

CHAPTER IV : A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN NINIAN SMART AND RAHMATULLAH AL-KAIRANAWI

4.1 Introduction

Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi are scholars in the study of religion. Even though both scholars have never met as they come from different periods, there are similarities in their methodologies such as the usage of sacred books as primary sources in writing, historical facts as arguments, geographical facts as arguments and making arguments using examples.

Meanwhile, differences between Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's methodologies are influenced by their writing objectives and ambience. However, the purpose of identifying similarities and differences is not to determine truth and fault. Conversely, the understanding of opinions, perspectives and ideas of the scholars are the priority.

According to Carla Mooney (2015), understanding the similarities and differences between the world's religions provide a better understanding on how these beliefs unite and divide people around the world. The study of religion pursues two goals; description and classification (Oliver Freiberger, 2018).

Description within the study of religion refers to the effort to understand the various aspects of religion, especially through the intellectual disciplines (Robert Segal, n.d). Meanwhile, classification within the study of religion means the attempt to systematise and explore a variety of knowledge about religious beliefs, practices, and institutions (Charles Joseph Adams, n.d).

4.2 Similarities

4.2.1 Sacred Books as Primary Source in Writing

Sacred books refer to holy texts or religious scriptures. They are guidelines and references in religion as beliefs, myth, ritual practices, commandments or laws, ethics, spiritual aspirations, and formation of a religious community are the main discussion in sacred books. Religions may have one or more sacred books for example, the Avesta is Zoroastrianism's sacred book, the Bible is Christianity's sacred book and Veda is Hinduism's sacred book.

David H. Pereyra (2021), expresses that although each religion has different bonds with their sacred books, they all have an important connection to oral and sensory dimensions of the religious sacred books. Preservation, transmission, reading, and reciting of the sacred books lead to intimacy with God.

The emergence of the sacred books has been closely associated with the formation of religious community and are of vital importance to the respective religious communities. Beyond this close relationship between a community and its sacred books, there have always been well distinct connections to other texts and other readings of the same religions (Simome Sinn, 2017).

Ninian Smart refers to sacred books as a primary source to understand religious phenomena from religious followers' perspective without bias and judgement. For example, he analysed the *Book of Going Forth by Day* to understand the concept of death in the ancient Egyptian religion from the ancient Egyptians' perspective as the *Book of Going Forth by Day* is their sacred book.

Nevertheless, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi quotes verses from sacred books to support an argument as sacred books provide a real understanding of religious teachings. For example, the Bible verse quoted by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi as evidence that the Pentateuch is not a book of Moses because the word “Pentateuch” was never mentioned in the original verse in Deuteronomy 27:5.

4.2.2 Historical Facts as Argument

Historical facts are information about past events. History deals with the question of “what happened”. Historians focus on the chronology of an event, discover causes of an event, identify effects of events and analyse interpretation of events. An event influences the minds of people to bring changes in the pattern of thinking and style of living.

A historical argument is a comprehensive description and free from the value of judgment. Ninian Smart applies historical facts due to two reasons. First, historical facts as a chapter introduction. For example, he assumed that ancient India encompassing the modern state of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet and Sri Lanka is the cause of the diversity in religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Jainism and Christianity that emerged in India.

Second, historical facts as introductions to religions. For example, Ninian Smart argued that the histories of the Israelites religion and Judaism originated from the Abrahamic belief. Abraham believes in *El* as the highest God. However, the Abrahamic belief is developed by Abraham’s descendants like Isaac and Jacob. Around 1300 BCE, after Moses’s revelation, the Israelites religion is known as Judaism.

Meanwhile, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi applied historical facts based on two reasons. First, historical facts as the support information in an argument. For example, he argued that the number of books in the Old Testament and the New Testament is doubted by Christian scholars due to it being reviewed by three great councils such as the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E., Council of Laodicea in 364 C.E. and Council of Carthage in 397 C.E.

Next, the second reason is to prove claims. One of the examples would be when Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi expressed that hadith is authentic and accepted by Muslims because it has gone through a rigorous process created by disciples of companions of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and Muslim scholars. Authentic hadith is determined by the reliability of *Asma Ur-Rjial*, the biographies of reporters of hadith from the Prophet's companions until present time.

4.2.3 Geographical Facts as Argument

Generally, geography studies the natural world such as land formations, animals, and the atmosphere. Geographical facts refer to the information of Earth's landscapes, humans, places, and environments. It is one of the empirical evidences because knowledge or information is received by the senses through observation or documentation of behaviour.

Descriptions and explanations by Ninian Smart are supported by geographical facts. For example, Ninian Smart explains that Malacca is central to Islamic preaching and the main port in Asia and Southeast Asia due to the strategic position of Malacca. The Malay Sultanate of Malacca was one of the most important trade centres in Southeast Asia in the 15th century and located on the Straits of Malacca (Azlansyah Aman & Azhar Mad Arus, 2016).

According to geographical facts, Malacca's position is in the middle between India and China (David Ringrose, 2018). The spread of the Islamic religion in Southeast Asia is influenced by the empire of Malacca (Abdul Aziz Azmi & Farrah Wahida Mustafar, 2020), because the empire reaches throughout Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Indonesian islands and southern Thailand (Shukri Ahmad, 2011).

Meanwhile, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi also applied geographical facts to support arguments. One of which in refuting the Bible because of contradictions between Bible verses and geographical facts. For example, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi refutes the borders of land given by the Book of Joshua to the children of Benjamin which encompasses the sea southward because the sea never existed near the land of the children of Benjamin.

4.2.4 Argument Using Examples

According to Mohd Faizal Abd Kadir (2017), an argument by example also called as an argument using examples is an argument supported by providing examples. Appropriate examples and realistic descriptions can determine the validity of an argument. Moreover, examples can be used to gain a better understanding and relate to key points of an argument.

Ninian Smart applies arguments by example to provide better understanding in order to relate to the point of argument. For example, he assumes that the similarity between the Canaan religion and the ancient Egyptian religion is a myth. Ninian Smart provided a brief example that the story of *Baal* in the Canaanite religion, is similar to the story of *Osiris* in the ancient Egyptian religion because the fighting, dying and resurrection of Gods are the themes for both the *Baal* and *Osiris* stories.

Meanwhile, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi used brief examples to support arguments. For example, he argued that the concept of Christianity's God is anthropomorphic. As a supporting statement, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi provided examples that the concept of Hinduism's God is similar to the concept of Christianity's God due to the attribution of human characteristics to Gods.

4.3 Differences

4.3.1 Secularism by Ninian Smart

Generally, according to Alex Deagon (2017), secular means the systematic erosion of religious practice, values and belief, as a result, a secular society is one which lacks belief or faith in the supernatural, mysterious and magical. Religion is privatized as a faith whose object is the supernatural, and differentiates it from the natural and the rational.

Before the 19th century, the influence of Christianity pervaded within the Western academics including the discipline of study of religion. Study of religion was influenced by Christian theology. Western scholars studied other religions based on Christian perspective. However, Ninian Smart is one of the scholars who has changed this tradition. He has changed from the Christian theology approach to a neutral approach.

As one of the pioneers in the secular study of religion, Ninian Smart has separated study of religion from Christianity theology because he has changed from a Christian based subject to the study of world religions. He refutes Christianity theology domination because it generates misunderstandings on religion that have been studied. Ninian Smart emphasizes the description concept rather than the "truth claim" concept in the study of religion.

4.3.2 Suspending of Personal Belief by Ninian Smart

Focus on describing religious phenomena and avoiding questions of truth are essential principles in Ninian Smart's methodology. Ninian Smart encourages a scholar and student to "bracket out" personal belief. Suspending a scholar's previous ideas, thoughts or beliefs about the truth, value or meaning of the religion under study is priority. It means not allowing one's personal religion or belief to intervene during the process of studying other religions.

Ninian Smart prioritizes academic purpose rather than personal belief because suspending personal belief aims to adopt a neutral position in the study of religion. It provides a way of comparing the religions without misrepresenting them by interpreting them through the lens of another religion. However, traditional Christians assume this principle as a threat because it has undermined and removed the authority of Christianity in the study of religion.

Christian theology is interested in their meaningfulness or validity rather than understanding of a particular religious idea or phenomenon because the aim of Christian theology seeks to deepen and advance theological truth. It is the ultimate difference between Christian theology's goal and Ninian Smart's methodology.

4.3.3 Description and Explanation by Ninian Smart

Generally, the definition of a description is a statement that gives detail about one or more populations, situations or phenomena. The description answers the question of "what", "where", "when" and "how". In the study of religion, the description is assumed as a way that describes the characteristics of the religion or religious phenomena studied. General information of religions, introductions of religions and interpretations of religions are the main objective of the description. .

The description is applied by Ninian Smart in the study of religion to describe characteristics of religions studied without bias and prejudice. It does not focus on the question of “why” religious phenomena occur. One of the characteristics of description is free of judgement and criticism. Moreover, Ninian Smart’s principle in study of religion is to delineate and explain the characteristics of religion from the religious followers’ understanding.

For example, he classified the concept of *Jihad* in Islam into two. First, *Jihad* is warfare against polytheists, Christianity and Judaism until they pay the *Jizya* and because of the expanding of Islamic territories. Second, *Jihad* is the inner war to eliminate temptations and obstacles to true obedience to Allah. However, Ninian Smart explains that *Jihad* as an inner war is more prioritised than *Jihad* as warfare in Islamic teaching.

4.3.4 Integration of Religion and Science by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi

Contrast, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi accepts religious scripture and science or rationality in his methodology in study of religion. Science and religion are both important factors of modern life because religion is concerned with a world beyond the senses and science is concerned with a world known to us in terms of our sense-perception.

This combination is an essential element in Islamic scholarship as Muslim scholars struggled to confront with the propaganda of Christians missionary in the 19th century. Before that, science and rationality were ignored by Ottoman Salafi tradition. However, this combination is balanced between religion and science. Descriptions and explanations based on a combination of them are advantageous to Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi in the study of religion.

Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi empathizes the scripture and the sciences because science strengthens the truth of the contents of scripture so that the contents can be rationalized by people. The Quran, hadith, views of Muslim scholars and empirical evidences have influenced Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's methodology in study of religion. He assumes the Quran is a symbol of the unification of Muslims and science is a part of Islamic heritage.

4.3.5 Assertiveness by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi

Generally, assertiveness is concerning the ability to express thoughts and feelings openly in an honest, appropriate, respectful and direct way. Nature of assertiveness is willingness to volunteer opinions, question, and confront stressful situations without fear. Being assertive means being able to stand up for your own or other people's rights in a calm and positive way, without being aggressive, or passively.

Assertiveness in Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's methodology have influenced by British government policy and the Christianity propaganda. Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi speaks up in defence of his views and able to analyze information and point out the information lacking details and evidence. He uses positive assertiveness because his expression based on authentic facts and data. Authentic facts form Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's confident in study of religion particularly in debate.

For example, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi asserts the Pentateuch not being the Torah of Moses because the language laws support his claim. The first-person pronoun representing Moses like phrases "I" and "We" were never used by the Pentateuch. Conversely the phrase "Moses says", a third-person pronoun is used by the Pentateuch when representing Moses.

4.3.6 Disputation and Judgement by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi

Generally, a disputation shows an inclination to dispute or disagree. The disputation in the study of religion means the study of religion with a disputative purpose. It answers to the question of “why”. Expressing disapproving judgment on one group or more is the main element. Consequently, judgement and criticism are the basis of the disputation.

Disputation in Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's methodology due to two reasons. The first reason is to refute Christianity teachings and the second reason is to defend Islam from Christian scholars. Disputation of Christianity teachings by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi are based on empirical facts, textual facts and scholars' opinions. Meanwhile, defending Islamic teachings are done based on historical facts and scholars' opinions.

Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi disputed that the Bible is the word of God because contradictions between the Hebrew translation and the Latin, Syrian and Greek translations are evidence of alterations in the Biblical texts. Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi referred to opinions by Adam Clarke, a British Methodist theologian and biblical scholar, as the supporting information in the argument.