

THE APPROACH BY BADI'UZZAMAN SAID NURSI TOWARDS NON-MUSLIM RIGHTS IN THE RISALAH AL-NUR

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ABSTRACT

The Non-Muslim rights in an Islamic state have been recognized by Islam since the time the Prophet Muhammad SAW was sent to spread the Message of Islam. However, the rights reserved for them are not absolute; in fact Islam has outlined certain guidelines to limit the freedom allocated to them, to which they are bound. This paper focuses on the approach adopted by Badiuzzaman Said al-Nursi in his treatise Risalah al-Nur, towards the rights of Non-Muslims in an Islamic country. This paper is categorized as a library research. The framework specifically utilizes two main methods namely the data collection method and the data analysis method encompassing analyses of historical records, content analysis, and biographical analysis. A review of the Risalah al-Nur reveals that its approach towards the Non-Muslim rights in an Islamic state is that of a pacifist nature, based on the principles of justice. In short, this approach may be implemented in a country comprising plural societies practicing a variety of religious beliefs such as Malaysia. The right to practice religion for the Non-Muslims is guaranteed because the views of ulamas like Badiuzzaman Said Nursi are not grounded on whims and fancy but founded on schools of thoughts driven by the Islamic law as well as by firm evidences and rational analogies. The approach preached by this scholar is vital in the current context and must be expressed as a holistic approach.

Keywords: Badiuzzaman Said Nursi; Non-Muslim Rights; Risalah al-Nur

INTRODUCTION

Badiuzzaman Said Nursi was a Turkish *ulama* famed for his use of various knowledge disciplines exceeding 80 fields, which was an unusual feat such that he was dubbed 'Badiuzzaman' (Era Reformer). He was an *ulama* who fought in the path of Allah s.w.t. throughout three eras: prior to the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate, after the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate, and during the era of abject secularism in Turkiye. He chose the path of Allah s.w.t. by teaching the people on piety integrated with science through his works to provide light in the confusion of true belief during the secular era. Said Nursi was not only active with the pen and *da'wah*, he was also involved in armed *jihad* against the Russian forces and was tasked as a commando to fight for the motherland during the First World War. He was the author of the interpretation book collection *Risalah al-Nur* which is a verbatim interpretation (*maknawi*) and *Isyari* interpretation of the Holy Quran. His thoughts and works were always well received among the scribes in their fields and contributed massively towards Islamic knowledge specifically *aqidah*, interpretation and *tazkiyah al-Nafs*. His writings were not only confined to these three aspects but encompass other aspects such as science, sociology, psychology, economics, spiritual health, politics, education and various others. This paper focuses on parts of his debates in the field of politics vis a vis his approach towards Non-Muslim rights in an Islamic state government system. Non-Muslim rights are critical issues in the current environment of a state governed by Muslims and they must be sanctioned in safeguarding the state's justice and harmony.

OBJECTIVE(S)

The research in this paper identified two (2) objectives namely (i) To elaborate on the approach by Badiuzzaman Said al-Nursi towards the Non-Muslim rights in an Islamic State based on the *tafsir* (interpretation) book *Risalah al-Nur*; and (ii) To propose a method to apply this approach to a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

This writing is classified as a library research. The research methodology employed in this study comprises two main methods which are data collection method and data analysis encompassing historical methods, biographical analysis method, and content analysis to derive the study findings.

BADIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI

Badiuzzaman Said Nursi was an *ulama* who valiantly fought for the truth even when faced with oppression and years of imprisonment upon his return to Turkiye after he escaped from prison camps in Russia. He dedicated his entire lifetime towards the spread of Islam until he was imprisoned and exiled for more than thirty years of his life and eventually sentenced to death. He was born in the Nurs village within the

district of Khizan in the Bitlis region of Eastern Turkiye in the year 1877/1293H. He received his early education from his father, Mirza and mother, Nuriah until the age of nine. He was then educated by his brother Mulla Abdullah. From small, he had shown a propensity to quickly master any knowledge he learnt; he memorized the Holy Quran in a matter of fifteen days, memorized ninety volumes of the books on basic Islamic knowledge within a period of three months, causing him to be dubbed "Badiuzzaman" by the *ulamas* of his era. His intellect and depth of knowledge were acknowledged by Ottoman *ulamas* in Eastern Turkiye and the then Syria and they also recognized the title accorded to him. In his youth (14 years old) he had ventured out in search of knowledge at knowledge centers in Bitlis, Sharwan, Sa'rid, Tillo, Mardin and review (*talaqqi*) sessions with famous *ulamas* of his era. Upon completion, he returned to Van. At the age of fifteen he studied disciplines such as mathematics, geology, physics, chemistry, astronomy, history, geography and philosophy within a short period of time. While in Van, he chanced upon a newspaper excerpt by the British colonial minister, Glad Stone, who addressed the masses upon the fall of the Turkish Ottoman Caliphate, "As long as the Holy Quran remains in the hands of the Muslims, we will never be able to colonize them; either we obliterate this book or we distance it from them". These words had a profound effect on his soul, thus began the historic moment in his life to the extent he vowed "I will prove to the universe that the Holy Quran is the manifest sun that will never set and can never be extinguished" (Ali Kurt, 2010: 3-5). He tried to establish a knowledge center, *Madrassa Az-Zahra'*, aimed at producing Muslim generations with high intelligence and intellect and utilized the principles of intellectual and emotional integration in facing Islamic enemies who were striving to unseat the Ottoman Caliphate and Islam (Said Nursi, 2016: 10).

RISALAH AN-NUR

Badiuzzaman Said Nursi had divided his life into the Old Said (involvement in politics) and the New Said (the start of his writing of religious books throughout his life). During his eight years of exile in Barla, he wrote three quarters of *Risalah an-Nur*. *Risalah an-Nur* commenced with four main volumes namely *al-Kalimat*, *al-Maktubat*, *al-Lama'at* and *al-Shu'a'at*. These four books spawned thirteen books and spinoffs to result in one hundred and thirty books with almost 6000 pages (Sadik Otaza, 2015:21-28).

Risalah an-Nur is a thematic interpretation book. It was first written in 1927 within a period of 23 years. The motivating factor supporting the writing of these pamphlets was to deflect Western secularism rationally, to answer atheist propaganda and to enliven religiosity. This was due to the prevailing oppressive environment where Islamic penmanship was prohibited, *madrassa* and *sufi* lodges were closed down, calls to prayer were changed to Turkish, Islamic jurisprudence was replaced with Western laws, and Islamic symbolic clothing such as the head coverings and turbans were prohibited whilst liquor drinking was widespread.

The chronology of *Risalah an-Nur* writing throughout the 23 years by year and place commenced with the First Phrase up to the 33rd Phrase in Barla in 1927-1929 namely sub-Phrases, the *Risalah Hashir*, the *Risalah Miracle (Mukjizat)* of the

Holy Quran, the Risalah Hashir of the Angels and the Souls, the Risalah Ana and Zarah, the Risalah Isra' and Mi'raj, On Unity of God and the Letters of Windows. Then in 1930-1933 in Barla, he authored the First to 29th Letters, and in 1930 -1934 he wrote Rumuzat As-Samaniyyah. In 1933 in Barla, he authored the 8th Radiance which was the Letters of the Holiness of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani. He wrote the 24th to the 26th Radiance which were the Veil Letters, the Letters for the Sick Patients, the Older People Letters in 1935 in Isparta. When he was imprisoned at Eskiher Prison in 1935-1936 he wrote the 27th Radiance until the 30th Radiance. In 1936 he wrote the First Light which was the Quraniyyah Isharatul Letters and the Second Light, On the Unity of Allah. From 1936 -1943 in Kastamanu, he resumed the writing of the Third Light until the 6th Light and the 8th Light which was the Holiness of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani Letters, proceeding with the 7th Light which was the Great Word Letters, the 8th Light, the Holiness of the Third Alawiyah, the 9th Light the Muqaddimatul *Hashyriyyah* Letters-the Benefits of the End Days and the 10th Light which was Part Two of the Faharasat Letters. The writing of the 11th Light (The Letters of Fruits), the 12th Light to the 13th Light (The Defence at Denizli and its letters) were done in the Denizli Prison during the years 1943-1944. While he was imprisoned at the Afyan Prison, he wrote the 14th Light, The Defence at Afyan and its letters as well as the 15th Light which was the *al-Hujjaj az-Zahra* Letters (Hayrat Malaysia, 2021).

RESULT OF THE STUDY

By referring to *Risalah an-Nur*, we may conclude that the approach towards Non-Muslim rights adopted by Badiuzzaman Said an-Nursi in his writings encompassed aspects such as the right to freedom, equal rights, principles of justice, appointments to posts, the right to be respected, the right to marriage, economic and political rights, and the right to peace. These aspects are further explained below:

Table 1: The approach towards Non-Muslim rights adopted by Badiuzzaman Said an-Nursi in his writings *Risalah an-Nur*

| No. | Aspects | Approach |
|-----|---|--|
| i | Right to Freedom | The right accorded to them is not to be unjust to them and to allow them to carry on their livelihoods. The current antagonism by Non-Muslims against the Muslims is due to the Muslims' inadequacies or bad behavior and they are taking advantage of the Muslims' ignorance (Said Nursi, 2013: 404). |
| ii | Implementing the Principles of Equal Rights | The equality between Muslims and Non-Muslims is equal rights not equal in terms of nobility for example the rights between a Sultan and a poor man is equal. Islam preaches that its adherents do not purposefully step on an ant, and prohibits torturing |

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| | | an ant, hence it is untenable that Islam would allow the ignorance of a human's rights (Said Nursi, 2013: 407). |
| iii | Implementing the Principles of Islamic Justice | The Muslims have to play their role in convincing the Non-Muslims of Islamic justice. If the Non-Muslims are confident that the breach of their rights did not come from Muslims, they will trust Islamic justice. On the other hand, if they are not convinced of Islamic justice, then the truth of Islam and its greatness will tame their ego and convince them (Said Nursi, 2013: 398). |
| iv | The Rights to Politics | The appointment of Non-Muslims to the state offices is welcomed as it is beneficial to the country. This is similar to their roles as watchmakers, mechanics, and street sweepers. According to Said Nursi (2013: 408) the prohibition of appointing Jews and Christians is not absolute in nature but <i>taqyid</i> in nature. If they are not hostile towards Islam then it is allowed. A Muslim is not necessarily Islamic in behaviour, similarly the characteristics of an infidel and his job are not necessarily infidel in nature. Therefore, why can't we accept Islamic traits manifested in a Non-Muslim? |
| v | The Right to be called by Good and Approved Names | Badiuzzaman Said Nursi implored that Non-Muslims must not be called by "the Infidel". This is because this hurts them and the act of hurting them goes against the Prophet Muhammad SAW example and Islamic teachings. A Muslim should not mix their beliefs with their social (<i>muamalat</i>) norms. |
| vi | The Right to Marry Other than Muslims | Badiuzzaman Said Nursi likens the marriage to a Non-Muslim in truth is because they are not optimistic towards Muslims but are blinded by love and lust. |
| vii | The Right to Join the Military | Rasulullah SAW had people who swore allegiance and alliance with him from among the Arab <i>mushrikeen</i> , and they went to war together. Non-Muslims have been drafted into the armies of Islamic countries even though this was not the norm, and the Janissaries were proofs of this (Said Nursi, 2013:410). |

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| viii | The Rights to Economics | <i>Risalah An-Nur</i> stressed that there must not be inferiority complex if the Non-Muslims surpassed the Muslims in various aspects if they are allowed freedom and treated well. This is due to the Muslims' bad behavior that causes Non-Muslims to shine and not caused by goodsocial interactions (<i>muamalat</i>) with them as encouraged by Islam. It is not bad teachings by Islam but the attitude of Muslims is the cause. |
| ix | The Right to Receive Good Treatment (Peace) | Muslims are obliged to act with the principles of sincerity and fulfil the duties towards the Non-Muslims with accuracy. Sincerity is the balm to <i>muslimeen</i> disunity and will breed good attitude and good actions. Muslims must unite to reflect Islamic honor to the Non-Muslims and reject bad competition (Said Nursi: 2010: 164-165). |

CONCLUSION

The approach adopted by Badiuzzaman Said Nursi towards the Non-Muslim rights in the interpretation book *Risalah An-Nur* is based on *daleels* from the Holy Quran, the Sunnah, *sirah* and Islamic history. He focused more on *aqidah* (Islamic theology) education, thoughts and Islamic *akhlaq* (morality) foremost as examples that highlight Islamic truth and nobleness towards the Non-Muslims in fulfilling their rights. This approach need to be practiced by Muslims at various levels especially among the ruling leaders. The implementation of these principles will bring about the targeted effect in achieving harmony among the plural societies of Malaysia.

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