

ISLAM AND LOCAL CULTURE : The Tense between Problem of Approach and Local Wisdom of Javanese Community

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KEYWOR

Local wisdom
Javanese Community
Islam

ABSTRACT

Local wisdom is the result of a process of dialogue between universality, Islam and local culture. In this case, Islam is presented in its substantive form, and the container (form) can use the social system applicable to the local community. This is what inclusive Islam means, that is, Islam is open to assimilating different elements of (foreign) cultures outside of Islam and then making them part of the Islamic tradition. In order to avoid syncretism, in the process of cultural assimilation, of course, the substantive elements must first be sorted out from the formal elements.

Introduction

There is no idea, either it is institutionalized in the form of religion or secular ideologies, which rises from a blank sphere. The rise of an idea must be started by some events behind it. Islam as a religion is also could not be separated from this axiom. Islam was born from a series of dialogue between the eternality of God words which are universal with local condition and actual in the earth (Arabian) some centuries ago. Therefore, the description of situation and condition of Arabian society is crucial to study in order to look at how far the dialogue is and what the result of dialogue is.

If so, the problem is how the reflection for the future is when Islam should be developed. Does the last mission of prophet Muhammad become the starting point measure all behaviours of the following generations? Or do those principles of dialogue remain to be used as a model in developing Islam in future? This paper attempts at discussing such problems. The writer will start by describing how the pre-Islamic tradition is and then how the responses expressed in al-Qur'an and prophet Muhammad is.

The Tradition of Pre Islam and *Samawi* Responses

Historians use a very contrast gap in explaining Islam and tradition of pre Islam with moral and ideological demarcation. A pre-Islam of Arabian society is an uncivilised society and then Islam comes as savior. In some cases, this claim is not incorrect. However, this generalization has

influence negative impact in developing historical criticism. The continuity of tradition between pre Islamic society and post Islamic society is neglected. As a result, the process of enculturation and acculturation of pre Islam of Arabian tradition and Islam is seen as unimportant historical facts. If it is studied, sometimes there are some errors in verification and interpretation.

The mistake in interpreting the historical facts is very possible because there is inability in collecting historical facts and interpreting them or there is imbalance between the ability of collecting historical facts and interpreting them. Some forms of mistake in interpreting historical facts are very possible due to the mistake in doing verification. Historical facts which suit for certain parts are used for all parts (*pars pro toto*) or they are used for all parts while they suit for certain parts (*toto pro pars*). As a result, in interpreting historical facts, there is a reduction which gives impact directly to generalization and making conclusion (Kuntowijoyo, 2001:171-172).

The mistake in generalizing historical facts can be seen from some apologetic claims proposed by puritan Muslims. Islam rises as an answer for condition of an uncivilised Arabian society. Therefore, in interpreting history there is no other choice except by contrasting Islam and Pre-Islam as contrasting white and black. Islam is regarded as a comprehensive and perfect religion, having all aspects including social institution, moral and ideology. All aspects of pre Islam are directly eliminated as the presence of Islam. Islam is as if a *samawi* package which rises from a blank sphere and should be used a starting point in developing all forms of regulation related to social institutions.

Islam as a perfect religion is true and could not be debated. There is no one could be called a good Muslim who is still doubt about the perfectness of Islam. However, the claim of the perfectness will be wrong if there is a effort to negate the important aspect of understanding the tradition of pre Islam. It is same as manipulating history. In fact, Umar bin Khattab as quoted by Khalil Abdul karim says that Arab is a standard material for Islam. It means that the tradition of pre Islam is adopted much and then integrated to be a part of islam in the form of rituals, social life, politics, economy, law and many others (Karim, 2003:1). In religious rituals, the practice of hajj is an example of pre Islamic ritual which is adopted then by Islam through some modifications based on Muhamad ijtihaad and al-Qur'an.

Before the presence of islam in Arabian society there are twenty one *ka'bah*. However, there is a *ka'bah* in Mecca which is interesting to visit. This *Ka'bah* is not only visited by Arabian tribes but also Jew and Christian from outside of Mecca. Because of this *Ka'bah*, Quraisy tribe is respected. *Ahl al-haram* is given to members of this tribe. Later, when Islam comes, *Ka,bah* is still respected and people still respect Quraisy tribe. This then gives an assumption that Quraisy ethnic group is greater than others. Salman Al-farisi, a Muslim from Persia, was rejected his proposal to marry Umar bin Khattab's daughter since he was not from Quraisy Karim, 2003:6).

Tradition respecting to certain months, which in al-Quran are called with *arab'ata hurum* , is started from Arabian tradition of pre Islam. These months are Dzulqa'dah, Dzulhijjah, Muharram and Rajab. During first three months, Arabian society of pre Islam use for going pilgrimage, while in Rajab they go for *Umrah*. Therefore, they declared that in these months there is prohibition to involve in a war. When Islam comes, the tradition to purify these four months is enforced as explained in *al-Qur'an* (al-Baqarah :2).

In addition to tradition related to ritual, Islam also adopts criminal and civil law. Hasan ud-Din Hashmi (1989) did a comprehensive research in his dissertation related to operative law during Pre Islam Arabian society. Marriage, for instance, in Arabian tradition of pre Islam is a legal institution to unify a man and woman in a family. There are many kinds of marriage practiced in Arabian society, some of them are rejected by Islam since they contradict with woman's values. A

marriage which is received totally by Islam is *bau'lah* marriage. This kind of marriage is started by man's proposal which is usually done by his father or uncle or himself. During marriage procession, there should be *ijab* and *qabul*. There should be *mas kawin* (dowry). After getting married, a husband is responsible for providing a house and other needs. If there will be children, they should be referred to the husband. This marriage is approved by Islamic law and Qur'an (al-Baqarah:235) justifies this (Hashmi., 1989).

In addition to marriage, divorce, both *raj'iy* and *ba'in*, exists in Arabian tradition of pre Islam (Hashmi, 1989:48-49). Islam then uses this model with a little modification. *Ba'in* divorce does not mean to close an opportunity for men to re-marry his ex-wife. If there is a man who already married and divorced his ex-wife, he could remarry her. This is as explained in the Qur'an (al-Baqarah, 2 :230).

There are many aspects which have a connection with Arabian tradition of pre Islam and they are adopted by Islam. From Hashmi's research (1989), it can be concluded that the majority of private and criminal law as found in Fiqh texts is a continuity of pre Islamic law. Some of them are received and adopted while others are rejected. However, in connection with *muamalah* and social institutions, there are many which have been received and integrated into Islam.

From the above brief description, it can be understood that Arabian society of pre Islam is not an uncivilised society. This generalisation could not be accepted. It is not rational that al-Qur'an wants to make a dialogue and challenges a stupid and uncivilised society. Therefore, it is dishonest if there is a claim that Islam is perfectly free from local culture.

To study in a depth in this issue, it needs a comprehensive historical research using social sciences. In this case, the writer wants to emphasize that understanding pre Islamic tradition is crucial to develop collective academic understanding so that Islamic development will not be coloured by apologetic and romantic attitude in future.

It is a fact that al-Qur'an answers to some situations in Arabian society. It can be seen from its description on religious institutions and myths coloured by local culture of Arabian society. The description about heaven for instance al-Qur'an tends to fulfil the desire of Arabian people who live in dry desert. Related to religious belief, al-Qur'an also does not discuss the tradition of Hinduism and Buddhism though they are important to be discussed. Al-Qur'an just mentions statue's worshippers in Mecca, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroaster. This could be understood since they are known by Arabian society at that time.

Even though al-Qur'an is coloured by local culture of Arabian society, every Muslim seems to agree that Qur'an messages are universal and eternal. Therefore, understanding al-Qur'an literally means destroying universal meanings of al-Qur'an. Rahman therefore is true when he says that the eternity of Qur'an is not on its literal meaning but on its context meaning. In other words, its eternity is on its moral ideal since it is not limited by space and time (Rahman, 1980).]To support the above arguments, we ask about *madinah* verses. Do these verses exist if prophet Muhammad do not travel to Madinah? If Muhammad for instance travels to Habasyah which was lived by Christians or India which was Hinduism, will Madinah verses be same on their contents as written now? The answer is no. The verses of Qur'an will of course tell about Hinduism since it was the actual situation.

It is clear that al-Qur'an is God response to social situation of Arabian society and Muhammad personality. Therefore, in addition to understand Arabian tradition and situation, understanding Muhammad personality is also crucial in understanding al-Qur'an. Understanding

al-Qur'an literally by avoiding the important meaning of Pre Islamic tradition will emerge an assumption that prophet Muhammad does not have any role in making tradition. This creates fatalistic ideology. God creates Arabian social situation including all practices of Muhammad then He send revelation, and this happens as He send al-Qur'an.

It is acknowledged that the importance of understanding socio-historical revelation of al-Qur'an is discussed by many classical scholars. Each book which discusses about *ulumul Qur'an* will also discuss the social condition behind the revelation (*asbabun nuzul*). However, the importance of this discussion is not completely fulfilled. The discussion on this topic is still partial. In some classical books, *asbabun nuzul* is described only related to certain verses. The description on social and cultural condition of Arabian society when al-Qur'an was sent is not studied in a depth. In fact, this description is crucial to get a comprehensive view on local tradition of Arabian society at that time.

Understanding historical context of al-Qur'an is a must especially for those who want to get objective meaning of al-Qur'an. This effort is not an difficult task because in some cases al-Qur'an also explains the reason and aim behind the verses both in term of prohibition and command. If al-Qur'an does not mention its reason and aim, one can study from the description of Arabian tradition at that time. It can be seen from when al-Qur'an explains specifically the share of inherited properties for those who have rights to get them but it does not mention its aim. In this case, the moral ideal of al-Qur'an can be studied through understanding to Pre Islamic tradition of Arabian society, especially related to inheritance.

This reason and aim of Qur'an revelation is called by Rahman as *ratio legis*, namely a general principle presented by al-Qur'an as an essence from legal decision. It is also moral ideal of al-Qur'an in which Islamic law is developed. Therefore, understanding al-Qur'an in a depth could not be only conducted by using grammatical approach (Rahman, 1885). Rahman (1984:19) also criticizes the interpretation method using grammatical-literal approach as follows : "to insist on literal implementation of the rules of the Qur'an, shutting one's eyes to the social change that has occurred and that is so palpably occurring before our eyes, is tantamount to deliberately defeating its moral-social purposes and objectives".

From the above explanation, it can be understood that accurate reading to local tradition of Arabian society where al-Qur'an was sent is very crucial to study in order to get an objective meaning contained in al-Qur'an . Therefore, it can be known what some aspects of al-Qur'an which are universal and eternal and what temporal and local aspects are. This is important so that the development of Islam in future is not entrapped on the cult of local tradition of Arabian society. Besides, the deep understanding to the Arabian local tradition is beneficial for Islamic teaching production.

Islam and Local Tradition, the Problem of Textual Approach

What is described shows that Islam is a result of dialectic between God's will and human culture or Arabian pre Islamic local tradition. Therefore it is normal that some scholars want to distinguish between particular and universal dimensions of Islam. This does not mean that we do not respect a tradition which enriches the appearance of Islam. However, it is wise if it is re-read to by using a contemporary perspective. This is because the change of time and place will need renewal of view to religion without deleting the spirit and moral values contained.

The research conducted Khalil Abdul Karim (2003), a scholar from Egypt, shows how Islam accommodates well local culture to use as religious doctrine. Hasanudin Hashmi (1989) also

conducted the same research with different focus. From these two researches, it can be concluded that al-Qur'an and Muhammad's *ijtihad* do not erase all rooted cultures in Arabian society. What is done is to acculturate local culture which provides a greater opportunity for a society in accepting Islam inclusively. This influences some Islamic propagators later.

In line with the sources left by Prophet Muhammad PBUH, Muslims then use these sources in solving social problems faced. But, there are also so many problems which could be solved well by these sources. This phenomenon is also found by the first generation of Muslims when Islam arrived in Syria, Palestine, and other regions. Problems found are more complicated and diverse. This is because Islam interacts with other cultures which are different from Arabian culture.

When some regions are governed under Islamic authority, particularly under Umar bin Khattab government, Islam was challenged by two great religions, Christianity and Zoroaster representing Byzantium and Persia respectively. It is rational that in this situation the problems are more complicated. Therefore, Umar bin Khattab made some changes on his policy regarding to spoil goods which is different from the prophet Muhammad tradition. He also cancelled hand cut, the sale of slave, and he also did not give *zakat* to new Muslims. In fact, these are ruled explicitly in the Qur'an (Rahman, 1984:271).

The above fact shows that human who becomes the object of Islamic law is dynamic and creative. Muhamad Shahrur therefore is true when he formulates two limits, above and under limits. In these two limits, human is provided a free sphere to choose and decide law which is suitable with certain situation and condition. Apart from the weakness of formulated theory, his idea is beneficial to enrich Islamic intellectualism related to interpretation method of law.

Human, with his mind, could not be forced to be on the right track without any alternatives. The consistency to be on the right track is suitable for other creatures, not human. Angel is always good, satan is always wrong, tiger and lion always eat meat. Therefore, it is impossible to force a lion to eat vegetables. The route of human life is not on the right track, but the right space. With the right space, human is able to choose freely. This means that the consistency of human is *hanifiyyah* or curvature (Syahrur, 1992:478-479).

What is done by Shahrur (1992) is an example of many scholars that conduct methods of *ijtihad* which are new in Islamic academic tradition. What people say about his educational background is not crucial since Syahrur tried to provide a medium to bridge some rigid textual approaches.

Al-Qur'an in its early process to be a text involved in dialogical situation. Some *ulama* agree to regard it as final. The finalisation of text can be identified from the presence of grammatical rules. As a result, a text is always used to measure religious legitimisation for every human's behaviour both in social and individual life. Because human potency is dynamic, reading to revelation should be conducted in dialogical situation. A full respect to diversity and differences of time and space is crucial to emphasize because cultural heterogeneity requires multi ideas in solving problems. Social reality does not stop at a certain point and therefore it is impossible to bind under a final religious decision. With this dialogical text understanding, it is hoped that it can provide transformative, inclusive, and tolerant Islam with local culture.

An effort to produce Islam with the above characters is difficult when conventional approaches are used. *Fiqh* in Islam has developed fast and become a very formal discipline. The formal character of *Fiqh* can be seen clearly from the pattern of legal decision which emphasizes on textual aspect. As it is known that the procedures of interpretation through textual and grammatical approaches always use exoteric aspects of text. Therefore, Ulil Abshar is true when he says that some *fuqaha* often face serious problem in choosing between *lafadz* (word) which is

exoteric and *ma'na* (meaning) which is esoteric. Because exoteric is always chosen so that *fiqh* becomes very formal, rigid and collides with local culture (Abdallah, 1996).

Compared to some *fuqaha*, *sufi*' people dare to go beyond the procedures of exoteric interpretation. It is not strange that *sufi* people are more tolerant to local culture. It can be seen from Islamic spread in Indonesia which is propagated by *Wali Songo* (Nine saints). Sunan Kali Jaga is always regarded as very tolerant propagator to local culture. He uses puppets in propagating Islam in Java. In Kudus, East Java, until now, there is no one who dares to cut cows. This is to respect Hinduism followers in the region. It gives an impression that Islam is tolerant and appreciative to local wisdom.

One of historical facts which is still believed by some scholars is that the coming of Islam in Indonesia is not from Saudi Arabia, but India. Islam therefore is usual to interact with Hinduism and Buddhism. Cultural assimilation between Islam with local Indian elements facilitates Islamisation process in Indonesia especially In Java in which Buddhism and Hinduism have been interacted with people as proposed by Mukti Ali (1971:5-6). Besides, the fast process of spreading Islam in Indonesia could not be separated from the *sufi* character which is tolerant to local culture. It is noted here that Islamic propagators known as *wali songo* are *sufi*.

There are many traditions which are acculturation between old Javanese tradition, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. There are rituals related to the birth of human, marriage, death and after the death. There are *mitoni*, *puputan*, *midodareni*, *tahlilan* and *yasinan*. They are basically not known during the life of Prophet Muhammad PBUH and his companions.

In addition to the above traditions, there are also Islamic Javanese tradition conducted in certain months such as *kirab Pusaka*, *Ya qawiyyu*, *sekaten*, *sadran* and many others. Ismail Yahya (2009) describes the diversity of Islamic Javanese culture with a simple and systematic study. First, Islamic Javanese traditions are conducted chronologically based on Islamic calendar. There are some Islamic Javanese tradition conducted in *suro* (Muharram), *sapar* (shafar) and many others. These then are analyzed related to history, procession, value and meaning contained. These are discussed in connection with Islam and each tradition.

As noted in History, some *wali Songo* are *Sunni* Sufism followers who respect *fiqh* and others are *Syiah* Sufism followers such as Syaikh Siti Jenaror Syaikh Lemah Abang (Saksono, 1996:231). These *wali songo* have moral integrity so that in a relatively short time Islam spread easily without vertical and horizontal religious conflicts. Their effort make Islam in Indonesia different from Islam in Morocco, Pakistan or Saudi Arabia. According to Mark Woodward, Islam in Java is basically Islam though not pure from prophet Muhammad PBUH. His understanding about Hinduism and Buddhism proves that Islam in Java is Islam which is coloured by Javanese local wisdom (Woodward, 2008).

Prospect and Closing

What happens in historical period of Nusantara islam especially in Java implicitly confirms that *ijtihad* is crucial to bridge the gap, time and space, between Islam and Javanese local tradition. With *Ijtihad*, local tradition will get religious legitimacy and legal foundation. The strategy is by re-interpreting the Qur'an and Hadith based on a comprehensive socio-historical context to find their vitality. Because the formation of human civilisation happens continuously, the need of *ijtihad* is in line with historical journey of human beings.

This *ijtihad* should of course be conducted by using local wisdom. However it does not mean that revelation is under reality but it is a way to transform revelation into dynamic reality. With

transformative Islamic approaches, Qur'an can be read and understood so that it is always actual. This is because it is interpreted by looking at social process, not as 'fossil' which is far from real life. With this view, Muslims can understand the phenomenon of science development as a part of dynamic realities.

What is done by Wali Songo in Islamizing Javanese land shows that they use transformative approaches to Islam. Islam for them does not only contain universal and eternal teachings but also temporal and particular aspects. Universal and eternal aspects of Islam are for unifying Muslims in the world while particular and temporal aspects of Islam support Muslims to be creative as time and space change. Temporal and particular Islamic aspects are fulfilled by Islamic propagators in Java with local wisdoms. The unification of eternal aspects and temporal aspects of Islam creates Javanese Islamic tradition.

Until now, there is no agreement about proportion of eternal and temporal aspects in Islam. This proportion is extremely influential for the development of Islam in future. Larger portion in universal aspects of Islam is smaller opportunity for Muslims to be creative in making Islamic tradition which is suitable with time and space. On the contrary, smaller portion of eternal aspects of Islam means greater opportunity for Muslims to be creative. The first paradigm refers to literal and textual approach and the second refers to contextual approach. The first paradigm contributes to the rise of puritan Muslim but the latter supports the presence accommodative Muslims.

Local wisdom is a result of dialogical process between universal Islam and local culture. In such conditions, Islam is presented in its substance while the use social institution in the society is its form. This can be called inclusive Islam that is Islam which includes some cultural elements from outside of Islam and accommodate them to be Islamic tradition. To avoid syncretism, in the cultural assimilation process, there should be classification between substantive and formal elements. 'Form' can be taken to be Islamic tradition while its substance is rejected. This is also used by al-Qur'an and prophet Muhammad in facing Arabian pre Islamic tradition as well as used by Islamic propagators in responding Javanese local tradition.

The projection about the colour of Indonesian Islam in future is difficult but it depends on the mainstream approaches used. The mainstream approaches are influenced by some factors. The first is the level of difficulty in understanding. Justification process of contextual, transformative and inclusive approach needs an explanation which requires an uneasy task so that it is difficult for those who are educated on Islamic tradition to receive it. It is different from literal and textual approach. Its explanation is simple. This can be seen from 'public' or secular universities in which their students tend to study using the second approaches.

The second is agent factor. In the past, Islamic propagators in Java are *sufi* who have interesting, simple, consistent character (Saksono, 1995 : 231). It is not strange that in relatively short time all Javanese regions are conquered by Islam. This indicates that the success of product marketing does not only depend on the quality of a product but also the role of marketing agent is also crucial. Therefore, the colour of Indonesian Islam is also influenced by the personality of the agent.

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