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Early Ideas of Reform in Hamka's Ayahku: A Historical and Religious Struggle of Muhammadiyah in Minangkabau

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Abstract

The paper aims to study the historical background of Islamic reform movement in West Sumatera with particular reference to the idea of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah or his pseudonym Hamka (1908-1981). The main issues discusses is the context of socio-religious reform brought forth by Hamka in the quest of modernity and its enriching narrative of renewal and enlightening spiritual cause. Toward this end, this research aims to highlight Hamka's significant work and aspiration for reform and the influence it developed in furthering his cause and legacy and monumental contribution in the history and tradition of reform in the Malay world. The study is based on normative and qualitative approaches in the form of content analysis. The data was conceptually analysed using descriptive, comparative and integrative method. The study found that Hamka's modern idealism was instrumental in driving new consciousness of Islamic movement for reform (islah) and renewal (tajdid) in the Malay world contributing to unprecedented religious struggle that erupted in the late 20th century in Malay Archipelago. It reflected the force of modern ideas espoused by the leading Egyptian-mufti and polymath Shaykh Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) that had brought decisive and greatest influence in the region. The implication of study is the creation of significance framework of religious ideal embedded in the practice of Islamic modernity adopted from Hamka's enlightening works and insights that present higher Islamic religious ideal and principle and the dynamic aspiration Kaum Muda (the young faction) in the context of its socio-religious development and influence reflecting their modern philosophy and construct..

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Introduction

This paper study the historical background of Islamic reform movement in Minangkabau especially the rise of Muhammadiyah (Sri Chalida et al., 2024) in its formative years, that largely stems from the considerable influence and exceptional work of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, or his pseudonym Hamka (1908-1981) a famous Southeast Asian Islamic reformist scholar and Muslim polymath in the Malay world (Mohd. Kamal Hassan, 2020). Hamka was born in Maninjau, West Sumatra, in local Minangkabau matrilineal society that traditionally known for its religious orthodoxy and adherent to matrilineal system. It symbolized the authority of *ninik mamak* (tribal leaders) in protecting the welfare of their nephew's, in strict adherence to traditional customs, that place women in higher position to familial heritage, as indispensable norms and practice dominating their affairs (Rahmah Eka Saputri et al., 2024). He received his early education in local *madrasah* and later on moved to a reputed pesantren (religious boarding school) of Thawalib School (Sumatera Thawalib) in Padang Panjang (Deliar Noor, 1982), a mainstream modernist school formed in 1919 that pioneered progressive-based educational framework of religious instruction, pedagogy and curriculum.

Hamka had produced significant historical works (Hafiz Zakariya, 2023), that offers universal and comprehensive perspective of Muslim history such as *Sejarah Umat Islam* and *Dari Perbendaharaan Lama*. Meanwhile his established works in philosophical and anthropological fields (Alexander Stark et al., 2023) includes *Falsafah Ideologi Islam* (1950), *Lembaga Hidup* (1940), *Falsafah Hidup* (The Philosophy of Life) (1940), *Tasawuf Modern* (1939), *Pandangan Hidup Muslim* (1960), *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup* (1979), *Kenang-Kenangan di Malaya* (1957), *Sayid Jamaludin al-Afghani* (1965), *Adat Minangkabau Menghadapi Revolusi* (1946), *Muhammadiyah Melalui Tiga Zaman* (1946), *Muhammadiyah di Minangkabau* (1975), *Islam dan Kebatinan* (1972), *Perkembangan Kebatinan di Indonesia* (1976), and *Peribadi* (1950) that value the independent individual will, and addresses the need for spiritual development and metaphysical consciousness. These works were written from rationalistic perspective and reformist Muslim view of Muhammadiyah, that brought forth compelling argument against deviant teaching of kebatinan or religious indigenization and mysticism in Minangkabau.

His writings includes fictional and non-fictional books, literature, and motivation and significant theme of mystical and spiritual experience, which includes *Mengembalikan Tasawuf ke Pangkalnya* (1942), *Doa-Doa Rasulullah SAW* (1974), *Akhlaqul Karimah* (1992), *Mutiara Filsafat* (1956), *Perkembangan Tasawuf dari Abad ke Abad* (1952) and *Renungan Tasawuf* (1985) that refers to the spiritual-ethical teaching of al-Ghazali, al-Junayd, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah and Syah Waliyullah, reaffirming the essence of tasawuf as conceived by Junayd and its perennial value and truth that made relevance to present world society. It develops the tawhidic worldview of the Qur'an and sunnah and Muslim outlook of life in conceptualising the intellectual and religious aspects of its history and reaffirming its profound spirituality, and uncompromising principle of monotheism (tawhid).

The last and final work of Hamka which has lasting impact on Muslim in Malay-Indonesian world is his monumental 13th volume Qur'anic exegesis *Tafsir*

al-Azhar. This is a great work which draw upon his knowledge of Arabic literature, poetry, Islamic theology, philosophy and civilization, Islamic history, Islamic jurisprudence, and western philosophy and thought, although this was maintained through Arabic translation. It features an enriching aspect of Malay-Indonesian culture and the sociology, art, language, history and politics and contemporary development of scientific knowledge and technology (Mohd. Kamal Hassan, 2020).

Hamka's *tafsir* lesson was first featured in his fortnightly magazine *Gema Islam* which appeared in 1962 to replace *Panji Masyarakat* which was banned by Sukarno in 1960. The 30th volume work was originated from his 1959 after *fajar* (dawn) lectures or kuliah tafsir (exegesis of the Qur'an) in Masjid Agung al-Azhar. It was published in the *Gema Islam* magazine only up to 1964, when he was arrested on trumped-up charges by Sukarno regime. The baseless accusation of plotting against the regime was obviously concocted to justify his arrest. The communist leaning of secular regime in fact want to remove him from further influencing Muslim community in Indonesia with his stirring religious sermon and popular writing (Mohd. Kamal Hassan, 2020).

After he was released from detention it took him one year to improve and fine tune his writing of tafsir and able to publish the first juzuk (chapter) in 1967. Among his references were the 38 Arabic *tafsir*, six major hadith collection, and leading sirah work and biography such as *Lubab al-Ta'wil* by Khazin, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* by Sayyid Qutb, *al-Mushaf al-Mufassar* by Farid Wajdi, *al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an* by al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir al-Kashshaf* by Abu al-Qasim Mahmud b. 'Umar al-Zamakhshari (467-538), *al-Tawassul wa'l-Wasilah* by Ibn Taimiyah, *Al-Arba'in fi Usul al-Din* and *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* by al-Ghazali, and *Futuh al-Makkiyah* by Ibn 'Arabi.

His *Tafsir* begin with *juzu'* (chapter) 18, *Surah al-Mu'minun* as its initial starting point in the course of writing and accomplishing his tafsir. The complete work was originally published in 13th volume and later revised and expanded by him in several places. It was widely printed and distributed by local publishers such as Pustaka Panjimas (1982), Pustaka Nasional (1989) and the latest edition by Gema Insani (2015) in 9 volumes.

Hamka's *tafsir* was inspired by the rational spirit of *Tafsir al-Manar*, which was appealing to his heart, by resorting to different *qawl* and *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and adapting to societal development, suitable to the time the *tafsir* was written. It adopted the Salafi mazhab orientation that directly referred to the Qur'an as its main sources instead clouded by classical commentaries. It also makes references to contemporary religious intellectual problem in Indonesia.

Based on substantive review, there were significantly lacking of comprehensive works that discussed the seminal role and contribution of Hamka in advocating and espousing for religious reform in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. Only few writings in the form of article and thesis that has briefly discussed aspect of modern reform and renewal that he projected especially in *Tafsir al-Azhar* (Wan Sabri Wan Yusof, 1997) and the structural reform of dakwah activism and its basic orientation and approaches (Haslina Ibrahim, 2022). However, there were several indispensable works of Hamka himself that presented the religious idealism and aspiration for reform in Indonesia. Among

his principal works which focus on the crucial theme of reform were *Ayahku: Riwayat Hidup Dr. H. Abdul Karim Amrullah dan Perjuangan Kaum Agama di Sumatera* (2007), *Teguran Suci dan Jujur Terhadap Mufti Johor* (1958) and *Pengaruh Muhammad Abduh di Indonesia* (1961).

Ayahku documented the historical struggle of Kaum Muda in West Sumatera (Ahmad Murad Merican, 2024) led by Shaykh Abdul Karim Amrullah (1879-1945) (Fauzan et al., 2024) to advocate modern aspiration of Islam based on Abduh's idealism and his rational and modern thought. His legacy was continued by Hamka through *Kulliyah al-Muballighin* of Sumatera and in the movement of Muhammadiyah that has significantly influence the socio-religious course in Indonesia. *Teguran Suci dan Jujur Terhadap Mufti Johor* articulated the intense struggle of Kaum Muda (the young faction) to combat heresy and superstition in Indonesia and their dispute with kaum Tua (the old guard) on trivial issues that has brought unrest in local dispute of religion and thought. It illustrated Hamka's attempt to reconcile the different and restore the fundamental unity of ummah as *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah* (people of the tradition and the consensus of the ummah)

Pengaruh Muhammad Abduh di Indonesia is a historic speech he delivered in the momentous event for the conferment of the title of Doctor Honoris Causa upon him in 1958 from the University of al-Azhar, Egypt. It described in detail "the influence of Al Ustadz Al Imam Syeikh Muhammad 'Abduh's teaching and thought in Indonesia" and his impact in the development of thought, culture and dakwah in the region. Besides that, many other writings in books, thesis and dissertation also gave concise exposition on the aspects of reform inspired by Hamka and his role to reinvigorate the spirit of reform and to restore the dynamism of the ummah in the Malay world. These, summarily, were discussed by H. Rusydi (1981), Wan Sabri Wan Yusof (1997), Milhan Yusuf (1995), Mohammad Hafiz Ahmad (2014) and Khairudin Aljunied (2018) that outlined his contributions in gearing significant change and transforming the ummah from his philosophical, and religious writings.

It illustrates the inspiring role of Hamka in gearing the cosmopolitan reform of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, and his impact in improving the modern life of Muslim in his highly active socio-political engagement and theological writing to synthesize the process.

The reform movement he inaugurated was carried out by Kaum Muda (the young faction) in the Malay Archipelago that disseminated his dynamics ideas and aspiration through journals and newspapers such as *Al-Imam*, *Al-Munir* and *Saudara*. One of the leading figure and pioneer in the struggle of Kaum Muda was Haji Rasul (Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah) and Kiyai Ahmad Dahlan whose legacy was continued by Hamka that was hailed as the foremost advocate of Abduh's reformist ideas through his influential writing and activity.

Some of the main objectives underlying this research are: (a) to investigate the outstanding contribution and role of Hamka in leading the modern struggle of Kaum Muda in Malay Archipelago (b) to analyse the theoretical foundation and method he inspired to realize the aspiration for reform and renewal (c) to illustrate his contributions in advocating change and reform through his extensive writings and activities (d) to study his significant influence and legacy in the modern history of Islam and reformist tradition in the Malay Archipelago.

While the significance important brought forth by this research are: (a) to implement the reform ideas advocated by Hamka in Muhammadiyah organisation and other socio-religious movement in the Malay Archipelago (b) to develop his ideal framework as module in the subject of Asian Civilization and Islam in Southeast Asia as indispensable syllabus for IPT (c) to apply his inspiring ideas of reform in transforming the contemporary ummah (d) to mobilize enlightening discourse on reform, *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) *'aql* (reason), *kalam* (Islamic theology) and *maqasid shariah* (the higher objective of Islamic law), and to break the friction between Kaum Tua (the old guard) and kaum Muda (the young faction).

Method

The method of study is based on inductive and deductive approach. It analyse the views and principal works of Hamka that presented the major framework of reform and its intrinsic Islamic idealism as formulated in his works. This critical ideas and exposition was derived from fundamental text and primary source he produced. It also based on secondary sources from previous works that critically analyse Hamka's modernist thought and perspective of Islamic modernism. This material and data were accessed mainly from archives and manuscripts in the Cornell University's Library's collection that keep the entire corpus of works and references and personal collection of Hamka. Exclusive interview with families and students of Hamka were also conducted to gather some unclassified data.

Some of the expected outcome / impact of this study are: (a) to establish Hamka's prominence and his extensive influence in the reform movement in Malay Archipelago (b) manifesting his inspiring work that projecting the reform ideas especially *Tafsir al-Azhar* (c) expounding his contributions in advocating dynamic and progressive Islam in Malay Archipelago (d) to reclaim his rightful position and legacy in the reform tradition in the Malay world.

Results and Discussion

1. Result

The modernist impact of Abduh had a remarkably profound and lasting impact in the Malay Archipelago, whose reformist ideas had strong repercussions in the political and social landscape of the region and were readily adopted by Hamka in his deeply influential tafsir, *Tafsir al-Azhar*.

The reformative force initiated by Muhammad Abduh in Egypt had a phenomenal impact in Malay-Indonesian world. Many great scholars and reformists branded as Kaum Muda (the young faction) were deeply influenced by his ideas and aspirations. Notable among them were Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (Haji Rasul) (1879-1945), and Haji Abdul Malik bin Abdul Karim Amrullah (1908-1981) who was hailed from West Sumatera.

Abduh's indelible legacy in the Malay-Indonesian world is evident in the scholarship he inspired among reform-oriented scholars in the form of tafsir, journals, press, magazines, schools, religious movements and institutions that flourished in the 19th and 20th century.

The spread of Abduh's ideas begin with the birth of the modernist reformist Pan-Islamism advocated by al-Afghani and 'Abduh, that attracted large audience from young activist and students. The network established between the Middle East and the Malay Archipelago begin at the centre of Cairo metropolis, at the height of colonial times and particularly in the 1920s, that provided a fertile ground for the Malay-Indonesian students.

Cairo was the cornerstone of tradition and the epicentre of cultural and religious movements, in which it has been and will always be a citadel of faith and a center of Islamic activity for the general welfare of the people.

In early 20th century, the wide circulation of "islah-oriented" journals, magazines and newspapers such as al-Imam (whose headquarters was in Singapore), al-Munir (West Sumatera), al-Ikhwan and Saudara and other influential works in Malaya contributed to extend Abduh's influence and sparked an unprecedented reform and revivalist movement in the Malay world.

Tafsir al-Manar, dictated by Muhammad Abduh and later published by Muhammad Rashid Rida in his periodical al-Manar, was highly influential in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago and had extensive impact on a range of tafsir produced in the 20th century. It showcased an important methodology of Qur'anic exegesis that celebrated the power of reason, besides encouraging critical investigation and deep reflection and definitive ijtihad (independent reasoning). The volume featured commentaries based on systematic exposition of rational principles and scientific framework..

2. Discussion

One of the most outstanding tafsir dedicated to the revival and reform of Islam in modern times was Tafsir al-Azhar, a major work by Shaykh Haji Abdul Malik bin Abdul Karim Amrullah that played a crucial role in propagating the views of classical tafsir and contemporary religious ideal and realizing the aspiration for reform and renewal in Indonesia. It was compiled from Hamka's lecture on the commentary of the Qur'an delivered at Al-Azhar Mosque, Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta in the kulliyah subuh (seasonal class after dawn). Since 1959, the commentary was published in Gema Islam, an influential periodical which profoundly reflected the idealism of al-Manarist school inspired by Muhammad Abduh, the "leading exponent of modern Islam in Egypt", as indicated in the style and approach of the tafsir.

The largest part of the tafsir from surah al-Mu'minun (the Believers) to al-Baqarah (the Heifer) was accomplished in his solitary confinement (27 January 1964-21 January 1967) when Hamka was falsely charged and accused of plotting to topple the Sukarno's regime during his guided democracy era. Dedicated to young Muslims with an inadequate knowledge of Arabic who were insufficiently furnished to understand the Qur'an, the Tafsir served as da'wah materials for leading mubaligh and cadre of Muhammadiyah.

First released in 1961, the Tafsir clearly portrayed the impact of Abduh's reformism in its exposition, whereby having been influenced by the Muslim reformist ideas championed by 'Abduh and his colleagues, Hamka attempted to disseminate the reformist ideas in the Malay- Indonesian archipelago, through

the available means at his disposal, that is by preaching and writing. The principal influence of Abduh's rational ideology and discursive philosophy of jurisprudence that impacted the tafsir was his *Risalah al-Tawhid* that influence Hamka's conception of the law, by way of his portraying the challenge and struggle towards the abolishment of taqlid (uncritical acceptance of the past legal opinions) and the implementation of ijtihad (personal judgment).

Muhammad Abduh's phenomenal influence is acknowledged in the introduction of *Tafsir Al-Azhar*: "A very interesting and captivating commentary to be an example for the commentator is *Tafsir al-Manar*, penned by Sayyid Rashid Redha, based on the teachings outlined by his teacher Imam Muhammad Abduh. His *Tafsir*, besides interpreting science pertaining to religion, comprising hadith, jurisprudence and history and others, also synchronize the verses with the current development of politics and social, corresponding to the time the *Tafsir* was conceived and crafted" (Hamka, 1982).

Hamka had been exposed to the exhaustive tradition of reform brought from the Middle East since his early years, as evidenced in his immaculate keynote address on the occasion of receiving honorary doctorate from al-Azhar University: "I admit that I never learned, either in al-Azhar or at Cairo University, but my intimate relationship with Egypt had long been rooted, since I managed to read Arabic books, especially of Shaykh Muhammad Abduh and Sayyid Rashid Ridha".

The approach of *Tafsir al-Azhar* was primarily based on the critical framework of tahlili (exhaustive commentary) and rational interpretation outlined by Muhammad Abduh in *Tafsir al-Manar*, which defended the supremacy of reason and upheld the principle of ijtihad based on maslahah (general welfare), reverberating Abduh's principles in asserting a claim to "renewed interpretation" (ijtihad) of Islamic law based on the requirements of "social justice" (maslahah) of his own era. According to Abduh, where there seems to be a contradiction between "texts" (nas) and "social justice" (maslahah), then social justice must be given precedence. Abduh supports the principle based on the notion that Islamic law was revealed to serve, inter alia, human welfare. Hence, all matters which preserve the well-being of the society are in-line with the objectives of the sharia and, therefore, should be pursued and legally recognized. Abduh believed that independent thinking (ijtihad) would enlarge the scope of knowledge because most of the aspects of human welfare (mu'amalat) can be further elaborated with the use of reason ('aql).

Tafsir al-Azhar radically challenged the status quo and emphasized the need to transform the worldview and reclaim the authentic values of religion as promulgated by the "salafi". Hamka, himself a reformer, argued in his interpretation of Qur'anic verses, in the context of his reform ideas in which bid'a (innovations in the realm of religion), and superstition were the main targets. This clearly resonates Abduh's aspiration and struggle to advocate Islamic modernity and its rational ideology, by outlining an approach to "return" to a pure understanding of Islam by interpreting the Qur'an and the sunna through the use of independent and rational investigation (ijtihad) above the allegedly blind reliance (taqlid) upon the opinions of the medieval jurists.

The *Tafsir* also developed a scientific methodology of exegesis which emphasized the central role of 'aql (reason) and its high place in textual

exegesis, in which a visible concern in his tafsir was the issue of 'aql (reason), rationality and reason. This concern is definitely related to his support of the reformist movement and the neglect of Muslims over the use of reason and their dependence over taqlid, arguing that it is 'aql that enables man to distinguish between good and evil and to appreciate God's creation around him. The use of 'aql is essential in examining ambiguity and the meaning of the Qur'an.

The Tafsir also portrayed the political and social life in Indonesia acting as a mirror of social change. In analysing the significance of the tafsir as a reflection of the socio-political experience of Indonesia we can concluded that Tafsir al-Azhar was a mirror of social change: pre-independence and post-independence Indonesia. All such issues were galvanized to contextualize the meanings of verses of the Qur'an in order to be understood and related better to the Malay-Indonesian people.

3. Impact

The cosmopolite nature of Hamka's works had presented multipronged civilizational appeal of his influence and idealism and renewed interest in the fundamental aspect of reform in the early 20th century Minangkabau heartland. It conveys his critical hermeneutics and epistemological ground in embracing the pan-Islamic ideals and its rational spirit that was instrumental in driving the historical rise of Muhammadiyah (Muhammad Nurrosyid Huda Setiawan et al., 2023) and the revival of its traditional role in modern context. The principle influence was developed in the context of modernizing Islam, and the fusion of Islamic tradition (Febriyani et al., 2024) with contemporary universal context of socio-cultural reality of post-truth era.

His ideas has significance relevance in the context of social reform (Sri Mulyani, 2024) and dakwah (Yuyun Affandi et al., 2024) carried out by Muhammadiyah, reflecting his universal concern to applying Islam in modern life, as "a key factor in modernist reformism" (Peter G Riddell, 2001). It emphasizes on the communal aspect and values of moderation and tolerance (Ery Charmelita Raska, 2023) and the force of cosmopolitan outlook that "Hamka's writing brings forth the legacy of cosmopolitanism embedded in the varying Malay traditions" (Aljunied, 2018).

His classic approaches has set forth a vibrant and cosmopolitan outlook of Islam and its fundamental socio-cultural force, aiming "to reform the self-identity of Malay-Muslims into a feeling of belonging to a millennium-old civilization" (Aljunied, 2018).

His creative writing was instrumental to the strengthening of the Islamic life and the reform of Muslim community particularly in the Malay world that bring forth enriching ideas of religion and its scientific elements and moral (Ahmad Ardi Nugroho, 2024) foundation. The contextual approaches he developed to the Quran has provided the essential elements and method to reinterpret the classical text and its epistemological significance by highlighting the essence of religion and its integral socio-religious context and framework (Syarifah Zahrah Syed Khalid et al., 2024) and projecting its dynamic impact on religious thought (Hafiz Asyraf et al., 2020) and vision..

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article had attempted to provide an overview of Hamka's instrumental role in driving the new consciousness and unprecedented reform in the Malay Archipelago in light of his struggle in Muhammadiyah that brought forth the dynamic force and structural nuances of its organizational framework. His political ideal was particularly centered on reforming Muslim society and their religious practice by embracing both its traditional and reformist spirit. It brings enriching cosmopolitan outlook of Islamic spirituality and ideology in the context of its rational argument and viewpoint manifesting his unprecedented intellectual and social insight that influence the modern cause of religious reform and help to transform the Malay-Indonesian world into dynamic and progressive nation. The production of his Qur'anic exegesis was instrumental in keeping the pace of reform in modern context espousing its social and religious ideal and rational spirit which has left profound legacy and impact contributing immensely to national integration and renewed ethical and moral consciousness.

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