

Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik

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Study on Islamic Literature Viewed from Theosophical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the theosophical-based humanity in some Islamic literary works: al-Matsnawi by Jalaluddin Rumi, Divan by Hafiz Asy-Syirazi, Syair Perahu by Hamzah Fansuri, Adam Ma'rifat by Danarto, Khotbah di Atas Bukit by Kuntowijoyo, and Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah by Hamka. This paper exposes that such literary works synthesize philosophy of Greek rationalism and Sufism of Moslem-Persian spiritualism. The paper shows that the great Islamic literary works commonly contain such general characteristics as themes on Divine based profane humanity, metaphysical meaning, profane and spiritual aesthetics, universal truth, and synthesis of philosophy and Sufism inherently integrated by Islamic Aqidah.

Key words: *sufism, aqidah, religious-based humanity, values, essence of meaning.*

The fact that Islamic setting-based literature has been part of the world-class literary tradition is widely acknowledged by a great number of literary critics. The acknowledgement is due to its tremendous contribution toward humanities. The humanity values introduced in Islamic literature are attributed to the totality in which the material and immaterial realities are synthesized interdependently. The humanity values with such concept are reflected in Islamic literary works which are valuable in their contemporary society as promoted by the greatest literary authors such as *Ka'ab ibn Zuhair* and *Hassan ibn Tsabit*, the most outstanding poet, more popularly called the poet of the prophet (*Sya'irun-Nabiy*) during the prophet Muhammad *Shallallahu alaihi wasallam* period 570–632. Some other popular literary writers with their masterpiece works from the peak of Moslem civilization (*al-Khadlarah al-Islamy*) 750–1250 are among others *Fariduddin Attar* "*Manthiq At-Thair* or "Birds' Concensus", *Umar Khayyam* "*Rubaiyyat*" or "The Stanzas", *Ibn Thufail* "*Hay Ibn Yaqdhan*" or "Life from Awakening", *Jalaluddin Rumi Al-Matsnawi* or "The Couplets", *Muhammad Iqbal* "*Asrari Khudi*" or "Heart's Secret" and *Hafidz Asy-Syirazi*, the most prominent Persian-Sufi "*Divan*" or "Board of Poems" until the 19th century also producing the greatest names such as, *Hamzah Fansuri*, the most outstanding sufi expert in the old-Malay era, "*Sajak Perahu*" or "Poems on

Canoe", and *Raja Ali Haji* "*Gurindam Dua Belas*" or "The Twelve Line-Poem".

The reputation of the Islamic literature in the humanity values has attracted attention and acknowledgement of the great literary men from all over the world. *Kahlil Gibran*, an outstanding literary man as well as Arab philosopher stated that the Arabic people contributed much to the rest of the world and gave more. Their literature, when it came to be known by the west, was perhaps found one of the richest on earth, with the *Qur'an* as its masterpiece (Kusdiyantinah 1990:1). Even the academy of Sweden also acknowledged the reputation of Islamic literature, presenting the Noble prize in literature to *Naguib Mahfuzh*, an Egyptian Arab Moslem writer, on his masterpiece entitled *Tsulatsyah* or Trilogy in 1988. Johann Wolfgang van Goethe, a German writer, Dante Alighieri, an Italian writer, and W.M. Thackery, an english writer, are interested in reading, enjoying, and studying the Islamic literary works written in Arabic or Persian language. Furthermore, Johann Wolfgang van Goethe was much influenced by the humanity values in Islamic literary works he read. The influence can be seen in his poem entitled "West Ostlicher Divan" strongly supposed to be influenced by Hafidz's ideas in his greatest poem "Divan". Dante Alighieri's monumental poem "Divine Commedia" is also supposed to be heralded by the Isra' Mi'raj story introduced by the prophet

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Muhammad *Shallallahu alaihi wasallam*. Such influences might also be found in several poems written by Kahlil Gibran as stated by Kusdiyantinah (1990:2) that Gibran's poetry was a combination of philosophical analysis, spiritual contemplation, and religious faith influenced by Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. In addition to the world's Islamic literary works as previously presented, such Indonesian writers as Amir Hamzah, Hamzah Fansuri, Hamka, Abdul Hadi WM, Danarto, Taufiq Ismail, Emha Ainun Najib, and Kuntowijoyo have also been inspired by the world's most outstanding Moslem authors so deeply that Braginsky, a Russian literary expert, conducted a research on Malay-Islamic mysticism. Therefore, further discussion on academic study, interpreting a meaning, and theosophical study on Islamic literary works becomes interesting to enrich our knowledge on literature in general.

Materials and Methods

This study analyses literatures that describe the theosophical-based humanity values as found in the Islamic literary works which synthesize philosophy deriving from Greek rationalism and Sufism deriving from Moslem-Persian spiritualism which is integrated by Islamic theology or *Aqida* by Moslem sufi-experts.

Results and Discussion

Academic Study on Islamic Literature

Academic study in literature is intended to convey the researched object based truth by implementing such scientific principles as logical, systematical, and objective. As an academic literary study, the starting point to determine is the literary philosophical basis which implicates several dissenting perspectives used to perceive the literary works as the object of study. From this view-point, the perspectives to academically study the literary works are extremely various and epistemologically implicates the distinct use of approach, theory, and method and results of study. As widely recognized that there are several perspectives in the literary study, each of which has its own focus of study. Formalism focuses its analysis on the formal structure of works isolated from socio-cultural context which really becomes the background of the works' creation (Hawkes 1978:21). Poetic structuralism more emphasizes on the works as a system which are closely related to the socio-

cultural background. Semiotics studies literature in relation with meaning. Psycho-linguistics focuses on the language utterances in the works in relation to the psychological aspect of the authors or readers.

Academically literary study is also faced to phenomena of the religious-based literary works or at least those containing religious elements. Such reality of course implicate philosophical basis which is closely relevant to explain the objective facts. Such phenomena are admitted by some literary critics among others A. Teeuw, Nurazmi Kuntum, Malaysian Islamic literary critics, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Maman S. Mahayana, literature lecturer of Faculty of Letters University of Indonesia, and A.R. Zaidan, a researcher of literature at the center of language cultivation and development national education department Indonesia. A. Teeuw (1988) stated that literature in Arabic culture was much influenced and even determined by Islamic religion, including Indonesian literature in general. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (1977:80) in theory of literature said that understanding literary works cannot be separated from extrinsic factors such as theology. Therefore, the literary study based on the Islamic religious-based perspectives such as theosophy which are still newly developed in Malaysia and Indonesia more focuses on the relationship between the literary works and the essence of meaning of life because the literary works are considered as part of life. While life according to Islamic world view includes both the worldly one and the day after.

In its historical development, theosophy defined as a system of philosophy which aims at direct knowledge of God by means of spiritual ecstasy and contemplation has been developed in the Moslem world since the seventeenth century by the experts of philosophy and *Sufism* such as Bayazid, Ibn Arabi, and Al-Gazali under the long, dialectical debates because it is not easy to synthesize the two contrast ideas, Greek rationalism and spiritual *Sufism* which dominate the Moslem thinkers. Based on the Islamic world view, called *Aqidah* or Islamic theology, the efforts to synthesize them virtually succeeded in the period of the expert of philosophy-*sufism* Shadriddin Asy-Syirazi. In this case, *Aqidah* is considered as a premise of absolute truth deriving directly from God through revelation and it is used as the basis of constructing empirical and rational premises. Philosophy, knowledge to study the essence of truth, just can be acquired, according to the west thinkers, based on radical thinking so that the truth resulted becomes speculative. On the other hand, according

to the experts of philosophy and *Sufism*, the essence of truth can be achieved through the synthesis between radical rationalism and contemplative spiritualism which are both conceptualized into the Islamic term "*al-Aql*" because the essence of truth lies outside the material, while rationalism merely covers inside the materialism. Therefore it understandable that rationalism when producing the truth becomes speculative and it will never reach the essence of truth. According to Asy-Syirazi, the essence of truth might merely be obtained through the synthesis of both philosophy and Sufism which is called "*al-Aql*" which then brings to the birth of theosophy (*al-Hikmah al-Ilahiyah*). Based on this theosophical thought, a large number of great Islamic works in their contemporary since 750 up to now have existed and even contributed to enrich the universal humanity values.

Meaning in Literature

It is widely admitted that every literary work has its own meaning, except formalism or classic structuralism which studies literature separated from the meaning. Like other literary studies such as poetic-structuralism and semiotics, theosophy also focuses its study on the essence of meaning of the literary works because every author, when writing the work, does not simply tell a story, but more than that, the author really wants to struggle his or her ideas, including the meaning of life, through the story.

The fact that the literary meaning is a reality outside the work itself readily requires a literary study completed with relevant academic cognition on the world view and cultural code (Teew 1983:15). It is also admitted that literary works are not just the closed objects which only serve toward the formal structure (Peirce 1985:4), but it is in fact relational phenomena directly related to the interpretation (Zaimar 1979:3), including the interpretation of meaning because the meaning of literary works is never stagnant, but it is extremely productive as stated by Eco (1984:25) that the text is locus where meaning is produced becomes productive. The productive meaning can be achieved through religion, philosophy, and art (Darma 1989: 5).

Alfaruqi (1989:76), a professor of Islamic studies McGill University Canada, infers that it requires the Qur'anic and Sunnah postulates to deeply understand the essence of meaning of the Islamic literary works because the literary values derives from Allah *Subhanahu wata'ala* who is absolute in

nature. In addition, Mohammad Iqbal, the greatest Moslem poet-philosopher of the nineteenth century, as cited by Naitre (1970:35) that emphasized his studies on metaphysics, proposes his notion that relative aesthetics values dependently reflect absolute aesthetics. Therefore, efforts to convey the relative aesthetics must begin from the eternal aesthetics through spiritual contemplation based on the revelation as the source of absolute truth.

Theosophical Perspective in Islamic Literary Study

The term Islamic literature, according to Siddiqi (1964:35), is defined as all works written by Moslem authors which contain literary values based on Islamic world view or *Aqidah*. If viewed from the language use, according to Nur Cholis Majid (1993:2), an Indonesian Moslem thinker, the Islamic literary works are mostly written in Arabic, Persian, Swahili, Urdu, Gujarati, Sindi, Javanese, Sundanese, Malay, and Indonesian. Furthermore, Majid explains that the most essential jargon of Islamic literary works is the Islamic-based ideas as the starting-point to write the works.

The reflection of theosophical thinking in the Islamic literary works generally present themes on religious-based humanity values as found in several great works written by outstanding Moslem authors as stated in the introduction. Ibn-Thufail, a great Moslem writer, in his work "*Hay Ibn Yaqdhan*" or "Life from Awakening" describes the importance of philosophy toward the Real life. However, the Real life will never be obtained except through "*al-Aql*". This is because that philosophy is just based on logics which can cover the material reality radically and speculatively. The same thought is also presented by Jalaluddin Rumi in his masterpiece, a highly theosophical work, *al-Matsnawi*. Through philosophical and sufi contemplation, Jalaluddin Rumi expresses his never-lasting, creative ideas about "Reality" which brings to the highest truth, called al-Haqq or divine truth. According to Rumi, all realities are united into a single unity as presented in one of his poems as follows:

I put off all multiples: I see
two worlds but one existence;

One I search for, One I know, One I see, One
I call
He be The First, but also The Last, He be The
Exoterist,
But also The Esoterist,

I know Nothing, but "One" and "Who One be"
I'm drunken of love prize, two world disappear
In my sight

(Rumi 1985:32, cited from *Divan-I Shams Tabriz*:127)

Hafiz Asy-Syirazi presented his mystical poem which contain theosophical element. Everything he saw materially or he experienced in his life is essentially the reflection of Allah. Allah for him exists everywhere and every time. Even Allah is the Real existence in the worldly life, he sees nothing but Allah as aesthetically figured out in his following poem:

At the market, at the top of meditation I saw just Allah,
at the valley of mount I saw just Allah,
always I saw Him besides me, in my suffering
in my delight and sadness I saw just Allah
in *shalat*, fasting, contemplating
in messengers' religion I saw just Allah
no soul no body no *aradh* no *jauhar*
no cause no result I saw nothing but Allah
shalat = pray
aradh = soul
jauhar = body

The word "market" in this poem denotes to a place of selling-buying transaction which is very crowded. People in it commonly focus on worldly businesses. On the contrary, the top of meditation is a place for contemplation to find self-consciousness. Hafiz finds that in the two dissenting places, the market which is very busy and the top of meditation which is very quiet, he sees nothing but Allah. The fact that he also undergoes the same spiritual experience in his various inner events of life such as delight, sorrow, suffering, fasting, and praying. It means that he sees by using his spiritual sense which brings him to the highest testimony.

Amir Hamzah in his Old-Malay poem entitled "*Syair Perahu*" or Poem of Canoe illustrates his spiritual journey by using metaphoric word "*Perahu*" or a canoe which symbolizes a media for spiritual journey toward the Real life as cited below:

Lailahaillallah is His rope
Allah's Perfection is His pillars
Assalamualaikum is His part of rope
Faith as the oar
Shalawat for the prophet is His tied rope
Istighfar toward Allah is His sail
Allahu Akbar is His name of wind

Subhanallah is His travel
Wallahu A'lam is His name of floor
Worship to Allah is His captain
Qudrat Allah is His harbor
The heaven *Jannatun-Naim* is His country.
Lailahaillallah = there is no God but Allah
Assalamualaikum = peace be upon you all
Shalawat = peace
Istighfar = asking for forgiveness to Allah for the sins
Allahu Akbar = saying that Allah is the Greatest
Subhanallah = Allah is the Holiest
Wallahu A'lam = Allah is the best-known
Qudrat Allah = Allah's eternal determination
Jannatun-Naim = the name of high-level Heaven

All metaphoric words used in the poem especially those of Islamic religious-based symbolize the atmosphere of mysticism because they are supposed to be parts of spiritual traveling toward Allah. Without them, it is impossible to start the journey. The word "*Lailahaillallah*" as the keyword which means there is no God but Allah is the precondition of the possibility of the journey. Because of it, the journey enables to start and reach the goal that is illustrated as the high-level haven, as the Real country.

Danarto strives to convey the mystery of spiritual world through his literary works such as *Godlob*, *Adam Ma'rifat*, and Javanese Pilgrims. They reflect Danarto's thought which considers the worldly life as part of long travel. He further explains that before we live in the world, we really lead life in the two different nature respectively the soul life and pregnancy life, as well as we will lead the unknown life in the two natures namely the *barzah* life and the day after which are impossible to know except through *Aqidah* as Islamic world view. As long as life is based on philosophy, life starts from not knowing toward not knowing. However, *Aqidah* postulates its premise that life begins from knowing toward knowing through the revelation. Even in his story "*Adam Ma'rifat*" or "Man's Consciousness", Danarto honestly realized that he couldn't get rid of God's power although he wildly tries to get absolute freedom.

Kuntowijoyo in his work "*Khotbah di atas Bukit*" or Preaching on the Hill depicts his theosophical thought through a story of the protagonist, Barman, who is formerly a fanatic follower of materialism. The most valuable thing for him is material, including the happiness of life which is also measured based on the materials collected. Materialism can motivate him to be rich and reach higher social status as a

diplomat with facilities available. Finally he comes to end the position as diplomat. He spends his rest of life in a villa on the slope of the beautiful mountain with fresh temperature and completed with his sweet heart. Unexpectedly, Barman meets an old sufi-man, Humam, who constantly relies his highest pleasure on the closeness to Allah *Subhanahu wata'ala*. Through his rational and spiritual explanation politely presented, Humam explains that hedonism will bring to nihilism if not controlled by spirituality and succeeds in attracting Barman's heart. Since then Barman who increasingly becomes older undergoes total change to follow Humam toward the essence of life so that he can understand the transcendental essence of life which is previously impossible to find in the meaningless and absurd hedonism.

Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka) through his literary work entitled "*Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah*" or "Under the Protection of *Ka'bah*" tells a story of forced marriage and unachievable love based on Islamic socio-cultural atmosphere: a *pesantren* – traditional Islamic boarding-based system education widely spread throughout Indonesia – life and Mecca city which has been so popular among the Indonesian Moslems up to now.

What is the essence of Islamic literature so that it has attracted the world's literary writers? Of course, the answer should be explored based on the Islamic works themselves. Based on the observation, one of the most important elements as found in other literary works is theme. Based on the themes, it is found that they commonly implicate meaning as the main basis for the writer to express the creative imagination in narrative forms. Viewed from the thematic aspect in general, the Islamic literary works contains transcendental love, spiritual wisdom, prophetic philosophy, noble character toward either the same creatures and their environment or the Creator. Sayyed Hossein Nasr (1976:54) states that the Islamic literary tradition which is considered the most ideal contains a synthesis of aesthetics, metaphysics, and logics. Therefore, in the Islamic literature reflects not only beauty but also spirituality and philosophy. The synthesis of three aspects above is integrated by the Islamic world view, called *Aqidah* in Islamic term so that it contains universal humanity values (*al-Basyariyyat al-Kulliyyat*) which is then saturated by the transcendental truth. The universal humanity values deriving from theosophy as commonly reflected in the Islamic literary works emit the transcendental aesthetics and truth in which the essence of Islamic literature lies. Thus,

the Islamic literary works are mainly, though not always, characterized by theosophy which integrates literature and religion.

What are really the essence of literature and that of Islamic religion? According to Budi Darma (1989:4) the essence of literature is human life which is based on the human intellectuality. In addition, the essence of Islamic religion is also human life which covers the worldly life and the life in the day after as the real and eternal one so that the life concept established in the Islamic religion is based on the revelation as the absolute source of truth, besides intellectuality. The interdependency between literature and religion in Islamic perspective, in fact, derives from the notion that the worldly aesthetics including what is found in the literary works which is the reflection of human inner experience is basically the reflection of the essence aesthetics which can only be achieved through religion, not through literature, because logics capacity cannot achieve the domain of essence as proposed by Bergson. If further explored about the interdependency between literature and religion, it will be understandable that it is really directed to protect the human existence from various distortions which bring the human beings into the victims of their freedom and speculative thoughts. Like Bergson, some other prominent english writers, according to Samekto (1976:88), such as John Galsworthy, TS. Eliot, Rudyard Kipling, and HG. Wells also remind about the danger of absolute defying the logics and rationalism but emphasizing the importance of religious-based humanity values to protect human morality and nature.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion on the Islamic literary study from theosophical perspective, it can be concluded that mostly Islamic literary works contain general characteristics such as theme on religious-based humanity values, metaphysical meaning, aesthetics, universal truth, synthesis of philosophy and Sufism inherently integrated by Islamic world view called *Aqidah* because Islamic literary works are constructed based the assumption that aesthetic values as reflected in the literary works are reflection of Islamic world view based life. Whereas literary works are part of Divine-life. In this point, what they contain cannot be separated from the Islamic world view which construct them.

The main characteristics can found as based upon the results of discussion on such masterpiece works as *al-Matsnawi* by Jalaluddin Rumi, *Divan* by Hafiz

Asy-Syirazi, *Syair Perahu* by Hamzah Fansuri, *Adam Ma'rifat* by Danarto, *Khotbah di Atas Bukit* by Kuntowijoyo, and *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah* by Hamka. As proposed by some outstanding, secular writers such as Bergson, John Galsworthy, TS. Eliot, HG. Wells, Budi Darma, Umberto Eco, Ismail Al-Faruqi, and Mohammad Iqbal, all literary works are interdependently concerned with meaning because the creation of works is directly related to the socio-cultural background of the writers including the religion. In the perspective of Moslem thinkers, Islamic literary works are part of life which includes the worldly life and the day after. Therefore, the works cannot be separated from Islamic world view, including the study on them.

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