

THE CONCEPT OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN *KITAB KUMPULAN RINGKAS BERBETULAN LEKAS*: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Konsep Tadbir Urus yang Baik dalam Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas: Satu Analisis Tekstual

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ABSTRACT

Good governance is a foundational element in the administration of a state, and it must be well understood by rulers, nobles, and those entrusted with leadership responsibilities. This principle is closely tied to the broader objective of achieving Maqasid al-Shariah, particularly in the domains of justice and the harmonization of relationships between the monarch, his ministers, and the rakyat (common people). This article critically examines the concept of governance as articulated by Raja Haji Ali Kelana in the classical Malay manuscript Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas (KKRBL) as the last known political treatise in the corpus of traditional Malay literature. The study adopts a qualitative textual analysis method, focusing on the ethical and philosophical dimensions of governance embedded in the KKRBL. The findings reveal three principal ideas. First, the state is analogized to the human body, in which every organ or component must function effectively to ensure the overall well-being of the whole. Second, the manuscript highlights the critical role of leaders in fostering justice, stability, and prosperity. Third, it underscores the significance of religion and historical consciousness as guiding frameworks in determining the trajectory of national leadership. This study aims to reassess and foreground Raja Haji Ali Kelana's contribution to Malay political thought and proposes that the insights from KKRBL can serve as a moral and intellectual reference for contemporary and future leadership.

Keywords: Good governance, Maqasid al-Shariah, Raja Haji Ali Kelana, Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas

ABSTRAK

Tadbir urus yang baik merupakan asas utama dalam pentadbiran sesebuah negara dan mesti difahami dengan mendalam oleh para pemerintah, bangsawan, serta individu yang dipertanggungjawabkan dengan amanah kepimpinan. Prinsip ini berkait rapat dengan matlamat utama pencapaian Maqasid al-Shariah, khususnya dalam aspek keadilan dan keharmonian hubungan antara raja, para menteri, serta rakyat jelata. Artikel ini meneliti secara kritikal konsep tadbir urus sebagaimana diuraikan oleh Raja Haji Ali Kelana dalam manuskrip Melayu klasik

Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas (KKRBL), yang dianggap sebagai karya politik terakhir dalam korpus kesusasteraan Melayu tradisional. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah analisis tekstual kualitatif dengan memberi tumpuan kepada dimensi etika dan falsafah tadbir urus yang terkandung dalam KKRBL. Dapatan kajian memperlihatkan tiga gagasan utama. Pertama, negara diumpamakan sebagai tubuh manusia, di mana setiap organ atau komponennya mesti berfungsi dengan baik bagi menjamin kesejahteraan keseluruhan. Kedua, manuskrip ini menekankan peranan penting para pemimpin dalam memupuk keadilan, kestabilan, dan kemakmuran. Ketiga, ia menegaskan kepentingan agama dan kesedaran sejarah sebagai kerangka panduan dalam menentukan hala tuju kepimpinan negara. Kajian ini bertujuan menilai semula serta menyerlahkan sumbangan Raja Haji Ali Kelana terhadap pemikiran politik Melayu, di samping mencadangkan bahawa pandangan-pandangan daripada KKRBL dapat dijadikan rujukan moral dan intelektual bagi kepimpinan masa kini dan akan datang.

Kata kunci: Tadbir urus yang baik, Maqasid al-Shariah, Raja Haji Ali Kelana, Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas

INTRODUCTION

The concept of etiquette or *adab* in the Malay-Muslim context cannot be separated from the Islamic worldview, as the term *adab* itself is etymologically derived from Arabic, denoting refined behavior, virtuous character, proper manners, and eloquent speech. Within the framework of governance and administration, *adab* refers to the ethical dimensions of leadership and the principled execution of duties in public service, especially within government institutions. According to Kamus Dewan (2016), *pentadbiran* (administration) is defined as matters relating to governance, the methods of governing, and organizational management. In a broader scope, governance is understood as the process by which a government manages societal affairs and ensures the welfare of the nation and its people.

Therefore, good governance inferred as encompassing the systems, regulations, and ethical conduct by which leadership is exercised; both in statecraft and in institutional administration. In classical Malay literature, this theme is embedded within a genre known as constitutional manuscripts (*naskhah ketatanegaraan*), which served as didactic texts for rulers. Notable works in this genre include *Taj al-Salatin* (The Crown of Kings), *Bustan al-Salatin* (The Gardens of Kings), *Nasihah al-Muluk* (Advice to Kings), *Thamarat al-Muhimmah* (The Essential Fruits), and *Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas* (KKRBL). These texts were composed with the explicit purpose of offering moral guidance and administrative counsel to rulers, rooted in Islamic legal and ethical principles. As articulated by Raja Ali Haji in *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*:

“...*hukum syariat yang di dalam al-Quran al-‘azim dan di dalam hadis nabi s.a.w. yang sudah dibanyakkkan makna dan maksudnya dan mafhumnya dengan jalan yang teguh dengan ilmu naqli dan ‘aqli dengan jalan qiyas yang jali daripada ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama‘ah, iaitu imamnya yang maha besar lagi mujtahid mutlak, iaitu Maliki dan Syafi‘i yang dipakai oleh umat nabi s.a.w. beberapa jenis daripada bangsa dan negeri dan benua...*”

(Raja Ali Haji Raja Ahmad, 1999, pp. 120).

According to Azman Yusof (2012), although constitutional texts were often composed at the behest of the royal court, there were instances where such works emerged from the author’s own moral conscience and sense of duty; grounded in their role as advisors with deep intellectual and administrative insight. These texts were not merely instruments of royal command but represented a sincere contribution to the moral and political guidance of kings and rulers. A prime example of this can be seen in *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, which was written for the Riau-Lingga Kingdom. Raja Ali Haji clearly dedicated the work as a personal offering to the ruler:

“*Bermula al-faqīr ilā Allāh Ta‘ālā al-Ḥaqq ‘alā Ibn Raja Aḥmad al-Riyāwīyah mempersembahkan hadiah ini akan jadi peringatan ke hadrat al-Mukarram Yang Dipertuan Muda Raja Ali*”

(Raja Ali Haji Raja Ahmad, 1999, pp.34).

This demonstrates that the work was not produced under compulsion, but rather as a voluntary and scholarly act of devotion. In a similar vein, KKRBL was not composed under the directive of Sultan Abdul Rahman, the ruler of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate at the time. Instead, it was written in response to a request made by Paduka Khalid Raja Hitam:

“Maka diperbuat kumpulan ini atas jalan yang ringkas supaya dapat mengetahui lekas ialah dengan permintaan saudara yang ijābatuhu ‘alā muhtam Paduka Khalid Raja Hitam...”
(Raja Haji Ali Raja Muhammad Yusuf, 1999:1).

This statement reflects the autonomous intellectual agency of the author, who, while honouring a request, retained the tone of sincerity and scholarly initiative typical of advisory literature within the Malay political tradition.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative methodology, focusing on the textual analysis of KKRBL. The primary method utilised is content analysis, a qualitative research technique aimed at interpreting data that has been systematically documented in written form. This approach allows for a deep exploration of meaning, structure, and patterns within the text, ensuring that the analysis remains both contextually grounded and theoretically informed.

The content analysis conducted in this study is carried out systematically and in detail, adhering to a structured interpretive framework. According to Ahmad Sunawari Long (2007:128), content analysis as a research method is characterised by three essential features that ensure the credibility and rigour of the findings. *First*, it must be objective, meaning that it follows specific rules and procedures without the influence of researcher bias. *Second*, it must be systematic, whereby the information is organised according to a pre-established structure or coding system. *Third*, it must be general, implying that the results produced are aligned with broader theoretical frameworks and may be applicable within a specified field of inquiry.

Through this methodological approach, the study aims to extract and synthesise the key themes, values, and philosophical underpinnings of governance as articulated in KKRBL, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on classical Malay political thought.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Riau-Lingga Sultanate Kingdom

The Riau-Lingga Kingdom held a prominent and influential position within the broader framework of Malay culture, with its roots traceable to the 16th century. Originally, it functioned as a component of the larger Johor-Riau-Lingga polity; a political entity that embodied the continuation of the post-Melaka Malay sultanate tradition. However, a significant shift in the structure of governance occurred during the reign of Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Syah (1722–1761), whereby administrative authority was vested in the Yang Dipertuan Muda. In contrast, the Sultan's role became largely ceremonial, serving primarily as a symbolic representation of royal sovereignty (Muchtar Lutfi, 1977:52). This transformation marked a decentralisation of power, reflecting a dual leadership model that was characteristic of the Riau-Lingga political configuration. The administrative centre of the Riau-Lingga Kingdom was established at Pulau Bintan, a strategically located island that subsequently evolved into one of the major trading hubs within the Malay Archipelago. Its geographical position along vital

maritime routes enabled it to flourish as a central node in the trade of spices and other valuable commodities, thereby enhancing the kingdom's economic stature in the region. The kingdom's period of greatest prosperity coincided with the leadership of Yang Dipertuan Muda Raja Haji, who was widely recognised not only as a sovereign figure but also as an accomplished entrepreneur and formidable military commander. His leadership marked a golden era of political influence and commercial success for Riau-Lingga.

However, this prosperity began to decline following a significant military confrontation with colonial forces. In 1784, Raja Haji led an armed resistance against the Dutch East Indies army but was ultimately defeated, marking a pivotal moment in the erosion of the kingdom's political and economic dominance (Azman Yusof, 2012:34). The defeat not only weakened Riau-Lingga's sovereignty but also exposed the vulnerabilities of Malay maritime polities in the face of expanding European colonial ambitions.

On 26 November 1818, a formal agreement was concluded between Yang Dipertuan Muda Raja Jaafar; acting on behalf of Sultan Abdul Rahman and C. Walterbeck, representing the Dutch East Indies Company. This treaty marked a critical juncture in the political history of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate, as it signified the formal subordination of the kingdom to Dutch colonial authority. The pact outlined four principal conditions: firstly, the Sultan formally recognised the Dutch as the highest authority in Riau; secondly, the Dutch were granted permission to station and strengthen their military presence within the territory; thirdly, all other foreign powers were prohibited from entering into trade agreements with Riau; and fourthly, the appointment of any future Sultan was contingent upon the approval of the Dutch East Indies Company (Muchtar Lutfi, 1977:58–59).

These terms effectively dismantled the kingdom's sovereignty, transforming Riau-Lingga from an autonomous Malay polity into a vassal state under colonial control. From that point onwards, the Riau-Lingga Sultanate no longer functioned as an independent entity in regional or international affairs, and its political agency became heavily constrained by Dutch imperial interests. In an effort to strengthen its position within the international arena and to formulate a strategic response to the growing threat of colonial domination, the Riau-Lingga Kingdom actively pursued diplomatic relations with several regional powers in Southeast Asia. Among its key allies were the Kingdom of Johor and the Sultanate of Aceh, both of which shared common cultural, political, and religious ties with Riau-Lingga. These alliances reflected the kingdom's attempt to build a network of mutual support grounded in Malay-Islamic political solidarity.

One of the most significant diplomatic initiatives occurred between 1904 and 1905, when Raja Ali Kelana was dispatched as an envoy to the Ottoman Empire (Turkey). His mission aimed to secure military assistance and political backing from the Khalifah in the face of increasing Dutch colonial encroachment. This effort underscores the Riau-Lingga court's awareness of transregional Islamic diplomacy and the symbolic importance of aligning with the Ottoman Caliphate. However, despite these endeavours, the colonial power of the Dutch proved overwhelming. The Dutch East Indies authorities gradually intensified their control over the Malay world, culminating in the eventual dissolution of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate in the early 20th century. The fall of Riau-Lingga marked not only the end of a sovereign Malay polity but also the broader erosion of indigenous Islamic governance in the region under the weight of European imperialism.

Raja Haji Ali Raja Muhammad Yusof (Raja Ali Kelana)

Raja Haji Ali was the son of Raja Muhammad Yusof al-Ahmadi (the 10th Yang Dipertuan Muda, 1858–1899), grandson of Raja Ali (the 8th Yang Dipertuan Muda, 1844–1857), great-grandson of Raja Ja'afar (the 6th Yang Dipertuan Muda, 1808–1832), and a direct descendant of Raja Haji Fisabilillah (the 4th Yang Dipertuan Muda, 1777–1784), Upu Daeng Chelak (the 2nd Yang Dipertuan Muda, 1729–1746), Upu Daeng Rilaka, and ultimately Upu Lamadusalad, the ruler of the Luwuk Kingdom in Sulawesi (Azman Yusof, 2012). Despite his noble heritage and the established tradition of record-keeping among Malay aristocrats, Raja Haji Ali's exact year of birth remains a matter of scholarly debate.

This is particularly curious given that the recording of birth dates was a common practice among royal families for the purpose of succession and official documentation. Abdul Jalil Borhan (2011:47) asserted that Raja Haji Ali was born in 1858. However, other researchers have offered alternative dates: Aswandi Syahri (2007:10) cited sources that suggest he may have been born in either 1849 or 1850.

The name “Ali” was a common and highly esteemed name among the Riau nobility, resulting in the frequent recurrence of this name across generations of aristocratic lineages. In order to distinguish himself from other figures bearing the same name, Raja Haji Ali bin Raja Muhammad Yusuf was more widely known by the epithet Raja Ali Kelana. The term Kelana, in the context of the Riau-Lingga court, denoted the putera mahkota or crown prince, who was considered the designated heir to the position of Yang Dipertuan Muda. Despite his lineage and political standing, the Dutch colonial authorities opposed his appointment as the 11th Yang Dipertuan Muda of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate (Azman Yusof, 2014). In addition to the name Raja Ali Kelana, he was also referred to by various other titles and epithets, such as Raja Ali Riau, Raja Ali Bukit, and Raja Haji Ali al-Ahmadi. The honorific al-Ahmadi was adopted after he pledged his allegiance (bai’ah) and received spiritual transmission (tawajjuh) in the Tariqat Naqshabandiyyah Mujaddidiyyah Ahmadiyyah Muzhhariyyah during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1322H/1905M. This spiritual affiliation was conferred upon him by the az-Zawawi family, who were prominent figures within the said Sufi order (Aswandi Syahri, 2007; Abdul Jalil Borhan, 2011).

Raja Ali Kelana was raised within the aristocratic milieu of the Riau-Lingga royal household, which was deeply rooted in a tradition of religious piety and intellectualism. As a result, it may be inferred that he received both structured formal and rich informal education from an early age. The Riau court itself was regarded as one of the premier centers of Islamic scholarship in the Malay world during the 19th century. It attracted distinguished scholars, both local and international, such as Raja Ali Haji, a renowned intellectual from Riau, as well as respected foreign religious scholars including Habib Syeikh al-Saqqaf, Syeikh Ahmad al-Jabarti, and Syeikh Ismail bin Abdullah al-Minkabawi (Azman Yusof, 2014). In addition to his noble lineage, Raja Ali Kelana was known for his devout religiosity, love of knowledge, and reverence for Muslim scholars. This reverence had long been a hallmark of the Riau-Lingga rulers. For instance, during the reign of Raja Ali bin Daeng Kamboja; the 5th Yang Dipertuan Muda (1784–1806), a prominent scholar from Madura, Syeikh Abdul Ghaffar, introduced the Tariqat Khalwatiyyah Sammaniyyah, and the ruler became one of his devoted disciples. Similarly, Raja Ja’afar, the 6th Yang Dipertuan Muda (1808–1832), demonstrated great appreciation for religious preachers and Qur’an reciters (qari’). Whenever a Qur’an teacher visited Pulau Penyengat, the ruler would personally invite the scholar to reside at the royal court for several months to provide instruction to members of the royal family and state officials. This tradition established an intellectually fertile environment that allowed uninterrupted focus on religious instruction. The conducive scholarly atmosphere in Riau was aptly described by Andaya and Matheson (1983:148), who observed:

“Here, Islamic reformists at the end of the 19th century were able to flourish, encouraged by the piety of Malay sultans and Bugis Yang Dipertuan Muda. Sufi orders, mystical fraternities guided by a shaykh, thrived, although practices perceived as diverging from the purity of medieval Islam were prohibited.”

Such a context significantly shaped Raja Ali Kelana's religious outlook, positioning him among the most well-educated and spiritually conscious members of the Riau-Lingga intelligentsia. Raja Ali Kelana is also reported to have pursued his studies in Makkah. Alongside his uncle, Raja Ali Haji, he studied under the tutelage of the renowned Malay scholar Syeikh Ahmad al-Faṭānī, who had long resided in the holy city and was known for his intellectual contributions to the Islamic world and the Malay archipelago (Azman Yusof, 2012). Following the abolition of the Yang Dipertuan Muda office, Raja Ali Kelana became actively involved in several non-governmental organizations, most notably the Jam’iyyah Rushdiyyah (Rushdiah Association), which he co-founded with Raja Khalid Hitam, the grandson of Raja Ali Haji.

Initially, the association's members comprised the Musyawarah council of the Riau-Lingga court, who functioned as advisors to the sultan. Consequently, the association was financially supported by the state in its early years. Over time, the association evolved into a vibrant intellectual hub that championed reformist ideas, literary output, and socio-political discourse.

Through the publication of various texts, the association's influence spread across the Malay Archipelago, stimulating political consciousness among the wider public. It played a pivotal role in fostering reform in areas such as governance, social development, and the economy. In addition to his leadership within the organization, Raja Ali Kelana was a prolific writer whose works spanned religious, political, and educational themes. Among his key writings are:

- i. *Pohon Perhimpunan Pada Menyatakan Peri Perjalanan*; written on Saturday, 23rd Ramadan 1313H / 6 March 1896 and printed by Maktabah wa Maṭba'ah ar-Riyāwiyah, Pulau Penyengat in 1315H / 1897.
- ii. *Perhimpunan Pelakat*; completed in 1316H / 1899 and printed in 1317H by Mathba'ah ar-Riyāwiyah, Pulau Penyengat.
- iii. *Bughyat al-Ānī fī Hurūf al-Ma'ānī*; date of composition unknown; printed by Mathba'ah al-Aḥmadiyyah, 50 Minto Road, Singapore, in 1341H / 1922.
- iv. *Rencana Mudah Pada Mengenal Diri Yang Indah*; completed on 3 Rajab 1344H / 17 January 1926 and printed by Mathba'ah al-Aḥmadiyyah, Singapore.
- v. *Kesempurnaan Yang Lima Bagi Islam Menerima*; completed on 3 Jumādā al-Ākhirah 1345H / 8 December 1926 and printed by Maktabah wa Mathba'ah al-Aḥmadiyyah, 82 Jalan Sultan, Singapore.
- vi. *Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas Pada Orang Yang Pantas Dengan Fikiran Yang Lintas*; date of writing unknown; published in 1910 by Maṭba'at al-Imām, Singapore.

Owing to financial difficulties and increasing pressure from the Dutch colonial administration, Raja Ali Kelana eventually relocated to Johor. There, he was appointed as *Syaikhul Islam*, the highest religious authority in the Johor government; outranking the Mufti and a title historically used during the Ottoman Caliphate. In his capacity as Syaikhul Islam, he was entrusted with multiple diplomatic missions to Istanbul in the years 1883, 1895, 1899, and 1913, to deepen his understanding of Islamic legal systems, particularly the *Majallah al-Aḥkam al-'Adliyyah*, an important codification of Hanafi jurisprudence adopted during Ottoman rule. Raja Ali Kelana passed away at 8:00 a.m. on Sunday, 10 Jumada al-Akhir 1346H / 4 December 1927, at his residence in Jalan Tebrau, Johor Bahru.

Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas manuscript

This study is based on the manuscript *Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas* (KKRBL), an important political-literary work authored by Raja Ali Kelana that reflects the intellectual and administrative ideals of the Riau-Lingga polity. The first edition of the manuscript was published by Maṭba'at al-Imam in Singapore in 1328H / 1910, while the second edition was reprinted in 1999 by Penerbitan Khazanah al-Fataniyah as part of an initiative to preserve classical Malay manuscripts (Jelani Harun, 2001). According to Proudfoot (1993), extant copies of this manuscript are housed in several major libraries, indicating its historical significance and scholarly value. These include the National Library of Singapore (catalogue number MR 297.6 ALI [Q11.4/29], microfilm code NL 7925), the University of Malaya Library (catalogue number BL167A1Abbmt), and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London (catalogue number LIBA800 430093). Furthermore, oral and local historical sources suggest that an additional copy is preserved at the Penyengat Island Library, underscoring the manuscript's continued relevance within the Malay world (Azman Yusof, 2014).

The content structure of KKRBL is systematically divided into 31 thematic sections, comprising a total of 160 subsections (fasal), each elaborating on specific aspects of governance, ethics, philosophy, and moral instruction. The work demonstrates a distinctive blend of metaphor, historical references, and philosophical parables intended to guide rulers and state officials.

- i. Section 1 employs the metaphor of the human body to symbolise political loyalty and systemic integrity (13 subsections).
- ii. Section 2 focuses on the virtue of knowledge, cautioning against laziness and intellectual stagnation (4 subsections).
- iii. Section 3 highlights the importance of rationality as intellectual provision for just governance (2 subsections).
- iv. Sections 4 and 5 critique misguided and indecent perceptions, which lead to ambiguous truths and deceptive behaviours (3 subsections collectively).
- v. Section 6 addresses moral degeneration, arguing that no human being is created in vain (3 subsections).
- vi. Section 7 advocates for perseverance in the pursuit of knowledge, particularly among the elite (11 subsections).
- vii. Section 8 urges steadfastness in truth, warning against ethical compromise (1 subsection).
- viii. Section 9 discusses the religious oath and moral responsibility expected of fair and virtuous leaders (10 subsections).
- ix. Section 10 contains historical reflections on ancient kings, serving as exemplars for contemporary leadership (11 subsections).
- x. Sections 11 and 12 discuss royal descent and succession, highlighting legitimacy in leadership (2 subsections).
- xi. Section 13 provides genealogical commentary on Malay origins, referencing Sultan Abdul Jalil (5 subsections).
- xii. Section 14 explains the title “Upu Kelana Jaya”, with reference to Sultan Ala al-Din Syah (1 subsection).
- xiii. Sections 15 through 27 form a substantial portion of the manuscript, focusing on a series of thirteen allegorical fables rooted in classical and Islamic wisdom:
 - Fables 1–4 involve figures such as Anushirwan, Shabib ibn Shibah, the Roman Caesar, and Aristotle, each delivering philosophical insights (13 subsections).
 - Fables 5–7 explore the moral guidance of Alexander the Great and Socrates (5 subsections).
 - Fables 8–10 feature characters such as Buzir Jamhur and virtuous ministers, portraying loyalty and wisdom (14 subsections).
 - Fables 11–13 critique silence in the face of tyranny, volatility in royal decision-making, and the dangers of corrupt ministers (12 subsections).
- xvi. The final sections shift towards rhetorical refinement, practical wisdom, and literary articulation:
 - Section 28 discusses rhetorical decorum and the selection of appropriate speech levels (maqam) (21 subsections).
 - Section 29 provides guidance on ethical and spiritual well-being, aiming at societal harmony (26 subsections).
 - Section 30 presents a didactic poem as a moral warning (1 subsection).
 - Section 31, titled *Kesusahan Kumpulan Ringkas*, offers concluding reflections on efficiency and moral urgency in governance (2 subsections).

This intricate structure illustrates Raja Ali Kelana’s effort to synthesise political ethics, classical philosophy, religious doctrine, and Malay royal ideology into a coherent guide for leadership. The fusion of *tazkirah* (reminders), *hikmah* (wisdom), and *nasihat al-muluk* (advice to rulers) positions KKRBL within the broader tradition of Islamic-Malay political literature, resonating with earlier works such as Taj al-Salatin and Thamarat al-Muhimmah (Jelani Harun, 2001; Azman Yusof, 2014).

The Ethics of good governance in KKRBL

Upon close examination, the ethical framework of good governance outlined in KKRBL is delineated into two primary dimensions: general ethics and specific ethics, the latter being directed particularly at the ruling elite, namely the kings and ministers. These principles serve as a moral compass in guiding the administration of the state, with emphasis on both personal integrity and institutional responsibility.

a) Governance Must Be Organized and Loyal

The first ethical foundation is that governance must be both organized and supported by loyalty. According to Kamus Dewan (Edisi Keempat), the term teratur (organized) refers to something that follows proper regulations and has been systematically arranged, while taat setia (loyal) is defined as steadfast adherence to promises and oaths (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2016, hlm. 1381, 1624). In the context of governance, rulers especially kings and ministers are entrusted with maintaining the order and prosperity of the state in domains such as security, economy, and politics. While the king occupies the highest position in the political hierarchy, actual power is often distributed among various ministers, each overseeing a different administrative portfolio. For the system to function effectively, these ministers must pledge absolute allegiance to the king and the constitution. Any act of betrayal or treason, particularly from within the ministerial ranks, is depicted metaphorically as a disease that threatens the overall wellbeing of the political body. Raja Haji Ali Kelana (1999) employs an analogy that likens the structure of the state to the composition of the human body, drawing upon the philosophical idea of the microcosm (al-‘ālam al-ṣuḡhrā) to represent the state:

"Bermula adalah kerajaan itu dapat dibandingkan dengan seorang manusia yang aqil baligh merdeheka sejahtera daripada penyakit yang memberi mudarat pada tubuhnya dan ialah jua dinamakan alam sughra. Telah berkata oleh yang berkata maka apabila cedera oleh satu anggota daripada segala anggota akan sesuatu daripada wazifahnyanya nescaya cedera aturan tubuh dan berseru-seruanlah binaan-binaannya kepada penyakit yang memakan diri dan rosak dan yang seumpama yang demikian mumlikah, istimewa lagi kepala mumlikah itu."

This passage underscores the interconnectedness between various components of the state apparatus, asserting that any dysfunction; however minor can lead to systemic failure. The metaphor serves not only as political instruction but also as a didactic warning. Raja Ali Kelana extends this analogy with a detailed mapping of the human anatomy to the structure of governance, as follows:

Human Anatomy	Symbolic Equivalent in Governance
Heart (qalb)	The King
Head	The Palace
Knowledge	Chief Officer (Perdana Menteri)
Mind (‘aql)	Deputy Officer (Menteri Kanan)
Eyes, ears, nose, mouth	Internal Ministers
Hands and feet	Foreign Ministers
Fingers	Village leaders (penghulu)
Finger joints	Sub-leaders or assistants
Bone, veins, skin, flesh	The people and the soldiers

This organic model of the state emphasizes the synergistic function of all components, where each part, regardless of its size, contributes to the health and stability of the whole. The failure of one part, particularly in the political context, may cause dysfunction across the system. Hence, loyalty (al-walā‘) and order (al-nizām) are not merely administrative ideals but ethical imperatives in Islamic-Malay political thought.

b) Wise and Passionate in the Pursuit of Knowledge

One of the essential ethical foundations of good governance as conveyed in KKRBL is the requirement for a leader to be wise and committed to the pursuit of knowledge. A wise person is one who is knowledgeable not only in worldly matters but also in the affairs of the hereafter. This idea is underscored in Section 2 (pp. 1–14), where the author equates wisdom to the position of Bentara Kanan (Chief Right Officer) within the hierarchical structure of state administration. Accordingly, an ideal ruler must be among those who are intellectually refined and exhibit a strong inclination towards continuous

learning. To substantiate this assertion, the author supports his claim by citing *dalil* (religious evidences) from the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as opinions from classical Islamic scholars, affirming the noble status of knowledge and the vital role of education in shaping moral excellence and leadership integrity. The following *syair* (didactic poem) is included by Raja Haji Ali Kelana to further reinforce the virtue of knowledge:

*Ilmu itu semulia barang
Telah berkata oleh seseorang
Siapa tiada padanya terang
Bukan laki-laki disebut orang
Tuntutlah ilmu jika sengsara
Amalkan dia ayuhai saudara
Dengan dia perhiasan mesra
Pengetahuan ilmu tiadalah cedera*
(Raja Haji Ali Raja Muhammad Yusuf, 1999, pp. 5–6)

This poetic excerpt emphasizes that knowledge is the most noble form of adornment. It constitutes the core of an individual's dignity and social esteem. Without it, one cannot be recognised as a complete and honourable person according to the traditional Malay-Islamic intellectual framework.

c) Maturity and Positive Thinking in Governance

Maturity refers to someone who has a lot of experience, is accomplished (thought), showing perfection or maturity in his thinking (ibid). Positive means that a person showcases things which are good and beneficial. In a broader context, being matured and positive are closely linked to being knowledgeable and intelligent. The qualities of mature and positive thinking are among the key ethical attributes emphasised in *Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas (KKRBL)*. Maturity refers to an individual who is seasoned through experience and demonstrates soundness and depth in reasoning, while positivity is understood as the tendency to highlight and pursue what is good and beneficial (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2016, hlm. 101, 1234). In a broader sense, these traits are inherently linked to knowledge, wisdom, and sound intellect.

Accordingly, a ruler and his ministers must be selected from among those who possess not only administrative acumen but also intellectual maturity and positive moral character. This notion is articulated in Section 3 of *KKRBL*, titled “Kelebihan Akal” (The Advantages of Intellect), specifically on pages 13 to 14. The author metaphorically equates the mind (*akal*) to the *Bentara Kiri* or Chief Left Officer in the administration of the state, highlighting its crucial role in advising and guiding leadership. The author warns that without maturity and positive thinking in governance, the nation would face degradation and mediocrity. This idea is encapsulated in the following *syair*:

*Hidup yang muda sebab akalnya
disisi manusia sungguh ianya
atas akal berjalan ilmunya
cubaan halus yang dicubanya
se afdhal nikmat daripada Allah
bagi seseorang akal itulah
daripada suatu maka tiadalah
melebihi dia jahat jauhlah*
(Raja Haji Ali Raja Muhammad Yusuf, 1999, pp. 13)

This *syair* eloquently illustrates that intellect (*akal*) is a divine gift that elevates human dignity and distinguishes individuals in society. It is intellect that underpins sound leadership and ensures the administration of justice and wisdom in governance.

d) Economic Development as Pillar of Governance

Raja Haji Ali Kelana, in KKRBL, places significant emphasis on the importance of economic strength as a foundation of good governance. He asserts that the greatness of a nation is closely tied to its economic prosperity, which he ranks as second only to military strength. An increase in national revenue not only enhances the state's material wealth but also enables the government to provide a higher quality of life for its citizens through the development of infrastructure, welfare policies, and the strengthening of national defence systems. The author's concern appears to stem from his observation of the economic decline of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate in contrast to the growing economic dominance of colonial powers such as the Dutch and British. Recognising the urgent need to compete with these powers, he stresses the responsibility of rulers to focus on strengthening the state's economic foundation. This insight is profoundly captured in one of his key statements:

"Kerajaan sangat berkehendak harta itu baginya kerana ia pangkat yang kedua daripada tentera... tiada sultan melainkan dengan harta dan tiada harta melainkan dengan hasil negeri dan tiada dapat hasil itu melainkan dengan meramaikan dan tiada boleh ramai melainkan dengan keadilan"
(Raja Haji Ali Raja Muhammad Yusuf, 1999, pp. 24)

This statement encapsulates a holistic model of governance that begins with justice (keadilan) as the root of all progress. From justice comes demographic and economic growth, which in turn enables the consolidation of political and military power. Such a framework reflects a sophisticated political philosophy that integrates moral, economic, and administrative principles to sustain a sovereign and prosperous state.

e) Unity Founded on Truth and Taqwa

In KKRBL, Raja Haji Ali Kelana underscores the principle that unity must be rooted in truth (al-haqq) and taqwa (God-consciousness). This concept is primarily discussed in Section 7 under the heading "Assemble and Unite with Knowledge – Perseverance by Noblemen", where he quotes verse 13 of Surah al-Hujurat to advocate for mutual recognition and unity among human beings based on piety and sincerity. The verse serves as a foundational ethical guideline, reminding the ruling class and citizens alike of the divine imperative to know, respect, and unite with one another in righteousness.

Further elaboration on the requirements for unity is found in Section 29, which outlines five essential conditions: (i) mutual acquaintance and familiarity; (ii) integrity (amanah); (iii) adherence to law and customs ('urf); (iv) obedience to established rules; and (v) sincerity in action (ikhlas). These conditions reflect the holistic nature of unity that goes beyond mere political allegiance and instead fosters moral and spiritual cohesion. The essence of unity, as emphasized by Raja Haji Ali, lies in maintaining trust, fulfilling promises, and cultivating pure hearts bound by mutual love and compassion. This is poignantly expressed in the following passage:

Sesungguhnya setengah daripada segala yang wajib berhimpun akan saudara itu memelihara setia dan menyempurnakan janji dan bersih hati pada berkasih-kasihan. Dan benar pada berkasih sayang dan bersekutu pada kesusahan yang dahulu daripada kesenangan. Maka manakala dapat kita ini kelakuan pada mana-mana tempat berhimpun nescaya tertanamlah pada segala hati anggota berkasih sayang dan berjinakan yang lemah lembut dan teguh pertambahan dan hasil bersatu.
(Raja Haji Ali Raja Muhammad Yusuf 1999, pp. 77)

This passage reflects the author's deep concern for social harmony and ethical governance. It suggests that the strength of a nation is dependent not merely on its laws and institutions but also on the moral fibre and spiritual unity among its leaders and people.

f) The Principle of Tabayyun in Governance

The term tabayyun originates from the Arabic language, functioning as a fi'l amr (imperative verb) in plural form, derived from the root verb tabayyana, with the verbal noun (masdar) being at-tabayyun. Linguistically, tabayyun carries three closely related meanings: first, to clarify a matter until the truth is established; second, to affirm the veracity of a fact; and third, to avoid haste by approaching an issue with caution and deliberation. In the context of governance as discussed in KKRBL, Raja Haji Ali Kelana (1999) emphasizes the critical need for rulers, particularly kings and ministers, to uphold the practice of tabayyun in administering justice and making state decisions. He warns against issuing judgments or enforcing punishments based on unverified or vague information. Any information received, especially that which may implicate others, must be meticulously verified. Failure to do so may result in slander (fitnah), injustice, and potential harm to the state's integrity and social order. This principle is clearly articulated in Part 37 under the topic "Faulty Protection – The Truth Should Not Be Overlooked", where Raja Haji Ali warns:

Janganlah diperbuat tidak kelulu mudah-mudahan kelak tak malu...oleh kesamaran mafhumnya dengan yang salah tujuannya maka dilayani oleh mereka itu akan barang yang kesamaran itu, hal keadaannya condong kepada fitnah.

This warning illustrates the author's concern with ethical statecraft rooted in Islamic values. The implementation of tabayyun ensures that justice is upheld, and that the leadership maintains credibility, avoids tyranny, and protects the citizens from wrongful harm.

g) Adhere to promises

In KKRBL, Raja Haji Ali Kelana (1999) underscores the importance of fulfilling promises as an essential element of ethical governance. This theme is elaborated in Section Nine under the heading "Sumpah Jalan Agama bagi Yang Reda dan Adil" (Religious Vow of Devotion – For the Contented and Just). The author classifies promises into three primary categories:

- The promise of Allah to His servants
- The promise of a servant to Allah
- The promise of a servant to another human being

Theologically, Allah SWT is described in the Qur'an as One who never breaks His promises (al-Quran, 3:9). Therefore, humans are enjoined to emulate this divine trait. Promises to Allah must be fulfilled without condition, reflecting sincerity and obedience. Promises between human beings, meanwhile, must also be honoured as long as they do not contravene the principles of Islamic law (shariah). The fulfilment of such covenants is a testament to personal integrity, social trust, and stable governance. The practice of making and renewing political oaths (sumpah setia) has deep roots in the political culture of the Malay world, particularly between the Malay and Bugis elites. The historical record demonstrates several instances in which Malay rulers and the Yang Dipertuan Muda of Riau-Lingga renewed their mutual oaths to strengthen political unity and ensure the legitimacy of their joint governance. Among the key episodes are:

- In 1130H, Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Shah I renewed the covenant between the Malays and the Bugis, with the Sultan being appointed by Kelana Jaya Putera, the Bugis sovereign. The oath emphasized: "...tiada boleh menghilangkan kebajikan Yang Dipertuan Muda dan tiada boleh membuang Yang Dipertuan Muda sekali-kali..." ("...the welfare of the Yang Dipertuan Muda shall not be ignored, nor shall he ever be dismissed").
- In 1141H, Sultan Alauddin Daing Pali, then the Yang Dipertuan Muda, reaffirmed this agreement.
- In 1167H, Daeng Kemboja renewed the covenant during his tenure as Yang Dipertuan Muda.
- In 1219H, Raja Ali II continued the tradition by renewing the oaths.
- In 1254H, Sultan Muhammad Shah and Raja Abdul Rahman introduced additional provisions when renewing the existing vows.
- In 1275H, Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Shah and Raja Muhammad Yusuf al-Ahmadi further updated the covenant to reflect new political circumstances.

- Finally, in 1313H, Sultan Abdul Rahman Muadzam Shah and his father Raja Muhammad Yusuf al-Ahmadi formalised the agreement in a document referred to as “ikatan dan simpulan” (binding and knotting), symbolising a solemn commitment to unity and integrity in governance (Raja Haji Ali Kelana, 1999, pp. 102–105).

These oaths reflect a deep ethical and religious consciousness within the political tradition of the Riau-Lingga kingdom. They illustrate how governance in the Malay world was not merely administrative but was also infused with moral and theological obligations.

h) Managing the speech

Raja Haji Ali Kelana (1999) places considerable emphasis on the ethics of speech, particularly for rulers and high-ranking officials. This concern is extensively discussed in KKRBL, Section 28, under the heading “Adab Berkata-Kata – Memilih Maqam Jangan Sekata”, spanning from Part 111 to Part 131. According to him, effective communication is not merely about the transmission of ideas but must be governed by religious, ethical, and social propriety. He asserts that, “Whoever believes in Allah and the Day of Judgement must speak good or remain silent,” In this context, the ruler and his ministers are expected to embody the highest standards of decorum in speech. Several key principles are outlined, including:

- Always speak the truth and refrain from lying.
- Debate using sound arguments and verified facts.
- Never turn away while someone is speaking.
- Reprimands should be delivered with gentleness and wisdom.
- One must apologise sincerely when in error.
- Avoid speech that humiliates others or causes unnecessary grief.
- Refrain from excessive self-praise and from dominating conversations.
- Address others with proper titles and honorifics, particularly when engaging with royalty and the nobility.
- Maintain confidentiality and uphold trust by safeguarding secrets.
- Respond to questions with politeness and calmness.
- Avoid common or vulgar language in formal discourse.
- Do not interrupt others mid-conversation, nor swear oaths on matters contrary to Islamic teachings.
- Exercise reflection before speaking, and avoid engaging in pointless arguments.

These guidelines, as outlined by Raja Ali Kelana, reveal the sophistication of Malay-Islamic political thought, which upholds the principle that ethical speech is essential for just governance and the maintenance of societal harmony. His emphasis on speech etiquette reflects the traditional Malay worldview in which governance is inseparable from *adab* (manners), *amanah* (trust), and *akhlak* (morality), especially for those entrusted with power and leadership (Raja Haji Ali Raja Muhammad Yusuf, 1999, pp. 146–159).

i) Maintaining Personal Health and Well-being

Raja Haji Ali Kelana (1999), in KKRBL, devotes Section 29 under the title “Pemeliharaan Sembuh Bagi Kesentosaan Tubuh” to address the importance of health maintenance. This section reflects his deep awareness of the integral relationship between physical well-being and effective leadership. The discourse begins with dietary principles, emphasizing moderation and balance. He advises that one should begin eating before feeling extreme hunger and stop before reaching satiety, reflecting a practice deeply rooted in prophetic tradition.

Raja Haji Ali categorizes food into three main groups: (i) meat, cereals, and vegetables; (ii) oil and fats; and (iii) fruits. In addition to the classification, he elaborates on the methods of food consumption, incorporating elements of proper dress and dining etiquette, especially for those in leadership positions.

This holistic view aligns with the Islamic perspective that personal discipline in health and habits contributes to social and administrative order. He further encourages practices such as adequate sleep and regular fasting. While he does not explicitly cite his sources, much of his guidance appears to be inspired by the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). For example, he writes:

“...dan adalah nabi saw berbuka ia atas atas sebutir kurma atau dua atau mengambil ia sedikit daripada air jika tiada mendapat kurma maka lazimlah atas kita mengikut akan kelakuan yang demikian itu dengan sebab sunat dan memelihara bagi sihat dan menakuti akan beberapa penyakit”.

(Raja Haji Ali Raja Muhammad Yusuf, 1999, pp. 172).

This passage emphasizes the prophetic method of breaking fast with dates or water, not only as a spiritual act but also as a preventive health measure. By highlighting such practices, Raja Haji Ali Kelana integrates prophetic wisdom into the ethical and physical expectations of rulers and officials, further illustrating the comprehensive Islamic approach to governance and personal conduct.

j) Learning from History (Iktibar)

The concept of iktibar, derived from the Arabic root word, signifies taking lessons or drawing moral insights from past events and experiences (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2016, pp. 52). Meanwhile, sejarah (history) refers to either lineage and ancestry or past events that have been recorded and narrated (ibid., pp. 1367). In KKRBL, Raja Haji Ali Kelana underscores the importance of learning from history as an essential element of good governance.

To illustrate his point, the author presents a series of moral tales and historical narratives that serve as examples for rulers and ministers. These narratives drawn from both local traditions and classical Islamic and Persian sources; highlight both exemplary and condemnable traits in governance. The tales are primarily found in Sections 15 to 27, comprising 18 sub-sections in total. Among these, particular attention is given to community leaders or penghulu (chiefs) in:

- Section 24: The Tenth Chronicle – On the Virtuous and Wise Minister
- Section 25: The Eleventh Chronicle – On How Silence May Bring Dishonour
- Section 27: The Thirteenth Chronicle – On Treacherous and Deceitful Ministers

Several historical anecdotes and parables cited in these sections include:

- The narrative of Nusyirwan Adil, a just king, receiving sage advice from his mentor, Yunan.
- A letter composed by Nusyirwan Adil addressed to the Caesar of Rome, outlining strategies for sustaining the longevity of a kingdom.
- The advice of Shabb bin Shabah to Raja Mahadi on the qualities of just rulership.
- The legend of Iskandar Zulkarnain (Alexander the Great) and his exemplary justice.
- The tale of Ibrahim Hijab, a minister renowned for his unwavering loyalty.
- A moral story involving Nusyirwan Adil and a wise young girl that highlights ethical leadership.
- The account of Raja Kastasab and his betrayal at the hands of a treacherous minister, Rasat Rusan.

These stories are not mere historical curiosities but serve as moral exemplars (uswah hasanah) for leaders. By reflecting on past rulers, both virtuous and vile, Raja Haji Ali encourages his readers, especially those in leadership, to internalize the values of justice, wisdom, loyalty, and moral clarity. The method reflects a classical Islamic pedagogical approach where history functions as a mirror for ethical introspection and principled governance.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A. An Analogy: The Government as the Human Body

One of the most profound elements in KKRBL is Raja Haji Ali Kelana's use of rich metaphorical and allegorical expressions to communicate principles of governance. A particularly striking analogy compares the structure and functioning of a government to that of the human body; a classical rhetorical technique that resonates with both Islamic political philosophy and traditional Malay wisdom literature. In this conceptual framework, each part of the human anatomy symbolises a component of state governance with specific roles and responsibilities:

- i. The Heart – Represents the Sultan or Yang Dipertuan Muda, the supreme ruler and commander-in-chief. As the organ that sustains life, the heart signifies the King's central role in decision-making and the moral compass of the nation.
- ii. The Head – Symbolises high-ranking state officers such as the Prime Minister and key ministers. Just as the head governs the body through cognitive function and coordination, these leaders oversee national security, administration, and defence—including the military and police.
- iii. Knowledge/skill (Ilmu/Kemahiran) – Is likened to the First Bentara, the officer responsible for ensuring that government operations proceed in a systematic and efficient manner.
- iv. The Mind ('Aql) – Represents the Second Bentara, whose duty is to uphold wisdom, discernment, and strategic foresight in policymaking and executive decisions.
- v. Sensory Organs (Eyes, Ears, Nose, Mouth) – These correspond to the Home Minister or internal security personnel who are charged with detecting subversive elements and maintaining domestic order.
- vi. Fingers and Finger Joints – Depict mid-level administrators and civil servants who implement laws, manage offices, and provide vital services to citizens.
- vii. Feet – Refer to the state's infrastructure, transportation, and logistical systems, which enable the movement of people, goods, and information.
- viii. The Eye (Media Apparatus) – Functions as the government's monitoring and communication tool, such as the press and official media, tasked with conveying accurate and timely information to the public.
- ix. The Mouth (Oratory Apparatus) – Symbolises spokespersons or orators who articulate the state's policies and defend its positions in public discourse.
- x. Nervous System (Intelligence Apparatus) – Analogous to intelligence services and surveillance agencies that gather strategic information and monitor internal and external threats.

This allegorical structure is not merely literary ornamentation; it encapsulates Raja Ali Kelana's vision of governance that is integrative, organic, and functional; each component reliant upon the other for the health and longevity of the whole. As noted by Andaya and Matheson (1983), the political climate of Riau-Lingga during Raja Ali Kelana's era was marked by a blend of Islamic reformism, traditional aristocratic values, and institutional complexity. Thus, these metaphors serve not only as pedagogical tools but also as a framework for understanding the deeply interwoven nature of leadership, governance, and societal harmony in the Malay-Islamic worldview (Raja Haji Ali Raja Muhammad Yusuf, 1999; Jelani Harun, 2001).

B. The Roles and Responsibilities of a Leader

Leadership plays a pivotal role in ensuring that the governed populace lives in peace, harmony, and prosperity. The responsibilities of a leader are manifold and must be exercised with a high degree of wisdom, justice, and foresight. KKRBL underscores several of these responsibilities, particularly in the form of ethical guidance and allegorical narratives. Among the core duties highlighted are the following:

- a) Administering Justice

Justice forms the cornerstone of effective governance. A leader must uphold fairness in decision-making and in the execution of laws, irrespective of an individual's socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or background. Justice in this context also entails equitable distribution of resources, access to opportunities, and legal protection. The importance of this principle is illustrated in the "11th Fable – The Notable Minister: Silence Warrants a Bad Reputation," where the failure to act justly leads to reputational damage and governance failure (Raja Haji Ali Raja Muhammad Yusuf, 1999).

b) Ensuring Public Order and Peace

One of the fundamental duties of leadership is to maintain peace and societal stability. This involves the proactive prevention and resolution of conflicts, curbing acts of violence, and upholding national security. A peaceful environment is the prerequisite for development and national unity.

c) Promoting Societal Welfare

A leader is entrusted with the responsibility of enhancing the quality of life for citizens. This includes developing robust economic policies, advancing educational opportunities, improving healthcare services, ensuring affordable housing, and constructing sustainable infrastructure. Moreover, alleviating poverty and reducing unemployment must be central to the leader's development agenda.

d) Generating Positive Impact

Policies and decisions must be evaluated for their long-term consequences. A visionary leader is one who considers intergenerational justice and the sustainability of policies, ensuring that each decision made contributes constructively to the social and economic advancement of the nation.

e) Being Observant and Attentive to Public Needs

An effective leader is one who listens attentively to the aspirations, grievances, and feedback of the people. Constructive engagement and participatory governance ensure that leadership remains responsive and grounded in the realities of its citizens.

f) Leading by Example

Exemplary conduct is essential in leadership. Leaders must model ethical behaviour, display integrity, and maintain accountability in both public and private capacities. Moral leadership inspires confidence and legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

g) Making Informed and Wise Decisions

Sound policymaking is predicated on accurate data, consultation with experts, and prudent judgment. Rash or uninformed decisions can have far-reaching negative implications. As such, wisdom, foresight, and deliberation must characterise the decision-making process.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of leadership is measured not only by the policies enacted but also by the degree to which these policies uphold justice, enhance societal welfare, and reflect the ethical compass of the leader. Self-reflection and openness to constructive criticism are essential qualities for continued improvement. Only through such conscientious leadership can a nation achieve sustainable progress and uphold the trust of its people (Andaya & Matheson, 1983; Jelani Harun, 2001; Raja Haji Ali Raja Muhammad Yusuf, 1999).

C. Religion and History as Foundational Sources in Governance

Religion and history have long served as foundational references in the governance of a nation, particularly in shaping the moral, ethical, and administrative frameworks within which leaders operate. Religion, especially Islam in the context of KKRBL, provides a comprehensive moral compass that informs the principles of justice, accountability, and ethical leadership. The infusion of Islamic values throughout KKRBL reflects the centrality of religion not merely as a spiritual guide, but as a governing ethos that underscores the importance of *taqwa* (piety), *amanah* (trust), and *adl* (justice) in the exercise of power (Raja Haji Ali Raja Muhammad Yusuf, 1999).

Simultaneously, history offers a reservoir of collective experiences, comprising both achievements and failures that can guide contemporary leadership in policy formulation and strategic governance. By harmonizing religious doctrine with historical consciousness, leaders are better positioned to formulate governance strategies that are ethical, sustainable, and responsive to the evolving needs of the nation. Through historical reflection, leaders are reminded of the cyclical nature of rise and decline, thereby encouraging prudence, foresight, and adaptive innovation. The use of historical anecdotes and allegories in KKRBL, particularly in its fables and chronicles, demonstrates how past lessons are employed to inform present realities without neglecting foundational values.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that Raja Ali Kelana's conceptualisation of good governance in *Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas* (KKRBL) was deeply rooted in Islamic sources, particularly the al-Quran and al-Hadith, as well as classical wisdom drawn from Persian literary traditions. These references formed the ethical and philosophical foundation of his administrative thought, rendering his ideas both contextually rich and timelessly relevant. Although the language and presentation of the text may appear elementary, the scope of the subject matter is notably broad; encompassing essential themes related to leadership, justice, loyalty, ethics, socio-political responsibilities, and the moral obligations of rulers and ministers.

KKRBL also serves as a significant cultural and intellectual expression of Malay political thought and societal expectations towards governance. It reflects the aspirations of the Malay-Muslim community for rulers who are wise, just, pious, and knowledgeable. In this regard, the manuscript deserves greater scholarly attention, especially within the discourse of constitutional literature (*nusus dusturiyyah*) in the Malay world. Therefore, KKRBL should be recognised as an important historical and intellectual source in shaping contemporary perspectives on governance and administrative ethics within the Malay-Islamic tradition.

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