ISLAM AS A RELIGION AND CIVILIZATION: THE ROLE OF MUSLIM SCHOLARS

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ABSTRACT

Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji hubungan erat antara agama dan peradaban Islam dengan menelusuri kontribusi historis, filosofis, dan epistemologis Islam dalam membentuk masyarakat utama (ummatan wāsiṭan). Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kepustakaan dan data dianalisis secara deskriptif-analitis. Hasil penelitian ini menjelaskan bahwa Agama Islam diposisikan tidak hanya sebagai sistem spiritual dan ritualistik, tetapi juga sebagai fondasi peradaban yang meliputi ranah ilmu pengetahuan, sosial, politik, dan budaya. Pendekatan keilmuan Islam *Bayani*, *Burhani*, dan *Irfani* dikaji sebagai basis epistemologis yang mendukung integrasi wahyu, akal, dan intuisi spiritual. Artikel ini juga menyoroti urgensi karakter *Irfani* dalam diri akademisi Muslim sebagai agen transformasi sosial yang mampu memadukan keunggulan ilmiah, kedalaman spiritual, dan keberpihakan sosial. Dengan mengedepankan prinsip wasatiyyah dan Islamisasi ilmu, tulisan ini menawarkan perspektif alternatif dalam membangun peradaban Islam modern yang adil, beradab, dan transenden. Tulisan ini diakhiri dengan penekanan pada peran strategis akademisi Muslim dalam rekonstruksi peradaban Islam di tengah tantangan globalisasi dan krisis nilai kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: *Islam; Peradaban; Epistimologi Islam*

Abstract: *This article examined the profound relationship between religion and Islamic civilization by tracing Islam's historical, philosophical, and epistemological contributions in shaping an exemplary society (ummatan wāsiṭan). Islam is positioned not only as a spiritual and ritualistic system but also as a civilizational foundation encompassing the domains of knowledge, society, politics, and culture. The Islamic epistemological approaches Bayani, Burhani, and Irfani are explored as theoretical frameworks that integrate revelation, reason, and spiritual intuition. The current article also emphasized the urgency of cultivating Irfani character among Muslim scholars as agents of social transformation who embody scientific excellence, spiritual depth, and social commitment. By upholding the principles of wasatiyyah and the Islamization of studies; this study offered an alternative perspective for constructing a modern Islamic civilization that is just, civilized, and transcendent. The current article concluded by underlining the strategic role of Muslim academics in reconstructing Islamic civilization amid the challenges of globalization and contemporary moral crises.*

Keywords: *Islam; Civilization; Islamic Epistemology*

A. INTRODUCTION

Religion and civilization are two closely interrelated entities in the history of mankind. Religion, as a system of belief and values governing human relationships with the Divine and with others, plays a central role in shaping the social, political, cultural, and intellectual structures of a society. In the Islamic context, religion is not only spiritual or ritualistic, but also a normative foundation for the birth of a great civilization that reached its peak during the medieval period. Islamic civilization developed as a result of the creative interaction between revealed values (the Qur'an and Sunnah) and the dynamics of historical context and temporal challenges.

Islamic civilization is not a monolithic entity limited to religious aspects, but includes various domains of life, ranging from science, philosophy, art, architecture, economics, to politics. This aligns with Nasr's (2006) view that Islam from the beginning has presented a cosmological vision that unites the spiritual and intellectual dimensions, thereby enabling the emergence of a highly cultured society. History records that cities like Baghdad, Cairo, Cordoba, and Andalusia became global centers of intellectual and scientific advancement, largely due to the contributions from Muslim scientists such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd.

The relationship between religion and civilization in Islam is also reflected in its scientific approaches, that recognizes three main epistemological approaches: *Bayani* (textual-normative), *Burhani* (rational-philosophical), and *Irfani* (spiritual-intuitive). The *Bayani* approach is rooted in exegesis and hadith studies; *Burhani* emphasizes rationality and deductive logic as practiced by philosophers; and *Irfani* emerges from the Sufi tradition, focusing on inner purification and spiritual insight (Arkoun, 2002). These three approaches became the epistemological foundation that encouraged both the intellectual and spiritual advancement of Islamic civilization.

Moreover, the interaction between religion and civilization in Islam shows that Islam does not reject modernity but rather calls for its reinterpretation through the lens of divine values. This presents a contemporary challenge for Muslims to reconstruct a civilization that is not only technologically advanced but also ethically and spiritually dignified.

Therefore, an understanding of the relationship between religion and civilization becomes very important in formulating the direction of the transformation of Muslim society in the current global era. This study aimed to explore and analyse the relationship between religion and Islamic civilization using philosophical and historical approaches, and offer ideas for the revitalization of Islamic civilization rooted in the values of revelation and classical Islamic intellectual traditions.

B. METHOD

The research method in this article uses a qualitative approach with library research. The author examines various Islamic, philosophical, and historical literature on Islamic civilization to examine Islam's epistemological contributions through the *Bayani*, *Burhani*, and irfani approaches. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources, including the works of Muslim figures, classical texts, and relevant contemporary writings. They were then analyzed descriptively and analytically to uncover the connections between religion, science, and Islamic civilization. This approach allows the author to comprehensively explore the historical, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions of Islam, while linking them to the challenges of modernity and the strategic role of Muslim academics in building a just and transcendent civilization.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Islam in Shaping an Exemplary Society

As a religion grounded in divine revelation, Islam offers not only spiritual and moral guidance but also a comprehensive social system designed to form a just, prosperous, and dignified society. The concept of an exemplary society (ummatan wāsiṭan) in Islam is not a utopian ideal, but a real goal that can be realized through the implementation of Islamic values in social life. The Qur'an explicitly states that Muslims were sent as a middle community t who bring justice and bear witness to all mankind (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 143). This verse contains a deep conception of the transformative role of Islam in shaping a superior society that is balanced between worldly and ukhrawi dimensions.

The Concept of the Exemplary Society in Islamic Perspective

The concept of the exemplary society in Islam is characterized by the principles of justice ('adl), balance (tawāzun), moderation (wasatiyyah), and social responsibility (amr bi al-ma'rūf wa nahy 'an al-munkar). Such a society is not only ritually submissive to God, but also actively builds civilization and upholds human values. Al-Faruqi (1982) argues that Islamic civilization is constructed on the foundation of tawḥīd, a principle that unifies all aspects of human life in devotion to God.

Islam has historically succeeded in establishing a civil society since the time of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. The Medina Charter serves as an early example of a social contract that upheld pluralism, justice, and collective responsibility. This proves that Islam from the beginning has supported an inclusive, egalitarian society based on prophetic ethics (Lapidus, 2002). Through its teachings on rights and responsibilities, wealth distribution, social justice, and human dignity, Islam has shaped the framework of a moral society.

Zakat, infaq and waqf are social instruments that are not only spiritual in nature, but also serve as a means of economic equity and social welfare (Kahf, 1995). In addition, Islam gives a major place to science and education as a means of character building and social capacity development.

Education in Islam is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but also the formation of morals and values. Ibn Khaldun in his Muqaddimah emphasized the importance of knowledge and manners as the foundation of a superior civilization and society (Ibn Khaldun, 1976).

Wasatiyyah and Contemporary Social Reform

In the modern context, the principle of wasatiyyah offers Islam's relevant response to the challenges of extremism, materialism, and social disintegration. The moderate approach in Islam emphasizes a balance between spirituality and rationality, between tradition and progress. This concept has been adopted by many contemporary Muslim thinkers as a foundation for social reform and the development of multicultural societies (Ramadan, 2009).

Beyond that, Islam advocates principles such as consultation (shūrā), responsible leadership (amānah), and legal justice (ʿadālah), all of that serve as fundamental elements for constructing a democratic and inclusive social system. These values significantly contribute to reinforcing social cohesion and cultural resilience in the face of globalization. Islam has a fundamental role in shaping the ultimate society characterized by justice, balance, social responsibility and respect for human dignity.

Through the values of revelation, intellectual tradition, and social instruments such as zakat and education, Islam is able to become a driving force for the development of an inclusive and highly civilized society. The concept of wasatiyyah provides a philosophical and practical basis for Muslims to continue to play an active role in realizing a social order that is just and dignified amid the dynamics of the times.

The *Bayani, Burhani, and Irfani* Approaches in Islamic Epistemology

Epistemological approaches in Islamic science have undergone significant developments influenced by the integration of revelation, reason, and spiritual intuition. The three main approaches often discussed in Islamic scientific discourse are the *Bayani, Burhani* and *Irfani* approaches. All three have different philosophical and methodological roots, and represent the diversity of ways Muslims understand and build knowledge.

1. The *Bayani* Approach

The *Bayani* approach comes from the text (nash), primarily the Qur'an and Hadith. This method prioritizes literal, linguistic and systematic interpretation of revelation as the principal source of knowledge. Since in the *Bayani* approach is deductive, starting from general principles in the text and then applying them to specific cases. The main figure of this approach is al-Syafi'i in the field of usul fiqh.

The *Bayani* approach is widely used in classical Islamic legal studies since its ability to emphasize the authority of the text and loyalty to revelation. However, this approach is often criticized for being less responsive to social dynamics and the development of modern rationality (Nasr, 2006).

2. The *Burhani* Approach

The *Burhani* approach emphasizes the use of reason and deductive-empirical logic as the main tools in acquiring knowledge. The word "burhan" itself means clear and rational evidence. This approach was developed in the Islamic philosophical tradition, particularly by philosophers such as Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, who were heavily influenced by Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophy.

The *Burhani* approach explains that truth is achieved through logical argumentation and rational proof. This approach is often used in rational sciences such as philosophy, logic, medicine and astronomy. It is also the basis for integration between Islamic and modern sciences. However, this approach is criticized by some scholars since it tends to ignore the spiritual dimension and inner experience (Al-Attas, 1995).

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3. The *Irfani* Approach

The *Irfani* approach emphasizes spiritual insight and intuitive cognition (kashf) in the attainment of knowledge. Rooted in the traditions of taṣawwuf (Islamic mysticism) and Illuminationist philosophy, this method is prominently represented in the works of Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā. In the *Irfani* epistemology, knowledge is not acquired solely through textual analysis or rational inquiry, but through the purification of the soul, spiritual discipline, and direct experiential awareness of transcendent realities (maʿrifah).

Irfani knowledge is often regarded as deeper and more holistic since it engages with the esoteric dimensions of reality and fosters an integrative understanding of God, humanity, and the cosmos. However, it is frequently criticized for its subjective nature and difficulty in academic verification. Nevertheless, it remains indispensable for enriching the spiritual dimensions of Islamic knowledge (Nasr, 2006).

The Human Need for Religion

Religion is one of the fundamental aspects of human life. From ancient times to the modern era, humans have shown a deep inclination towards spiritual and transcendental matters. This need is not just an emotional or cultural need, but an existential one. Religion provides meaning, direction and purpose to life, and becomes a value system that directs individual and

collective human behaviour. In the perspective of philosophy and psychology, the human need for religion reflects the search for absolute truth, inner peace, and moral order (Frankl, 1985).

Religion as an Innate Need

Islam provides a view that religion is an innate need of humans. The Qur'an mentions that every human being is created with the potential to recognize God (tawhid) as in QS. Al-A'raf [7]: 172, that states that the human spirit testifies to the oneness of God before being born into the world. This potential then develops according to the environment, education, and individual awareness. According to Al-Ghazali (2000), the human need for religion is a soul need that cannot be replaced by material, since religion fills the inner space that is divine.

The Functions of Religion in Life

Religion has various strategic functions in human life. First, religion provides meaning to life. When humans are faced with suffering, death, or uncertainty, religion comes as a source of comfort and hope. Second, religion forms a system of values and social ethics that serve as a foundation for social interaction. Third, religion strengthens social solidarity by creating a collective identity and sense of community (Durkheim, 1915). Fourth, religion guides the development of spirituality and self-control.

The Need for Religion in the Context of Modernity

In the modern era, marked by secularization and rationality, the human need for religion has not decreased, but rather has undergone a transformation. Modern society still seeks meaning and spirituality, although often outside formal religious institutions. According to (Habermas, 2008) religion remains relevant in the public sphere since it holds moral and spiritual values that are not replaced by instrumental rationality. In this context, religion acts as a source of criticism of the dehumanization of modernity.

Human Needs for Science in Islamic Review

Science is one of the most essential needs of human beings in their pursuit to understand themselves, their environment, and their God. In Islam, the search for knowledge is not only an intellectual endeavour but also a spiritual obligation. The religion accords knowledge a position of paramount importance, as reflected in the first divine revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad, the command to "read" (iqraʾ) in Surah al-ʿAlaq [96]:1–5. This verse forms the epistemological foundation of Islam, encouraging its adherents to think, investigate, and explore knowledge for both individual and societal benefit.

Knowledge as an Innate and Intrinsic Human Need

Humans were created with the potential of reason that distinguishes them from other creatures. This potential shows that the search for knowledge is part of human nature. According to Al-Attas (1993) knowledge in Islam is not just an accumulation of information, but an understanding

that leads to the recognition of the ultimate truth. Therefore, the human need for knowledge is intrinsic, that comes from within as a response to intellectual and spiritual calls.

The Value of Knowledge in Islam

Islam makes knowledge the path to piety. In QS. Al-Mujadilah [58]: 11, it is stated that Allah will elevate the degrees of those with knowledge. A Prophetic Hadith also states that "studying is an obligation for every Muslim" (HR Ibn Majah). This shows that Islam views knowledge as not just a tool for the world, but a means to get closer to Allah and achieve the glory of life in this world and the hereafter. Al-Ghazali (2000) states that knowledge is the light that guides the heart, and without knowledge, humans are in darkness.

The Role of Science in Building Islamic Civilization

Throughout history, science has been the foundation of the glory of Islamic civilization. Cities like Baghdad, Damascus and Cordoba became centres of science and multidisciplinary research, from medicine to astronomy. Figures such as Ibn Sina, al-Khwarizmi and al-Ghazali proved that in Islam, there is no dichotomy between religious and worldly sciences. Islam encourages the integration of science with the values of revelation, as the *Bayani*, *Burhani*, and *Irfani* approaches in Islamic science. (Nasr, 2006).

The Need for Science in the Modern Era

In the era of globalization and technological revolution, human needs for knowledge are increasingly complex. Muslims are required to not only master modern sciences, but also instill ethical and transcendent values in them. According to Al-Faruqi (1982), the Islamization of science is an answer to the challenges of modernity so that science is not separated from the dimensions of value and divinity. Therefore, Muslims must continue to develop holistic, integrative, and benefit-oriented science.

The Role of Muslim Academies and Building Civilization

Islamic civilization is a great heritage that has made important contributions to the development of science, philosophy, art, and world morality. Historically, the rise of Islamic civilization was greatly influenced by the role of Muslim scholars, scientists and intellectuals who made knowledge a means of worship and service to the people.

Today, the challenges of globalization, secularization, and identity crisis demand the active involvement of Muslim academics in the process of reconstructing Islamic civilization that is relevant to the context of the times. The role of academics is not only limited to the technical development of science, but also to the formation of a scientific paradigm rooted in Islamic values.

The Strategic Need for the Involvement of Muslim Academics

The role of Muslim academics is very strategic in responding to the various challenges facing contemporary Muslims. According to Nasr (1994), the crisis of modern Islamic civilization is not only due to Western domination, but also the weak epistemological awareness of the ummah

towards the Islamic scientific tradition. Therefore, Muslim academics are expected to be able to carry out "tajdid" (renewal) and "ihya'" (revitalization) of Islamic intellectual heritage critically and creatively. They must appear as agents of change who do not simply adopt the Western paradigm as a whole, but are able to make a critical synthesis between classical Islamic heritage and modern reality.

Islamic Epistemology and the Responsibility of Academics

One of the fundamental aspects in rebuilding Islamic civilization is the reconstruction of Islamic epistemology. Al-Attas (1993) emphasized the importance of Islamization of science as the first step in reorienting science to ethical and transcendental goals. In this context, Muslim academics hold the responsibility to develop knowledge that is not merely utilitarian, but also reflects the values of tawhid, justice and balance. This requires courage in developing an integrative and transformative educational curriculum, as well as conducting research that favors the benefit of the people.

The Contribution of Muslim Academics in the Social and Political Sphere

The role of academics is not only limited to the classroom or laboratory, but also in the socio-political sphere. History shows that many early Muslim academics such as Ibn Khaldun, al-Ghazali, and al-Farabi made major contributions to state theory, political philosophy, and social ethics. Contemporary Muslim academics need to take a similar role by building a scholarly narrative that supports the creation of a just and civilized world order.

They can be important actors in policy advocacy, community empowerment, and building a culture of research excellence in Islamic universities. The future of Islamic civilization depends on the active contribution of Muslim academics in combining scientific excellence, spiritual depth, and social alignment. In this context, Islamic universities must become centres of intellectual and moral transformation capable of producing Muslim thinkers and professionals with integrity. Therefore, systemic efforts are needed to strengthen the capacity of Muslim academics through education, research, global collaboration, and the formation of a civilization-oriented scientific ecosystem.

The *Irrfani* Character of an Academic

Islamic scientific discourse explains that the *Irfani* character occupies an important position as a spiritual foundation rooted in the tradition of Sufism and Islamic philosophy. This character is not only relevant in the context of individual spirituality, but also very important in shaping the personality of an academic who acts as an agent of social transformation. In the framework of building the main society (ummatan wāsiṭan), the *Irfani* character becomes an important pillar that harmonizes the intellectual, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of a Muslim scientist.

The Concept of *Irfani* and Its Relevance for Muslim Academics

Terminologically, *Irfani* comes from the word "`irfān" that means intuitive knowledge or realization obtained through inner enlightenment. In the Islamic tradition, especially Sufism and post-Avicennian Islamic philosophy, *Irfani* developed as an epistemological approach that emphasizes purification of the soul, inner experience, and direct connection with transcendent reality (Nasr, 1991). Academics who have an *Irfani* character do not merely pursue objective knowledge, but also make their knowledge a way to get closer to God and bring benefits to the people.

According to Al-Attas (1993), knowledge in Islam must lead to ta'dīb, that is an educational process that forms adab as a harmony between reason, heart, and action. Academics with an *Irfani* character live knowledge as a mandate and a field of service, not just a tool to gain social status or worldly benefits.

The Role of *Irfani* Character in Shaping the Exemplary Society

The exemplary society that Islam envisions is one that balances between material and spiritual aspects, between freedom of thought and moral control. In this regard, academics with *Irfani* character serve as the moral and intellectual guides of society. They set an example of scientific integrity, academic ethics and social piety. Through their contributions in education, research, and service, they not only educate but also purify people's lives (Mutahhari, 1985).

The *Irfani* character also encourages empathy, social awareness, and commitment to justice. Such academics will be more sensitive to the problems of the people and able to offer solutions that are not only rational, but also spiritually and ethically charged. They become a bridge between revelation and reason, between tradition and social change.

The *Irfani* character in an academic is a manifestation of deep spiritual awareness and integral appreciation of Islamic values. In the effort to form the main society, the presence of *Irfani* academics is crucial as moral guardians, enlightening knowledge disseminators, and change agents oriented towards blessings and benefits. With this character, Islam not only forms a knowledgeable society, but also a civilized society.

D. CONCLUSION

Islam, as an integral religion, has transformative power in shaping the main civilization and society characterized by justice, balance, science, and spirituality. Through the integration of revelation, reason, and spiritual intuition reflected in the bayani, burhani, and irfani approaches. Islam can build a noble and sustainable civilization. In the modern context, wasatiyyah principles and Islamic scientific values remain relevant to answer the challenges of globalization, materialism, and identity crisis. The role of Muslim academics is central in encouraging scientific, social, and cultural renewal rooted in Islamic values. Among the important characters that a Muslim academic must possess is the irfani character, which makes

knowledge a way of spiritual and social devotion. This character harmonizes the intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions to be able to present scientific transformations that are not only objective, but also full of values and blessings. Thus, forming the main society according to Islam requires synergy between religious teachings, civilization building, and the contribution of Muslim academics who have scientific integrity, spiritual depth, and social sensitivity. Islam not only builds a knowledgeable society, but also a civilized and dignified society

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