

Hamka and the Rise of Kaum Muda (the Modernist) in Indonesia

Ahmad Nabil Amir^{1*} & Tasnim Abdul Rahman²

¹Former Associate Research Fellow, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM), 24 Persiaran Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, Bukit Tunku, 50480, Kuala Lumpur

²Fakulti Pengajian Kontemporari Islam, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA) Kampus Gong Badak, Gong Badak 21300 Kuala Nerus, Terengganu

*Corresponding author: nabiller2002@gmail.com

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Abstract

The paper aims to study the historical background of the Islamic reform movement in West Sumatera with particular reference to the idea of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah or his pseudonym Hamka (1908-1981). His religious ideal was instrumental in driving the new consciousness and unprecedented religious struggle that erupted in the late 20th century in the Malay Archipelago, which reflected the force of modern ideas of Shaykh Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) that had brought decisive and most significant influence in the region. The reform movement he inaugurated was carried out by Kaum Muda (the young faction) in the Malay Archipelago, who disseminated his dynamic ideas and aspirations through journals and newspapers such as *Al-Imam*, *Al-Munir*, and *Saudara*. One of the leading figures and pioneers in the struggle of Kaum Muda was Haji Rasul and Kiyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan, whose legacy was continued by Hamka, who was celebrated as the foremost advocate of Abduh's reformist ideas through his influential writing and activity. Therefore, this research analyzes Hamka's reputed struggle in leading this unprecedented religious movement for reform (*islah*) and renewal (*tajdid*) in the Malay world. This research aims to develop his legacy and monumental contribution to the Malay world's history and tradition of reform.

Keywords: Hamka, Muhammad Abduh, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, Reform, Modernist

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis latar belakang sejarah perkembangan gerakan pembaharuan Islam yang muncul di Minangkabau yang dipelopori oleh Haji Abdul Malik bin Abdul Karim Amrullah atau nama singkatannya Hamka (1908-1981). Pandangan agamanya memberi pengaruh yang mendalam dalam membangkitkan kesadaran dan perjuangan agama kaum muda yang tercetus pada permulaan abad ke 20 di kepulauan Melayu-Indonesia. Ia terkesan dengan gagasan-gagasan moden yang dikembangkan dari idea Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) yang memberi pengaruh yang besar. Gerakan pembaharuan ini dipelopori oleh

golongan modernis (Kaum Muda) yang menyebarkan idea-idea pembaharuan yang progresif dan dinamik menerusi penulisan jurnal dan akhbar yang diterbitkan iaitu *Al-Imam*, *Al-Munir* dan *Saudara*. Antara perintis yang awal dalam perjuangan kaum muda adalah bapanya sendiri iaitu Haji Rasul bersama-sama dengan Kiyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan yang merupakan pengasas gerakan Muhammadiyah. Perjuangan ini diwarisi oleh Hamka yang menjadi tonggak dan kekuatan penting dalam gerakan Muhammadiyah dengan idea-idea reformis yang diilhamkan oleh Muhammad Abduh melalui aktiviti dan penulisannya yang berpengaruh. Hasil kajian merumuskan bahawa gerakan perjuangannya telah membawa kesan yang meluas dalam mencetuskan kesedaran moden secara gerakan *tajdid* dan *islah* yang tersusun dalam pergerakan Muhammadiyah. Justeru artikel ini ingin menganalisis legasi dan sumbangan Hamka dalam sejarah serta tradisi pembaharuan dan pemodenan Islam di dunia Melayu.

Kata kunci: Hamka, Muhammad Abduh, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, Islah, Kaum Muda

Introduction

This paper offers an extensive study of the historical background of the Islamic reform movement in Minangkabau, especially the rise of Muhammadiyah in its formative years and its profound influence in the religious work and struggle of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, or his pseudonym Hamka (1908-1981). Based on substantive review, there was a significant lack of comprehensive works that discussed the crucial role and contribution of Hamka in advocating for unprecedented reform in the Malay world. Only a few writings in the form of a thesis briefly discussed aspects of modern reform and renewal that he projected, especially in *Tafsir al-Azhar* (Wan Sabri Wan Yusof, 1997). However, several important works of Hamka presented the religious idealism and aspiration for reform in Indonesia. Among his principal works which focus on the theme of reform are *Ayahku: Riwayat Hidup Dr. H. Abdul Karim Amrullah dan Perjuangan Kaum Agama di Sumatera* (1962), *Teguran Suci dan Jujur Terhadap Mufti Johor* (1958) *Pengaruh Muhammad Abduh di Indonesia* (1961) and *Said Djamiluddin Al-Afghany: Pelopor Kebangkitan Muslimin* (1970).

Ayahku documented the historical struggle of Kaum Muda in West Sumatera, led by Shaykh Abdul Karim Amrullah (1879-1945), to advocate the modern aspiration of Islam based on Abduh's idealism and school of thought. Hamka continued his legacy through *Kulliyah al-Muballighin* of Sumatera and in the movement of Muhammadiyah, which has significantly influenced 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 religious doctrine and thought. It illustrated Hamka's attempt to reconcile the differences 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 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 Syekh Muhammad 'Abduh's teaching and thought in Indonesia" and his impact on the development of thought, culture, and da'wah in the region. *Said Djamiluddin Al-Afghany: Pelopor Kebangkitan Muslimin* is a political biography of the Pan-Islamist reformer Jamal al-Din al-Afghani that appealed to Hamka's intellectual formation and rational outlook.

In addition, there were many other writings in the form of books, theses, and dissertations that gave a concise exposition on the aspects of reform and renewal inspired by Hamka and his role in reinvigorating the spirit of reform and in restoring the dynamism of the ummah in the Malay world. These, summarily, were discussed by H. Rusydi (1981), Karel A. Steenbrink (1994), Milhan Yusuf (1995), Wan Sabri Wan Yusof (1997), Muhammad Jamil (1998), Ahmad Ishak, Md Sidin ed. (2001), Fadzilah Din (2003), Abdul Rahman Abdul Aziz (2007, 2009), Muhammad Hilmi Jalil & Fakhru Adabi Abdul Kadir (2012), Mohammad Hafiz Ahmad (2014), James R. Rush (2016) and Khairudin Aljunied (2018) as well as from Hamka's writings, novels and memoirs such as *Angkatan Baru* (2020), *Tuan Direktur* (1966), *Empat Bulan di Amerika* (1954) *Kenang-Kenangan Ku Di-Malaya* (1957), and *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup* (1974) that reflected his vision of modern Indonesia, outlining his idealism and insightful vocation in gearing significant change and transforming the ummah from his classic worldview, that underlie his philosophical and religious writings.

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 analyze 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 reform tradition in the Malay Archipelago.

The significance brought forth by this research is: (a) to implement the reform ideas advocated by Hamka in the Muhammadiyah organization and other socio-religious movements in the Malay Archipelago; (b) to develop his ideal framework as a 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 syariah* (the higher objective of Islamic law) and to break the friction between Kaum Tua (the old guard) and Kaum Muda (the young faction).

Methodology

The method of study is based on an inductive approach. It analyses the views and principal work of Hamka that presented the primary framework of reform and religious idealism as formulated in his works. These critical ideas and exposition were derived from the fundamental text and primary sources he produced. It is also based on secondary sources from previous works that critically analyze Hamka's modernist thought and perspective of Islamic modernism. This material and data were accessed mainly from archives and manuscripts in Cornell University's Library's collection, which keeps the entire corpus of works and personal collections of Hamka. Exclusive interviews with families and students of Hamka were also conducted to gather some unclassified data. Some of the expected outcomes or *deliverables* results and impact of this study are: (a) to establish Hamka's prominence and his extensive influence in the reform movement in the Malay Archipelago; (b) manifesting his inspiring work that projects the reform ideas especially *Tafsir al-Azhar*; (c) expounding his contributions in advocating dynamic and rational Islam in Malay Archipelago (d) to reclaim his rightful position and legacy in the reform tradition in the Malay world.

Result and Discussion

The modernist impact of Muhammad Abduh had a remarkably profound and lasting impact on the Malay Archipelago, whose reformist ideas had substantial repercussions in the political and social landscape of the region. Hamka readily adopted it in his profoundly influential tafsir, *Tafsir al-Azhar*. The reformative force initiated by Muhammad Abduh in Egypt had a phenomenal impact on the Malay-Indonesian world. His ideas and aspirations profoundly influenced many great scholars and reformists, known as Kaum Muda (the young faction). Notable among them were Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (Haji Rasul) (1879-1945) and his son Haji Abdul Malik bin Abdul Karim Amrullah (1908-1981), who was hailed from West Sumatera. Muhammad Abduh's indelible legacy in the Malay-Indonesian world is evident in the scholarship he inspired among reform-oriented scholars in the *tafsir*, journals, press, magazines, schools, religious movements, and institutions that flourished in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The spread of Muhammad Abduh's ideas began with the birth of the reformist Pan-Islamism advocated by al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, which attracted an audience of young students. The network between the Middle East and the Malay Archipelago began at the center of Cairo's metropolis at the height of colonial times, particularly in the 1920s, and provided fertile ground for the Malay-Indonesian students. Cairo was the cornerstone of tradition and the epicenter of cultural and religious movements, which has been and will be a citadel of faith and a center of Islamic activity for the people. In the 20th century, the wide attention of "*islah*" in journals, magazines, and newspapers such as *al-Imam* (whose headquarters was in Singapore), *al-Munir* (West Sumatera), *al-Ikhwān*, *Saudara*, and other influential works in Malaya contributed to extending Muhammad Abduh's influence. It sparked an unprecedented reform movement for Islamic revival in the Malay world.

Tafsir al-Manar, dictated by Muhammad Abduh and later published by Muhammad Rashid Ridha, was highly influential in the Malay Archipelago and extensively impacted *tafsir* produced in the 20th century. It showcased an essential methodology of Qur'anic exegesis, the power of reason, and the encouragement of critical understanding (*ijtihad*). The volume featured commentaries based on a systematic exposition of rational principles and scientific framework.

One of the most outstanding *tafsir* dedicated to the revival and reform of Islam in modern times was *Tafsir al-Azhar* (1982), a significant work by Shaykh Haji Abdul Malik bin Abdul Karim Amrullah that played a role in realizing the aspiration for reform in Indonesia. He was compiled from Hamka's lecture in the *kulliyah subuh* (seasonal class after dawn) delivered at Al-Masjid al-Azhar, Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta. Since 1959, the commentary has been published in *Gema Islam*. This influential periodical profoundly reflected the idealism of Muhammad Abduh, the "leading exponent of modern Islam in Egypt," as indicated in the style and approach of the tafsir.

The most significant of the *tafsir*, from *surah al-Mu'minun* to *al-Baqarah*, was composed in jail (27 January 1964 until 21 January 1967) when Hamka was falsely charged and accused of plotting to topple the Sukarno's regime of guided democracy. In his tafsir, he was dedicated to the young Muslims with an inadequate knowledge of Arabic who were trying to understand the Qur'an; the *Tafsir* served as *da'wah* materials for leading *mubaligh* and cadre of Muhammadiyah.

In 1961, the *Tafsir* portrayed the impact of Muhammad Abduh's reformism in its exposition, whereby having been influenced by the Muslim reformist ideas of Muhammad 'Abduh and his colleagues, Hamka attempted to disseminate the reform ideas in his country, Indonesia, through the means available to him, that is by preaching and writing. The principal influence of Muhammad Abduh's ideology and critical philosophy of jurisprudence that impacted the *tafsir* was his *Risalah al-Tawhid*, which influenced 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 influence is acknowledged in the introduction of *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (1982): "A fascinating and captivating commentary to be an example for the commentator is *Tafsir al-Manar*, penned by Sayyid (Muhammad) Rashid Ridha based on the teachings outlined by his teacher Imam Muhammad Abduh. Besides interpreting the science of religion, his *Tafsir*, comprising hadith, jurisprudence history, and others, also synchronizes the verses with the development of politics and society, corresponding to the time the *Tafsir* was composed and crafted."

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 an 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 Muhammad Abduh and Sayyid (Muhammad) Rashid Ridha."

The approach of *Tafsir al-Azhar* was primarily based on the critical framework of 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 Muhammad Abduh's principles in asserting to "renewed interpretation" (*ijtihad*) of Islamic law based on the requirements of "social justice" (*maslahah*) of his era. According to Muhammad Abduh, where there seems to be a contradiction between "texts" (*nas*) and "social justice" (*maslahah*), then social justice must be given precedence. Muhammad Abduh supports the principle based on the notion that Islamic law was revealed to serve, among other things, human welfare. Hence, all matters that preserve the well-being of the society are in line with the objectives of the sharia and, therefore, should be pursued and legally recognized. Muhammad 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*).

In *Tafsir al-Azhar*, Hamka 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, a reformer, argued in his interpretation of Qur'anic verses in the context of his reform ideas that *bid'a* (innovations in the realm of religion) and superstition were the main targets. This idea resonates with Muhammad Abduh's aspiration and struggles to advocate Islamic modernism by outlining an approach to "return" to a pure understanding of Islam by interpreting the Qur'an and the Sunnah using independent and rational investigation (*ijtihad*) rather than the allegedly blind reliance (*taqlid*) upon the opinions of the medieval jurists.

The *Tafsir* also developed a scientific methodology of exegesis that emphasized the 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 related to his support of the reformist movement and the neglect of Muslims over the use of reason and their dependence on *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 Indonesia's political and social life as a mirror of social change. In analyzing the significance of the *tafsir* as a reflection of Indonesia's socio-political experience, we can conclude that *Tafsir al-Azhar* was a mirror of social change in pre-independence and post-independence Indonesia. All such issues were used to contextualize the meanings of verses of the Qur’an so that they were understood and related better to the Malay-Indonesian people”.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this article attempted to provide an overview of Hamka’s instrumental role in driving the new consciousness and unprecedented reform in the Malay Archipelago, considering his struggle in Muhammadiyah that inspired the momentous movement of religious modernism of Kaum Muda. Such an unprecedented work and struggle was manifested in his intellectual and socio-political vision and insight that influenced the masses and helped to transform the Malay-Indonesian world into a progressive and modern nation. The production of his Qur’anic exegesis was instrumental in keeping the pace of reform and social change and left such a profound legacy of his religious writing and monumental struggle.

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