed Islam in the Malay land by changing the religion driven by intellectual faith (intellectually-driven faith) to become a private religion that justified itself using secular language. This is not surprising, as colonialism not only made people powerless or had no power in themselves (read: slavery), but also made people have no reasoning and thinking creativity, as felt today.

Being an inherited *slave mentality* as the product of imperialism for a long time has become a problem that needs immediate solving. The quality and work ethos of Malay society being far from expectations also becomes an 'ongoing issue' that can be witnessed now. Referring to the term that was used to be expressed by Anthony Reid in "*Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1860*" about "*Homo Ludens*"; Southeast Asian people prefer to enjoy life with things that have not much value, and they are easier to be 'blinded' as they are not decision makers.

The shift of religious paradigm by the Malay society as a result of the polarization of thoughts and the teaching of colonialism has caused them to be powerless in their existence. The spirit of Islam, which determines life in the hereafter and life on the earth, is declining in such a way that life in the world is no longer important and meaningful. Consequently, Malay society these days tends to become consumers rather than producers in terms of both life needs and ideas. The real personality of the Malay people, in fact, has been expressed in the verses of "Malay Old Poem," which is basically wrapped up in the expression "The Courtesy of Malay" (*Hati-Budi Melayu*). Basically, the word *budi* in this context means the power of thinking to understand a case and the ability to argue and make a conclusion in a rational way, which reflects the cleverness, ability, and wisdom that enable one to become a wise person.

Based on the above explanation, it can be understood that Malay society always upholds the rationality of thinking, being smart and wise to respond to any problems in life encountered both individually and in groups. Naquib al-Attas used to state, when giving the explanation of Islamization in Malayu land saying that one of the important factors in the success of Islamization in Malayu land was the rationality of the teaching of life offered by

Islam to mankind. This was because acknowledging the oneness of God (*tauhid*) is the first pillar and the foundation of every Muslim, stressing the importance of the change of paradigm of believing in the one God, from the belief in mythology to the belief based on the logic of man thinking. It is therefore not surprising that Muslim scholars say Islam is a 'religion of logic' and a 'religion of mankind', which can be seen from the tradition of Islam-Malay that is in practice from time to time supported by Muslim scholars, parents, and leaders in society.

Two of the Malay personalities; namely, as the thinkers and man of *Rabbani* which are expected to grow sustainably in the land of Malay. It is only with the presence of Muslim intellectuals anything about Malay can be understood in line with the importance of the contextualization of understanding in the eras of modernization and globalization. At the same time, the individuals with strong belief and noble values become they people whose ideologies can be understood and followed. This is vital as the smartness in Malay terminology which is identical with Islam is not merely aimed at personal pleasure but it is also oriented with the wish of God; not only based on desire but goodness. Therefore, the marriage of belief or being strong in faith and the effort to make improvement in the society is the yardstick of success in social life. If traced very deeply, wise thinking framework based on the foundation of religious understanding is the point where the Malay culture can be understood. That is to say, the Malay people are those who always try to make themselves smart in looking at reality. They are not people who make no considerations before making a decision and they are not people who are easy to be emotional as they know that anger or being easy to be emotional will only end with regret. In short, they are individuals who are responsive and prioritize wisdom.

Furthermore, being accommodative towards various ideologies or ideas makes Malay people prioritize the truth rather than the source of the truth as mentioned in the holy Qur'an that 'Muslims should become those who listen to what is being said and follow what is good on what is said. Therefore, "*Undzur ma qala wa la tandzur man qala*" is the key principle that must be prioritized. Such a life principle in human history makes Malay people become mature in society.

The continuation of such personality makes Malay people become open-minded towards ideologies, cultures and faiths (read; religion). This is, for example, based on their life reality which was within the circle of great civilizations at that time, starting from Chinese civilization with the influence of Konghucu teachings or through traders with different faith backgrounds such as the Arabs and the Indians. This is the thinking pattern that should always be reflected in the behavior of the Malay people. It is not surprising, therefore, that they (the Malay people) in their religious practice tend to stay 'in the middle (*ausatuha*).¹⁷

Such an open mind enables the Malay people to be mature enough to adapt themselves to differences, as proven by the acceptance and tolerance among them in terms of tribes, cultures, and faiths (where they are from). Unlike the expansion of Islam in the Middle East (as their origin), for instance, the accommodative attitude shown by Malay people reflects in the acceptance of the principle (read: Islam) inherited from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) without violence, which is not the character of the Malay people.. If violence is taking place, this does not represent the Malay people, as they are against it.

4. The Function of Philosophy in Religion: Hamka's Perspective

Many verses in the holy Qur'an state the importance of thinking for human beings, as they naturally ask about themselves and the reality in their surroundings. This becomes evidence that questions about metaphysics always come up since the existence of mankind. According to Sidi Gazalba, the answers to the questions are *aqal* dan *naqal*; common sense guided by religious teachings (read: revelation) and faith understood by human intelligence, because in logic there is a term "*al-Insan al-Hayawan al-Nathiq*" (human beings are rational creatures).

When giving an interpretation of verses 17 to 20 of Surah al-Ghashiyah (88), for instance, Hamka said how large the study areas of human thinking are, including Muslims in those verses, whereby the previous Muslim scholars made it important to think about, especially in Islam, by digging the key potential of mankind; that is, the common sense given by the Creator for the benefit of all mankind. This is what is called the balance between the role and responsibility of human beings as the representatives (*kalifah*) of God on the earth. That is to say, the existence of culture and civilization stems from the intelligence of human beings and their common sense. It is not surprising, therefore, that from the period of Thales and Socrates (in Greece) and also Napoleon until al-Afghani and Abduh (in Egypt), there were always people who tried to share ideas about the world and its meaning. These intellectual and spiritual journeys, which, according to Hamka's terminology, are called 'the search for the truth' (*al-thalabul al-haq*), were meant by Hamka as an effort to balance the utilization of common sense and the heart, between thinking and feeling. At the same time, because of the limitation of human capability to dig up existing secrets, the 'gained truth' is not absolute.

Such a limitation should make people aware of themselves and avoid arrogance and egoism (in this article, saying they are the only correct people). This sort of attitude not only shows their weaknesses as creatures with limitations, but it is also against the teaching of Islam about the acceptance of truth wherever it comes from. For example, when talking about Karl Marx with his economic and social thinking, Hamka strongly said that it was not good to fully put the blame on Karl Marx so long as his idea was not against the principle of Islam.. Such an attitude showed that Hamka appreciated the effort of a person to make use of his ideas.

Being appreciative of science is the main focus of philosophy. Islam is well-known as a religion that upholds science. Islam encourages people to make use of their thinking potential and to be thankful for the bestowal from God as the identity of human beings. Islam is the religion inaugurated by God as the way of life of mankind and therefore, human beings should understand its teachings. What is contained in the holy Qur'an and *al-Sunnah* is part of the main interpretation of human philosophy. It was no wonder, therefore, that when Hamka mentioned that whoever learns al-Qur'an very deeply, it means s/he is already with philosophy.

In addition to what is contained in Islamic teaching, nature is one of the things people think about along with its Creator. The realization and effort to understand the existing entity will produce what is called science. When people learn deeply about the biological process, for instance, this is what is called Biology; similarly, when learning about how the universe works, it is called Physics. Furthermore, when people are talking about human behavior and their creations, there appear 'anthropology', 'sociology', and 'ethics'. That is to say, human beings are the objects and the actors of the science itself.

However, unlike ideologies that keep on growing in the history of mankind, starting from liberalism, communism, secularism, and humanism, for example, the rationality desired by Islam has limitations. The limitations refer to the basic principles contained in al-Qur'an and *al-Sunnah*, which both become the patterns of the direction towards rationality and ideologies. This idea may be in line with what is aimed at by Engineer, that *learning a religion should be regarded as a serious spiritual, historical, and intellectual activity, not neglected and regarded as spiritual deception that is often committed by rationalists*. Therefore, according to Hamka, the presence of religion can give light to mankind when compared to the time before Islam came to them. In other words, common sense is not sufficient to help human beings to find their way, but religion, which is not based on knowledge and critical thinking, may lead people to be misleading in understanding the basic teachings of their religion. Both are important to be learned, understood, and applied in life. What to understand is that thinking in Islam requires a balance between thinking and feeling. In this context, Hamka agreed to use the word "al-hikmah" referring to the definition of philosophy.

It is not really wrong if it is said that the truth is not only a matter of the sophistication of argumentation, but also relates to the divine values that should be reflected in the people who are leading others towards the truth. As stated in al-Qur'an, the best way to express the truth should be in a good manner because the truth which is not delivered properly can reduce the essence of the truth itself. Furthermore, the truth deals with what is regarded as true, so a mistake in delivering it is far from the truth itself.

Furthermore, religion, according to Hamka, functions as a guide for commonsense, leading to the right path. On the other hand, religion and commonsense never oppose each other as many people understand. But Hamka viewed that religion leads people to raise the quality of commonsense. According to him, here is the difference between Islam and other faiths: religions other than Islam have their own places, and commonsense also has its own place. In short, the combination of reasoning and deep feeling makes everyone become a perfect man (*insan al-kamil*).

As has been touched on in the previous chapter, the freedom of thinking for the Malay people is highly appreciated in Islam. The freedom of thinking is seen clearly from the reality of what human beings have done, which is not different from what is generally understood from philosophy. The philosophy that requires the openness of man's creativity through their rationality is not against, in terms of meaning, the Islamic teaching. Therefore, thinking philosophically as a form of philosophical affirmation is not against the Islamic teaching as often stated in the holy Qur'an.

As a person who knew much about the essence of science, what Hamka was speaking about on different occasions was not meaningless. Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh (representing a number of Muslim scholars) did the same thing, starting from ideas in words leading to reality. One thing that became the focus of Hamka's idea was raising the awareness of Muslims after a long silence and romanticism about the history of the glorious time of Islam in the past as noted in history.

The above explanation implies the need to think critically and logically when looking at reality. It is this kind of thinking that is important in philosophical activities. This fact was stated by Hamka in discussing the civilization of Islam in the past. For him, what brought Muslims to the top glory of Islam could not be separated from a series of scientific activities

that became the focus of Muslim scientists. One of them was translating books in various languages about Greek philosophy into Arabic, where the greatest momentum was in the period of the al-Ma'mun caliphate. Only with philosophy in the eyes of Hamka that Islam could gain its glory that can be in the history again.

Philosophy also offers thinking critically, logically and systematically to Muslims all over the world. One of the manifestations of those attitudes was also possessed by Abduh, for instance, in how Hamka tried to clarify the esoteric science of Islam (*tasawuf*) through his work entitled "*Perkembangan dan Pemurnian Tasawuf*" (*The Development of the Purity of Tasawuf*) as an effort to return *tasawuf* to its origin. In short, Islam desires the harmony of thinking and remembering God, which is the soul or the substance of Islam.

In conjunction with the above context, Hamka stated that since common sense regulates all humans' actions and they could be accounted for, it should always be perfected and made smart. It should accept wisdom and science so that it can compare good and bad. This is what is called civilization, and only human beings can understand this. In addition, as the root of the word civilization, being civilized (read: civilized) should be one characteristic of every Muslim in order to spread civilization on the earth.

Having philosophical thinking as desired by Islam requires rationality in religion. According to Amin Abdullah, one of the central themes that has become a major study among well-known Muslim thinkers (including in Indonesia) is the strong belief in the dichotomy of science among Muslims that made them fail in facing modernity born by the disciplines outside Islam. The phenomenon of the difference in science (between the science on religion and non-religion) causes them to be left behind in almost all aspects of life and living. Consequently, Muslims can only watch what is going on today as they are not the doers of the action.

5. Conclusions

Referring to Hamka's philosophical thinking, it is clear that philosophy is not anything new, but its existence has long been recognized in Islam. The argumentation developed by Hamka did not stem from unreasonable assumptions but was based on the holy Qur'an. Therefore, philosophy for Hamka is a discipline that is recognized and justified in Islam. Only with critical, logical, and systematic thinking can Islamic civilization be maintained in the history of mankind. At the same time, Malay history has noted that Malay people used to achieve success in the past. Therefore, only with philosophical thinking illuminated by Islamic teaching can Islamic civilization be totally spread on the earth again.

6. References

- Abd. Rahim, Rahimin Affandi, "The Image of Islam in Building Modern Malay in Malaysia: An analysis", *Jurnal Pengajian Melayu*, Vol. 15, 2005.
- Abdullah, Amin, "Understanding al-Aql al-Rusydiyah in the Study of Islam", in Ibnu Rusyd, *Bringing Religion and Philosophy into Peace: Epistemological Criticism of Scientific Dichotomy*, translated. Aksin Wijaya, First Edition, Yogyakarta: Collaboration between Tsawrah Institute and Pilar Media, 2005.

Aljunied, Khairudin, "Hamka and Guided Commonsense", in *Suara Muhammadiyah*, Friday 07, July 2017.

<http://www.suaramuhammadiyah.id/2017/07/07/hamka-dan-akal-yang-berpedoman/>. Accessed on 23 January 2018.

Ali Engineer, Asghar, *Islam and Liberation of Theology*, translated. Agung Prihantoro, Fifth Edition, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2009.

Esposito, John L., "Contemporary Islam: Reformation or Revolution?", in John L. Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford History of Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Gazalba, Sidi, *Science, Philosophy and Islam: About Man and Religion*, Third Edition, Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1992.

Ginting, Selamat, "Hamka's Great Works in Prison", in *Republika*, Wednesday, 9, November 2011.

Hamka, *My Father: The Biography of DR. H. Abdul Karim Amrullah and the Struggle of Religious Groups in West Sumatera*, Fourth Edition, Jakarta: Umminda, 1982.

_____, *From Heart to Heart*, First Edition, Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2016.

_____, *Philosophy of Life*, Fourth Edition, Jakarta: Republika, 2016.

_____, *Social Justice in Islam*, First Edition, Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2015.

_____, *Institute of Life*, edited by Muh. Iqbal Santosa, Jakarta: Republika, 2015.

_____, *The Development and the Purification of Tasawuf*, First Edition, Jakarta: Republika, 2016.

_____, *The History of Muslims (New Edition)*, Fourth Edition, Singapura: Pustaka Nasional, 2002.

_____, *1001 Life Issues*, First Edition, Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2016.

Hamka, Irfan, *Father...: Biography of Hamka*, First Edition, Jakarta: Republika, 2013.

Ibrahim, Anwar, "The Malay Muslims and the Principle of Win Win Solution", in *Atas Nama Agama: Religious Discourse in "Free" Conflict Dialogue*, Andito, First Edition, Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah, 1998.

Mukti Ali, H.A., "The Perception of Buya Hamka: Muslim Scholars Have Long Been Sold...!", in Nasir Tamara, *et. al.; (Poets.)*, *Hamka in the Heart of People*, Third Edition, Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1996.

Musa, Hashim, *et al.*, "The Malay Courtesy: A Study on Social Personality of Malay Towards Prestigious Malay Penajaman Kajian Kepribadian Sosial Melayu Ke Arah Penjanaan Melayu Gemilang", *GEMA Online™ Journal of Language Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Januari 2012.

-----, *et. al.*, "The Malay Language and the Concept of the Truth of Science According to the Philosophy of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas", *KEMANUSIAAN*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2013.

Mohd. Koharuddin b. Mohd. Balwi, "The Tradition of Science and Education in Malay *Tamaddun* in the Archipelago", *Jurnal Kemanusiaan*, t.t., 48.

- Rasjidi dan Harifuddin Cawidu (*Poets.*), *Islam for Philosophy: Daras Book of Islamic Education at General Higher Education Institutions*, First Edition. Jakarta: PT. Bulan Bintang, 1988.
- Roza, Ellya, *The History of Islam in Riau*, First Edition, Yogyakarta: Aswaja Pressindo, 2017.
- Shobahussurur, "Educational Innovation in Islam, Hamka's Perspective", *TSAQAFAH*, vol. 5. no. 1 (2009).
- Syafii Maarif, Ahmad, *Searching for Authenticity in Confusion*, First Edition, Jakarta: PSAP Muhammadiyah, 2004.
- Wahyudi, Yudian, "Back to Fransisco with Muktazilah", in *Jihad Ilmiah: From Tremas to Harvard*, Third Edition, Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawesea Press, 2009.
- Yatim, Othman MD., dkk., "Intelektual Tradition of Malay-Islam: From Metaphor to Science", *Jurnal Melayu*, No. 6, 2011.
- Zar, Sirajuddin, *Philosophy of Islam: Philosophers and Their Philosophies*, First Edition, Jakarta: PT RajaGrafindo Persada, 2007.