

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF RAHMATULLAH AL-KAIRANAWI (1818-1891) IN STUDY OF RELIGION

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Abstract

The attraction in the study of religion continues to develop in this era of globalization. Muslim scholars have pioneered the effort and significantly contributed works and achievements in the study of religion. Thus, this study aims to highlight the achievements of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi, a 19th century Muslim scholar who specialised in the study of religion. Exposure to contemporary and future researchers on the great treatises of Muslim heritage in study of religion is significance of this study. This study uses qualitative methods through content analysis of the previous research, books, papers and previous thesis related to Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi. The study found that Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi made the important contributions in strengthening and defending the Islamic faith from external threats such as extreme non-Muslims, in the 19th century.

Keywords: history of religion, comparative religion, izhar al-haq, rahmatullah al-kairanawi.

INTRODUCTION

Study of religion is one of the Muslim heritages. Wan Haslan Khairuddin et al, (2020), expresses the study of religion in Islamic tradition as a sub-discipline of *'Ilm al-Kalām*. According to Siti Nurleha Shaffie (2012), Muslim scholars like Ibn Hazm, Ibn Nasim, Shahrastani and Al-Biruni, have contributed treatises, references and approaches in the study of religion. Thus, study of religion is regarded as one of the great contributions of Muslim's civilization to mankind's intellectual advancement (Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi W.Razali et al, 2014).

According to Norsaadah Din et al (2018), Al-Quran, Hadith and views of Muslim scholars are sources of study of religion in Islamic tradition. For instance, Al-Quran discusses regarding Judaism and Christianity in surah *Al-Baqarah* 2:113, surah *Al-Tawbah* 9:30, surah *Al-Maidah* 5:51-64 and surah *Al-Imran* 3:67 (Mohd Faizal Abdul Khir, 2017). Meanwhile, Prophet Muhammad SAW explains the difference between the fast of Muslims and Jews is *sahur* (Zaifuddin Md Rasip, 2020).

Therefore, Al-Quran and Hadith are essential factors in study of religion due to encouragement of both, Muslim scholars are inspired to engage in the discipline of study of religion (Zuriati Mohd Rashid & Engku Ahmad Zaki Engku Alwi, 2010). Obviously, Muslims' scholars are pioneers of study of religion since Muslim scholars contribute ideas and views as early the end of the Medinah period.

Statement of The Problem

Many of Muslim scholars are skilfully in certain disciplines and their contributions can be traced on different fields and places. For instance, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi, one of the Muslim reformists in 19th century (Seema Alavi, 2015). He is one of the most prominent scholars of India, who confronted Christian proselytism towards Muslim (Aisyah Rabiah Abdullah, 2020). According to Aemy Elyani & Jaffary Awang (2018), Ahmat Deedat, a modern Muslim scholar, has influenced by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi treatises in study of religion. Even, Clinton Bannet (2008), assumes Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi as one of the most active and prolific Muslim polemicists against Christianity.

Objectives of Study

1. To understand the concept of study of religion in Islamic tradition.
2. To introduce Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi.
3. To analyse contributions of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi in the study of religion.

Significance of The Study

This study exposures to contemporary and future researchers on the great treatises of Muslim heritage in study of religion. It towards researchers to deeper understanding regarding issues in Muslim intellectual and to attain a better understanding of the opinion of any Muslim scholars in the study of religion. Therefore, findings of this study generate new ideas in the study of religion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applies qualitative methodology since this study involves the process of collecting and analysing non-numerical data. This study collects existing data in the form of texts such as previous research, books, papers and previous thesis related to Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi. Therefore, this study uses content analysis to identify contributions of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi in the study of religion.

Biography of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi

According to M.Muslimin (2011), the name of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi is Muhammad Rahmatullah bin Khalil Al-Kairanawi Al-Uthmani bin Al-Hakim Najibullah bin Al-Hakim Habibullah bin Al-Hakim Abd Al-Rahim bin Al-Hakim Qutb Al-Din bin Al-Syeikh Fadhil bin Al-Hakim Diwan Khan Abd Al-Rahman bin Al-

Hakim Abd Al-Karim bin Al-Hakim Hassan bin Abd Al-Samad bin Abi Ali bin Muhammad Yusuf bin Abd Al-Kadir bin Al-Syeikh Jalal Al-Din bin Mahmud bin Ya'qub bin Isa bin Ismail bin Muhammad Taqiy bin Abi Bakr bin Ali Naqiy bin Uthman bin Abdullah bin Shihab Al-

Din bin Abd Al-Rahman Al-Jazruni bin Abd Al-Aziz Al-Sarakhsi bin Khalid bin Al-Walid bin Abd Al-Aziz bin Abd Al-Rahman Al-Kabir Al-Madani bin Abdullah Al-Thani bin Abd Al-Aziz Al-Kabir bin Abdullah Al-Kabir bin Umar bin Dhi Al-Nurain Amir Al-Mukminin Uthman bin Affan.

Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi is descendant of the third *Khulafa Al-Rasyidin*, Uthman bin Affan. His great grandfather, Sheikh Abed Rahman bin Abed Al-Aziz Al-Sarakhsi, is the first man from his family who moved to Panipat, India during Mahmud Al-Ghaznawi becoming ruler of India (Wan Haslan Khairuddin et al, 2013). Most of his family members are doctors and the title *Al-Hakim* refers to doctor of medicine.

He was born in 1818 in Kairana at Muzaffarnagar, Delhi, India (Arian Hopf, 2021). The title *Al-Kairanawi* is taken from his village, Kairana (Wan Haslan Khairuddin et al, 2013). Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi father, Maulvi Khalilullah is his first teacher due to home school is an initial of his learning and among his teachers are Sayyid Ahmad Shahid in Kairana, Maulana Imam Baksh Sahbai in Delhi and Mufi Saad Allah in Lucknow (Seema Alavi, 2015).

According to Rosie Bsheer (2020), Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi known as a leader for 200 *Mujahideen* from Najibabad due to his involvement in anti-colonial revolt and he called for armed struggle against the British rule which known as the 1857 Rebellion. However, British crushed the rebellion and put an order for Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's arrest.

Consequently, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi has moved to Mecca since British government's actions against Muslim in India (Muhammad Harmain, 2019). Mecca is Islam holiest city and the heaven for Muslim rebels fleeing repression. Muslim rebels assume Mecca is a transit point on the way to Cairo, Java and other destination. Conversely, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi assumes Mecca as his permanent house (Rosie Bsheer, 2020).

Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi was respected by the Mecca Community due to his being a prominent religious scholar and he was honoured by the Mufti of Mecca, Sheikh Ahmad Zaini Dahlan (Rosie Bsheer, 2020). In Mecca, Rahmatullah Al-

Kairanawi has opened the *Madrasah Al-Sawlatiyyah* (Sumanto Al-Qurtuby, 2020). According to Ulyan Nasri (2019), it is the first *madrasah* concept in Saudi Arabia.

Contributions of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi in Study of Religion

Having examined the biography of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi which has been discussed by several Western and Islamic scholars who argue according to their perspectives, next this study discusses Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's major contributions particularly in the study of religion. Among the contributions are debate, treatises, *Izhar Al-Haq* and legacy.

Debate

According to Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu (2017), Christian missionary movement thrived in the 19th century in India and this movement was accelerated by the fall and dissolution of the Islamic State of Mughal by the British colonial power in the 19th century. One of the Christian scholars, Karl Gottlieb Pfander has been involved in this movement (Seema Alavi, 2015). By 1839, he was sent to India and in 1841 he went to Agra (Arian Hopf, 2021).

In India, Pfander has translated his famous book on Islam and Christianity, *Mizan Al-Haq*, to Urdu translation (Arian Hopf, 2021). Grafton (2009) assumes *Mizan Al-Haq* is a Christianity apologetic work against Islam. However, Pfander's polemical *Mizan Al-Haq* was responded by Muslim scholars but the most prominent of all is Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi (Nile Green, 2015).

A debate between Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi and Karl Gottlieb Pfander happened on 10-11 April 1854 at Agra, India (Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu, 2017). Muslimin (2011), states themes of the debate are the Christian scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, the prophecy of Prophet Muhammad SAW and the inspiration of the Quran.

Oddbjorn Leirvik (2010), quotes Christine Schirrmacher views on this debate, utilization of insights from historical-critical Bible interpretation in Europe is one of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's arguments against Pfander. Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi has received favours from Dr. Muhammad Wazir Khan, a doctor, in gathering the historical-critical material (Francis Abdelmassieh, 2020).

Nevertheless, this debate is unfinished due to Pfander not attending the debate on the second day. However, German expert on Islamic Studies, Christine

Schirmacher assumes the debate between Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi and Karl Gottlieb Pfander as the most incident in Christian-Muslim (Oddbjorn Leirvik, 2014).

Treatises

According to Wan Haslan Khairuddin & Indriaty Ismail (2013), *Izalah Al-Auham*, *Izalah Al-Shukuk*, *Al-I'jaz Al-Aisawiy*, *Ahsan Al-Ahadith fi Ibtal Al-Tathlith*, *Al-Buruq Al-Lami'yah*, *Ma'dal I'waj Al-Mizan*, *Taqlib Al-Mata'in*, *Mi'yar Al-Tahqiq* and *Al-Bahth Al-Sharif fi Ithbat Al-Nasakh wa Al-Tahrif* are a few books written by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi.

The themes of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi treatises are refutation of Christian propaganda and protection of Islamic faith due to him facing Pfander and British threats. For instance, *Al-Buruq Al-Lami'yah* discusses the proof of the Prophecy of the Prophet Muhammad SAW based on verses from the Bible meanwhile *Al-Bahth Al-Sharif fi Ithbat Al-Nasakh wa Al-Tahrif* discusses the distortions and arrogations in the Bible (Wan Haslan Khairuddin & Indriaty Ismail, 2013).

Eventhough, *Izhar Al-Haq* is the most prominent of all. *Izhar Al-Haq* published in 1864 to defend Islam and its pristine teaching from Christianity missionary movement (Maziah Mustapha & Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, 2019). Clinton Benett (2008), states Pfander was transferred from India to Istanbul to establish a new mission in 1861 and he published the Turkish edition of the *Mizan Al-Haq*.

However, in 1863, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi was invited by Sultan Abdul Aziz, the Ottoman Sultan, to Turkey and Sultan Abdul Aziz has commissioned Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi to write a book about the debate with Pfander due to Sultan Abdul Aziz has impressed with his intellectual skills and anti-British commitments (Rosie Bsheer. 2020).

Consequently, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi established *Izhar Al-Haq* in 1864 in Turkey and Saudi Arabia (Oddbjorn Leirvik, 2010). The objectives of *Izhar Al-Haq* are as the response to Pfander's book, *Mizan Al-Haq* and the debate with Pfander (David D. Grafton, 2009). Nowadays, *Izhar Al-Haq* is one of the most widely circulated Muslim works regarding Christianity.

Izhar Al-Haq

Izhar Al-Haq is an iconic treatise by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi and synonymous with Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi. The writing of *Izhar Al-Haq* took 160 days or less than six months (Wan Haslan Khairuddin, Indriaty Ismail & Jaffary Awang, 2013).

According to Oddbjorn Leivik (2010), *Izhar Al-Haq* dealt with polemic issues such as the invalidity of the Trinity, the alleged corruption and abrogation of Biblical texts and the falseness of the Old Testament and New Testament.

Generally, *Izhar Al-Haq* has six chapters. The contents of *Izhar Al-Haq* are based on themes of the previous debate between Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi and Pfander such as chapter one, explanation of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Meanwhile, distortion and abrogation of the Bible discussed by chapters two and three. Next, chapter four explains perversion in the Trinity Concept. Lastly, chapter five and six discuss the proof of the divine origin of the Quran and the prophecy of the Prophet Muhammad.

German expert on Islamic Studies, Christine Schirmacher assumes *Izhar Al-Haq* as a summary of all possible charges against Christianity and it is used after Al-Kairanawi's death as an encyclopedia due to al-Kairanawi extended the material of earlier polemicists like 'Ali Tabari, Ibn Hazm or Ibn Taymiyyah (Maziah Mustapha & Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, 2019).

Legacy

Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's most essential contribution in the study of religion is a legacy of knowledge. The polemical writing of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi mainly *Izhar Al-Haq*, has influenced South African Muslim, Ahmed Deedat (Oddbjorn Leirvik, 2014). Ahmed Deedat was born in 1918 at the Surat, India in Muslim family and in 1927, he left India to join his father who was working at the Durban City, Southern Africa (Phillip Scheepers, 2016).

Ahmed Deedat has confronted by Christian missionaries in South Africa because they have accused the Prophet Muhammad SAW of having “used the sword” to spread Islam (Aemy Elyani & Jaffary Awang, 2018). According to Aemy Elyani & Jaffary Awang (2018), Ahmed Deedat was looking for answers to correct the misunderstandings thrown by Christian missionaries until he found the book *Izhar Al-Haq*.

Thus, Ahmed Deedat adopts and adapts the Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi methods to assist him to publicly tackle the strategies employed by the Christian missionaries in and beyond South Africa (Muhammed Haron, 2014). Ahmed Deedat has developed a specific discourse on the relationship between Muslims and other religions through polemic and public debates (Samadia Sadouni, 2013).

Methodologies of Ahmed Deedat in public debate are disputative, polemical and apologetic approaches (Aemy Elyani & Jaffary Awang, 2018).

Nevertheless, Ahmed Deedat aims to provide Muslims with theological tools for defending Islam against the intense missionary strivings of many Christian denominations (David Westerlund, 2003). In 1986, Ahmed Deedat was honoured by the government of Saudi Arabia with the King Faisal Award as recognition of his

contributions to Islamic propagation (Maziah Mustapha & Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, 2019).

However, the legacy of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi is continued by Zakir Naik, a modern Muslim scholar in study of religion. The genius and skills of Ahmed Deedat has inspired and influenced Zakir Naik in the study of religion (Maziah Mustapha & Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Islam is a religion against compulsion in inviting others into its teaching, but it allows for Muslim scholars to engage in any form of peaceful, ethical and intellectual discourse with adherent of other faith. Thus, in the Islamic tradition, the study of religion is a discourse on religious beliefs.

Study of religion is a field of knowledge initiated by Islamic scholars and Muslims community. This fact is an authentic fact due to the Quran and Hadith promoting the idea of study of religion. Tradition and legacy of the Quran and the Hadith in exposing the incoherence of the other religions than Islam has been propagated by the Muslim intellectuals and Islamic scholars.

Thus, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi, a 19th century Muslim scholar who specialised in the study of religion, engaged in public debate with leading Christian evangelicals and authored several books in response to non-Muslim allegations. Among the significant works and the most influential on study of religion in Muslim-Christian debate and dialogue is *Izhar Al-Haq* authored by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi.

The book *Izhar Al-Haq* is the manifestation of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi to protect Islam and to refute *Mizan Al-Haq* propaganda by Karl Gottlieb Pfander. *Izhar Al-Haq* is the greatest treatise by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi due to it admired and honoured by Muslim and Western scholars mainly in Muslim-Christian discourse. The contributions of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi in the study of religion are very essential. Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi made important contributions in strengthening

and defending the Islamic faith from external threats such as extreme non-Muslims, in the 19th century.

Nowadays, the legacy of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi continues to develop in this era of globalization. His treatises and approaches are references for contemporary and future researchers in study of religion. Therefore, this study suggests a review regarding methodology of debate by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi. A review on debate by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi made for the further scholars to understand the previous approach in debate and to create a new approach in accordance with current issues and situations.

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