

# *Contemporary Islamic Political Thought*

A Study of Eleven Islamic Thinkers

*Edited by*  
Zeenath Kausar



INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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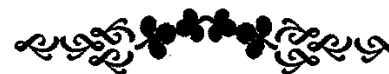
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For My father,  
Late Maulana Maqbool Ahmad Jamaie (Raḥmatullāh 'Alaih)  
whose thought and political activism inspired  
my life and thought!



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*Zeenath Kausar*  
Kuala Lumpur  
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- 37 Muhammad Noer, "Sumbangan Pemikiran dan Kepimpinan Muhammad Natsir," paper presented at the *Seminar Pemikiran Muhammad Natsir*, 18 April 1993, p. 1.
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- 55 Ibid., p. 46.
- 56 Ibid., p. 25.
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- 58 Muhammad Natsir, *Capita Selecta* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1973), p. 439.
- 59 Ibid., p. 440.
- 60 Ibid., p. 442.
- 61 Yusril Ihza, op. cit., p. 137.
- 62 The *Pancasila*, announced by Sukarno on 1 June 1945, is Indonesia's state philosophy. It literally means five (panca) principles (sila). These principles are: belief in one Supreme God; just and civilized humanitarianism; nationalism as expressed in the unity of Indonesia; popular sovereignty arrived at through deliberation and representation or consultative democracy; and social justice for all the Indonesian people.
- 63 Siddiq, op. cit., p. 2.
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## Chapter Nine

# Burhanuddin Al-Helmy: Political Activities and Ideas

Muhamad Fuzi Omar

## Introduction

Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy is one of the most well-known Muslim political thinkers and activists in the Malay land whose contributions to the independence of the country, Malaya, and to the development of Islamic political thought are highly significant for several reasons. He was among the earlier Muslim thinkers of Malaya who had been exposed to external politics and ideologies. He managed to combine Islam and national sentiments, which were strong during that time, and made the latter as a mean to achieve the former, i.e., the implementation of the teachings of Islam. For this reason, he was considered as a moderate political thinker and activist. This chapter aims at exploring and analysing Burhanuddin al-Helmy's active political life to provide an elaboration of his views on various political issues and ideologies confronting the Muslim *Ummah* during his time.

The chapter consists of two parts. The first part of the chapter presents a short biographical sketch of the thinker, his educational background and his active political life. It also explores his writings and political involvement in several organisations before he was elected as President of PAS. The second part of the chapter explores his political thought. His political thought can be comprehended and assessed broadly from three dimensions which are: his views on national independence, his reflections on the spirit of patriotism, and his deep concern and endeavours to make Islam the foundation of political thought. These three dimensions are interrelated with each other and shaped his political thought and political activities.

## Part I: A Brief Biographical Sketch

Burhanuddin bin Haji Muhammad Nor was born on 29 August 1911 in Kampung Changkat Tualang, Kota Bharu, Perak to a moderate and religious family.<sup>1</sup> His father, Hj. Muhammad Nor, who was originally from a royal family of Minangkabau, was a farmer. He was also a Sufi of the Naqshabandi Tariqah and was fortunate to be a student of several religious leaders in Makkah including Sheikh Mohammad Khatib Minangkabau. Hj. Muhammad Nor was a very religious, softhearted and calm person; he was referred to as '*Abi Halim*' by his friends. This title was later inherited by Dr. Burhanuddin as '*Al-Helmy*' which means a person who is soft-hearted, calm, patient, and never angry.<sup>2</sup> His mother, Sharifah Zahrah binti Habib Osman, was a Malay-Indian Muslim of mixed parentage. She was regarded highly in her society.<sup>3</sup> Burhanuddin al-Helmy was known as '*Pak Doktor*' (Doctor) referring to his profession as a homeopathy doctor. He himself had eight sons from three wives.

During his early years, he traveled to several countries including Indonesia, India, Egypt and Palestine,<sup>4</sup> accomplishing his educational pursuits as well as gathering political experiences. He was a pioneer in medical homeopathy in Malaysia. He established and maintained a Homeopathy clinic in Singapore and Johore Bharu with the help of a friend. Thus, he was a politician, medical doctor, educational figure and a Sufi. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy died on 25 October 1969.

He was brought up in an Islamic atmosphere and was taught knowledge about Islam from an early age by his parents, since his father was a Sufi. He was sent to a Malay primary school and completed his study at the religious school in his secondary level. From 1917 until 1923, he received his elementary education at Sekolah Melayu Behrang Ulu and one of the Malay schools in Bakap, Perak. During these years, he seemed to have an inclination to religious and spiritual knowledge more than to other fields.<sup>5</sup> In 1924, when he was thirteen years old, he was sent to Sungai Jambu, Padang Panjang, Sumatra, Indonesia where he did his Islamic studies. There, he was taught by several religious leaders of *Kaum Muda* (Reformist group), who possessed a comprehensive understanding towards Islam. He explained this when he said:

When I was learning in Indonesia, I was able to learn the Dutch language and my religious teachers were those of Youth Faction who had the progressive understanding of Islam. From then, my thought was formed after receiving the modern explanation and approach.<sup>6</sup>

The learning took two years after which he had a good command of the Dutch language. After that, he was sent to Sekolah Pondok Pulau Pisang Jitra, Kedah, one of the religious schools in Malaya. He stayed for only short period there because he was not used to the way of studying through memorization. Then, he moved to Madrasah al-Mashhūr Al-Islāmiyyah Pulau Pinang in 1927. Within a short period, he was able to master the Arabic Language.<sup>7</sup>

A year later, he went to India to seek knowledge and experience. In India, he was exposed to the thought of Mohd Ali Jinnah, Pandit Nehru and other Indian leaders and developed a keen interest in Mahatma Gandhi's movement towards independence of India and its progress.<sup>8</sup> He stated:

When I was in India, I had the opportunity to learn the English and French languages, besides, the medical homeopathy and the basic knowledge of Dutch language drives me to learn German language.<sup>9</sup>

During his studies in India, Burhanuddin was able to master several languages including English, French, Dutch and German. From there, he learned the psychology of teaching, metaphysics, spiritual knowledge, philosophy and comparative religion. It was reported that at the time he was writing his Ph.D dissertation in Aligarh Muslim University, he did a lot of research on the writings of philosophers and Sufis like al-Ghazālī, al-Baydāwī, al-Rufā'ī al-Rūmī, al-Qushayrī, and Ibn Aṭā'.<sup>10</sup> He was influenced by their thought and developed his own thought by combining the ideas of classical and modern scholars.

He obtained the degree of Medical Doctor Of Homeopathic (MDH) from Ismaeliah Medical College in New Delhi. He then obtained the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the Aligarh Muslim University, India.<sup>11</sup> After completing his studies, he traveled to the Middle Eastern Countries before returning to Malaya in 1935.

Shortly after his return from his studies and travels, Burhanuddin taught Arabic at Al-Junid Arabic School, Singapore.<sup>12</sup> He also edited a magazine called Taman Bahagia. However, one and a half hours after the first publication, he was arrested and held for six months due to his anti-colonial activities. This is as stated below:

When he came back to Singapore in 1938, he edited an anti-British newspaper called Taman Bahagia. This effort was short-lived since he was arrested by the British authority within one and half hours of its publication.<sup>13</sup>

In this magazine he wrote about the need for the Malays to struggle against colonial power, Britain, and to uphold the teachings of Islam to free the Malay race from colonization. He philosophically explained the interrelatedness of four things that are vital in one's life: faith, body, race, and state.<sup>14</sup> His goal was to arouse patriotic feelings and generate the idea of reformation among the masses. In doing so, the British colony felt threatened by his action that went against them. After being freed, he opened homeopathic clinics in Singapore and Johor Bharu in 1939 with the help of Dr. Rajah. They succeeded in managing these clinics until the second World War reached Malaya in 1942.

Burhanuddin actively participated in *Jam'iyah al-Islamiyyah Singapore*, an independent religious organization, as its Secretary. Many praised his intellectual capability. For example, in 1937, he represented this society in the debate with the traditional 'ulamā' on the issue of 'jilatan anjing' (dog saliva) at the Sri Cemerlang Palace, Kelantan together with Haji Abbas Mohd Taha who was the Grand Judge of Singapore.<sup>15</sup> This participation indicated that his religious capability was well accepted by the people even though he was more known as a homeopathic doctor. In 1942, he started to concentrate his efforts on the struggle for independence and upholding Islam as the utmost religion. In the 1954, he resumed his homeopathic work by training students.

During the three years of Japanese occupation, Burhanuddin was appointed as an advisor of the Malay Custom and Culture by the Japanese government. It was the highest position granted to any Malays at that time. He used his position to protect and help the *Ma'ahad Al-Ehya As-Sharif*, one of the prominent Islamic religious studies centers in Gunung Semanggol, Perak.<sup>16</sup>

## The Writings of Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy

He wrote in several fields including medicine, politics and *Taşawwuf*. In the Medical field he wrote *Falsafah Perubatan Homeopathy* (The Philosophy of Medical Homeopathy), *Biochemistry, Matera Medica, Sejarah Perubatan* (The Medical History), *Asas Pamakopia Homeopathy* (The Foundation of Pamachopic Homeopathy), and *Mutiara Homeopathy* (The Valuable Homeopathy).<sup>17</sup>

In politics and *Taşawwuf*, he wrote *Sejarah Perjuangan Kita* (The History of Our Struggle), *Falsafah Kebangsaan Melayu* (The Philosophy

of Malay Nationalism), *Ugama Dan Politik* (Religion and Politics) and *Ideologi Politik Islam* (Islamic Political Ideology), *Simposium Taşawwuf dan Tarīqah* (Symposium of Taşawwuf and Tarīqah).<sup>18</sup>

As an activist in Islam, Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy articulated his ideas of reformation and thoughts through certain platforms to spread them effectively, mostly through writing. His first article was published in "Taman Bahagia" which was banned an hour after its publication because the colonialists foresaw the dangerous effects of the anti-British feelings the articles contained. Among the vernacular publications, he contributed his articles to *Berita Melayu* and *Melayu Raya*.

Apart from these articles, he also wrote some religious books which contained his ideas on the Malay condition and ways to solve them. He was the only Malay figure who wrote his own speeches and had them published. Among the speeches that were published were "Symposium of Taşawwuf and Tarīqah," "Opening Remarks to the Congress of Partai Rakyat" and "Welcome Speech at the PAS Conference." Apart from writing, his ideas could also be seen in parliamentary debates he participated in when he was a parliamentary member of Besut, Terengganu after he won the seat in the General Election in 1964 and where he remained until 1969.<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy aimed at reuniting the Malays in the archipelago, an idea which had historical precedence. In the eleventh century, the Malay Archipelago was once united by the Malay feudal system with its traditional leaders or rulers under the kingdoms of Sri Vijaya, Majapahit and Malacca.<sup>20</sup> Dr. Burhanuddin said that after the collapse of Sri Vijaya, the greatness and the superiority of the people shifted to Majapahit, and lastly, it was transferred to Malacca. These three empires were independent and established good relationships with their neighbours like China and India.<sup>21</sup>

These empires and kingdoms extended their jurisdiction over various areas of the peninsular and large parts of the archipelago. Their power expanded to the border of Siam Country to the north, spread to the west until it nearly reached the Indian beaches and Madagascar. Then, it expanded to the Famosa Island near Kyushu Island in Japan to the east and covered the millions of island in the Pacific Ocean to the south. They made contacts with their counterparts in Siam, Java, China and India. The Malay language spread everywhere as the lingua franca for trade and government.<sup>22</sup>

Islam was established in the archipelago because of the role played by Malacca in spreading Islamic teachings and establishing Islamic educational centers. The first Sultan, Parameswara, was the first convert to Islam in

1414 when he married a princess from Pasai, Indonesia and changed his name to Raja Iskandar Shah. From Malacca, Islam spread to other parts of the Malay world especially through trade, marriage and land invasion. Consequently, the rest of the Muslim world knew the Malay world. Inspired by Islam, the Malays produced many outstanding works of literature and the Malay language was enriched by a new vocabulary of philosophical and administrative terms. This can be seen in the application of the *Risalah Hukum Kanun Melaka* (Malaccan Law), *Undang-undang Laut Melaka* (Malaccan Maritime Law) in Malacca, the *Pahang Digest*, in Pahang and the *Ninety Laws of Perak* and *The Law of Johore* in Perak and Johor respectively.<sup>23</sup>

Dr. Burhanuddin referred to the Malay Kingdom as "*Melayu Raya*,"<sup>24</sup> which gradually disintegrated after the Portuguese captured Malacca in 1511. The year 1511 was the beginning of Western colonialism over the Malay land, although the Malay laws were sustained until the coming of the British since the Portuguese and the Dutch were not interested in introducing their laws. From then, the Malay kingdom was divided and colonized by one power after another for over four hundred and forty five years.<sup>25</sup> This began in 1511 when Malacca was occupied by Portuguese for one hundred and thirty years. In 1641, Malacca fell to the Dutch, and in 1824, the Anglo Dutch treaty or the Treaty of London was made between the Dutch and the British, which transferred Malacca to British control. In 1826, Malacca, Penang and Singapore were incorporated as the Straits Settlements of the Indian Government under British. After the Japanese occupation in 1942, all Malay lands were controlled by British under three categories: first, the Federated Malay States, second, the Non-Federated Malay states, and third, the Strait Settlements. In 1957, Britain agreed to grant independence to all the Malay lands (*Persekutuan Tanah Melayu*).

## Religious Discourse

Burhanuddin was often invited to chair or teach weekly religious courses. During his teachings and discussions with the students, he conveyed his ideas on several crucial issues. It was a vital way to attain support and influence the neutral people and to reach the opposition group. In closer interactions, his tender and friendly manner would attract more people to him. He also participated actively in seminars and conferences and presented papers in big gatherings. The talk he gave at the 12<sup>th</sup> PAS Annual General

Meeting, the inaugural congress of PKMM, and some other gatherings were thought-provoking. Through these talks and seminars, he conveyed his profound ideas and thoughts.

## Involvement in Political Organizations:

### Involvement in KMM (*Kesatuan Melayu Muda*)

KMM was formed in May 1937 in Kuala Lumpur by Ibrahim Haji Yaacob and his colleagues and it was the first Malay political party. It had an anti-British orientation and was inspired by the Indonesian revolution. KMM preached an ideology that sought to overthrow the monarchy and expel British. KMM accused the Malay elite, the English-educated members of traditional aristocracy, as a bourgeoisie, feudalist group and strongly criticized Chinese Malaya. Its immediate goal was to form a union of Malaya with a yet to be formed independent Indonesian (*Melayu Raya*). During this time, KMM had a political collaboration with PKMM.

Two years after its establishment, Mustapha Hussein, one of the leaders of KMM, introduced Dr. Burhanuddin to the association. It is believed that they met at his Homeopathy Clinic in Kuala Lumpur, where Mustapha had a medical treatment. Although Dr. Burhanuddin was not actively involved, KMM's anti-British ideas affected him. As a result, he came to accept the idea of uniting Malaya with Greater Indonesia (*Melayu Raya*).<sup>26</sup>

It should be noted that KMM leaders such as Ibrahim Haji Yaacob and Ishak Haji Muhammad were of a different background, i.e., secular background, whereas among the recruits of KMM were students of *Al-Ehya As-Sharif* School. In fact, through the students' initiative, a branch of KMM was established in Gunung Semanggol where *Al-Ehya As-Sharif* was situated. Ustādh Abu Bakar al-Bakir, *Al-Ehya*'s principal, had been the propagator of Malay nationalism at *Al-Ehya* since its establishment in 1934. Within less than two years from its official registration, KMM had formed branches in Penang, Malacca and in all the nine sultanate states except Perlis. KMM local leadership consisted almost exclusively of '*cikgu*' (Malay teachers) and '*ustādh*' (religious teachers). On the national level, well-known journalists and writers dominated the leadership team and writers. Contrary to popular or perceived impressions, a majority of those in the highest echelons of leadership were educated in English-medium language schools. However, the greatest common feature of KMM leaders and



supporters were their social origin, their non-aristocratic and peasant background.<sup>27</sup>

However, in 1941, seeing that the KMM might collaborate and join forces with their enemies, the British imprisoned KMM's activists including Ibrahim Yaacob, Ishak Haji Muhammad, Ahmad Boestamam, Sutan Djenain and others.<sup>28</sup> Dr. Burhanuddin was not detained as the British thought that he might not cause harm since he was not actively involved in the movement.

The detention crippled KMM activities until the Japanese invasion in February 1941, which was followed by the release of the detainees. Ibrahim then tried to reorganize and reactivate KMM and adopted a cooperative policy with the Japanese while clandestinely collaborating also with the Malayan Communist Party and Malayan People Anti-Japanese Army.

### Involvement in PKMM (Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya)

When the Pacific War was over, a new party, *Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* (Malayan Malay Nationalist Party) was formed in Ipoh, Perak, on 17 October 1945, two months after Indonesia declared her independence. Mukhtaruddin Lasso,<sup>29</sup> as President of PKMM, successfully led it. Dr. Burhanuddin was elected as the Vice – President even though he was not present at the meeting.

According to Ahmad Boestamam, PKMM or MNP (Malay Nationalist Party) as some writers termed it, was born from within the editorial and administrative ranks of *Suara Rakyat*. It was formed in a discussion in the *Suara Rakyat* office, which was attended by twenty people. The members of PKMM were deeply influenced by the independence struggle of Indonesia, headed by Sukarno and Mohamad Hatta. In other words, they wanted MNP of Malaya to become like the *Partai Nasionalist Indonesia* (Indonesian Nationalist Party).<sup>30</sup>

Their slogan was '*Membela Hak dan Keadilan Putera Melayu*' (To defend the Rights and Justice of the Malays).<sup>31</sup> Their aim was to defend the Malays who had failed and had been defeated for so long. However, their ultimate goals were to achieve independence for the Malay race and to claim their birthright.

Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy expressed the view that the Malays can only be mobilized through two means: religion and national feeling. On these bases, he formulated the PKMM on the principal of the sovereignty

of Allah, national aspirations, authoritative state, international brotherhood and social justice.

However, two months after the PKMM congress, a substantial rearrangement of PKMM leadership took place. In the middle of 1946, Dr. Burhanuddin was elected as the President, Ishak Haji Muhammad as the Vice-President and Ahmad Boestamam as the Secretary General. For the next two years, they became the leading figures in the radical Malay nationalist movement.<sup>32</sup>

Another significant aspect of the PKMM inaugural congress was that its opening ceremony was attended and addressed by representatives from the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), all of whom were Chinese. There was also an Indian representative. The tone of the speeches was leftist, and the races were urged to unite to fight against colonialism. However, according to Cheah Boon Kheng, at least one of the non-Malay speakers asserted: "...that to maintain that Malaya belonged to the Malays was to disseminate narrow nationalism."<sup>33</sup> This remark notwithstanding, the PKMM inaugural congress showed some signs of change in the attitudes of the radical Malay nationalists towards the immigrant communities, or perhaps, it was a tactic to win their support in order to achieve their major objectives – independence. This closeness to the immigrant communities subjected them to various political attacks by their conservative aristocratic rivals.

The *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf* (API) (Generation of Aware Youth) was formed in February 1946. It was the PKMM youth wing and its establishment was considered a significant development of PKMM, being established less than six months after the inaugural congress in Ipoh.

In the year 1947, PUTERA was established by PKMM. It was a coalition of the association and Malay parties. Its aim was to discuss the suggestion by Britain to establish '*Persekutuan Tanah Melayu*' (Federation of Malay States). PUTERA intended to present the suggestion as a preparation for the '*Perjanjian Persekutuan*' (Federation Treaty) by forwarding their suggestions to the British. In their efforts, PUTERA became involved in leftwing activities and came under the influence of the communist party. In mid-1948, activities of PUTERA were suspended and in 1950, the PKMM was banned. When '*Persekutuan Tanah Melayu*' (Federation of Malay States) was declared in February 1948, the British declared an emergency in Malaya.

In October 1945, the Malayan Union was proposed by Harold MacMichael, a British diplomat. This involved the surrender by all nine

Malay sultans of their sovereignty, thus changing the political status of those living in the Malay states and the Straits Settlements, as well as those who had lived there for at least the previous ten years. This was first announced on 10 October 1945, in a brief statement in the House of Commons in London. The laws no longer needed rectification by the Sultans but were to be signed by the Governor General of the Malayan Union, which included the nine Malay states, Malacca and Penang. The British move was interpreted to mean taking power away from the Malays. Subsequent British-Malay negotiations led to the abrogation of the Union of Malaya, retrocession of sovereignty to Malay states, and the integration of the states and the Straits Settlements into a new Federation of Malaya from 1 February 1948, with citizenship rights restricted only to Malays. The short-lived Mac Michael plan had served as a catalyst to foster Malay nationalism.

In May 1946, UMNO was established after being initiated by Onn Jaafar, a district officer in Johore. In its initial stage, UMNO merely strove to exert the traditional rights of the Malay community in that it sought the re-establishment of the old order. In rejecting the Malayan Union scheme, the party declared that the new proposals were not to be introduced. The party demanded that the British government restore the status quo by withdrawing the proposals immediately. PKMM cooperated with UMNO for five months, then separated from it after realizing that they had different courses of struggle. UMNO aimed at achieving immediate independence while wanting to preserve the status quo, whereas PKMM principally wanted to apply Islamic laws to the country. PKMM was a nationalist party that principally strove for the establishment of '*Malaya Merdeka*' within the scope of '*Indonesia Raya*' because both the Malays and the various ethnic groups in Indonesia were of the same race. The idea of '*Melayu Raya*' had a strong emotional appeal to party members.

At the conference of PKMM in Ipoh in July 1946, PKMM decided to withdraw from UMNO after five months of being together, as they did not share in the mutual agreement on the status quo that was sought by UMNO. The segregation between both parties evoked separate and different reactions from the British. UMNO's opposition to the Malayan Union scheme received accommodative and consultative treatment in the sense that the British agreed to open a dialogue with UMNO and the sultans to discuss alternative arrangements. These dialogues or 'constitutional talks,' took place through a special body called the Working Committee, which consisted of British Government members, four Malay Rulers and two UMNO representatives.

The outcome was a set of recommendations embodied in the Federation of Malaya constitutional proposal to replace the Malayan Union.

### The Stand of Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy and PKMM in the Malayan Union Issue

PKMM's opposition towards the Malayan Union scheme appeared on the surface to be inconsistent because its initial reaction was to state its support for the concept of a union or unitary state for the peninsula. It was on this basis that the party announced its 'fundamental agreement' with the scheme believing it would accelerate the pace towards independence. Ahmad Boestamam, a prominent leader in PKMM, pointed out that they gave their agreement in principal which was, according to the language of politics, not in agreement totally, and the political calculation that caused the PKMM to adopt the attitude of 'agreement in principal' was that of 'seizing the historical moment.' They agreed on the bases of their belief that there were two forms of independent state: the feudal form and the unitary form. They viewed the Malayan Union as clearly having crystallised in it the principle of unitary state whereby several states uniting or becoming one without autonomous rights for any of them. For this reason, the party was accused of being anti-Sultan or a feudal system whereby the majority of the Malays were attached to their government.

However, upon realising the full implications of the scheme and that it perpetuated British colonialism, PKMM clarified its stand by emphasising several qualifications for the kind of unitary state it wanted. These included complete independence and a democratically elected legislature. These qualifications were tantamount to complete opposition to the Malayan Union scheme. They made a request to a British officer, Lt. Colonel Rees William, a Labour Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies. Later, Dr. Burhanuddin stated: "The white paper of Malayan Union has been argued and proposed and we have proposed the constitution in the form we needed."<sup>34</sup>

Ahmad Boestamam stated that their opposition must be founded on the importance of the common people and in support for their dignity and sovereignty, instead of the position of the feudal class. So, in the congress of the deliberation of the Malay people, the PKMM's spokesperson voiced his party's unequivocal opposition to the scheme. At the same time, PKMM proposed that Congress adopt a resolution for the pursuance of a 'one

hundred percent independent Malaya.' However, this proposal was rejected and, as a sign of protest, the PKMM staged a one-day 'walk-out' from congress. As pointed out by Ahmad Boestamam, the British rejected the proposal because PKMM was not considered to be as influential in the Malay circles as Dato' Onn's UMNO.

## The Political Leadership in PAS

Dr. Burhanuddin joined PAS at a time when the party had begun to draw followers from PKMM and *Hizb al-Muslimin*. In spite of the lack of a suitable leader, they came to regard the party as their new political sanctuary. PAS soon grew in influence. PAS was able to register itself in the minds of the Malay electorate as an Islamic party which fought for Malay rights and Malay privileges. Dr. Burhanuddin was approached by several PAS leaders like Haji Hassan Adli, Haji Wahab Nur, and Haji Said Abd. Hadi. He was given the guarantee that the key leaders in PAS would accept his leadership. During the PAS youth meeting, he was given the Qur'an and a PAS flag, which indicated that he should not stray away from PAS objectives.<sup>35</sup>

However, even after Dr. Burhanuddin had taken over the leadership from Dr. Haji Abbas Alias, political disquiet in the party was seen to characterize its growth and development. By 1957, however, the party, no doubt owing to Dr. Burhanuddin's leadership, was heavily infiltrated by ex-members of Malay political parties from among those who became active members of PAS.

Nonetheless, the leadership of PAS was not surrendered to Dr. Burhanuddin without contest. All along, he was regarded as less of an Islamist and more of a Malay nationalist. There was insufficient data available with regard to the circumstances that led him to join PAS in 1956. The party Presidency that year was contested at the last minute. Although Zulkifli was defeated by eighty-four votes to twelve, he was to challenge Dr. Burhanuddin for Presidency again in 1959.<sup>36</sup>

The usual explanation given for this confrontation was simply that Zulkifly was more religiously-oriented than Dr. Burhanuddin. John Funston argued that:

...it seems more accurate to describe their differences as those between an adherent to Islamic reformism on the one side, and on the other, to a more quietist Sufism.<sup>37</sup>

Dr. Burhanuddin's image as a nationalist was never contradicted. In his Presidential address at the PAS General Assembly in 1956, he stated that:

As a patriotic, I do not consider it incompatible with my principles to carry on my struggle in any party, as long as the party is genuinely and positively opposed to colonialism, and is truly struggling for a genuine independence.<sup>38</sup>

When he was in PAS, he managed to lead it to its highest achievement in the general elections. In 1959, PAS won 13 Parliamentary seats and 42 state seats. Kelantan and Terengganu were controlled by PAS who managed to establish state governments.<sup>39</sup> He was also a Member of Parliament representing the Besut seat. When he was in Parliament, he tried to raise many issues. One of them was the Malays' rights in economic, social and political fields. He also criticised the federal government for discriminating the States of Kelantan and Trengganu, which were under the rule of PAS.

When he was in PAS, he continued to support the concept of 'Melayu Raya' or 'Indonesia Raya.' This was the reason he criticized Tunku Abdul Rahman when he proposed the idea of 'Malaysia.' Dr. Burhanuddin wanted Indonesia and Philippines to be included under the new federation to establish his concept of Greater Malaya.<sup>40</sup> However, the idea was rejected with the establishment of Malaysia on 16 September 1963.

In 1964, he faced a challenge from the government. He lost his status as a member of Parliament at the end of the year. In 1965, he continued with his idea for *Melayu Raya*. As a result he was accused of involving in a political movement to overthrow Tunku's government. He was accused of conspiring with the Indonesian involvements in the peninsular to establish the Front National, which aimed to overthrow the government. He was then detained under the Internal Security Act until 1969. Before he was released, he was asked to sign a released letter. He refused because he strongly believed that he was not guilty. His death came shortly afterwards, while he was still the President of PAS.

## Part II: His Political Thought

### National Independence

The issue of national independence was the core focus of Dr. Burhanuddin's struggle. He always stated that the faith, the body, the nation and the

territory, are interrelated. The strength of the faith will strengthen the body, which will then strengthen the nation and the territory. A strong territory will ensure a strong nation and faith.<sup>41</sup> He stated that only when a nation is free will the people's religion be free. Thus, an independent land was one of the major aims of his political struggle. In his writing, *Agama Dan Politik*, Dr. Burhanuddin said:

We are now still being colonised. Our politics is still far from administering the nation because that territory is still not under our control. When we are free and sovereign, then only we can rule our own nation, then only we can administer a nation which is named, the Malay land. Therefore, our politics today, should be focused on achieving the freedom, and independence, then we can build our own sovereign, peaceful nation.<sup>42</sup>

During this period the spirit to achieve independence was very strong among the local people. Therefore, this theme was the major aim of many nationalist leaders in Malay land, especially in opposing British colonialisation. However, what differentiates Burhanuddin from other activists was that his wider involvement in independent movements, in the Malay land, his deep concern over the issue of Palestine, and his staunch opposition to colonialization in all countries including India. In his *Pidato* (Debate), he strongly stated:

We oppose colonialization, but we are not pro-communist. We want our freedom, justice and sovereign land, which we owned before the colonialization.<sup>43</sup>

He also stated that, "We struggle hard for independence and freedom because we want to be equally accepted by other nations in the world." Dr. Burhanuddin's vision for independence was not limited to the Malaysian peninsula. His aim was independence for the Peninsular, Indonesia, Riau and other Malay lands. He wanted to establish independent Malay lands like those which existed during the periods of Sri Vijaya, Majapahit and Malacca.

Colonialization to him, should be opposed not only to free the land and to gain sovereignty, but also to free the mind from the colonial culture. For Dr. Burhanuddin, because of this cultural colonialization, the Malay mind and spirit have been subjected to the Western control. This was clear from his classification of colonialization. According to Dr. Wan Mohd Azam, Dr. Burhanuddin divided colonialization into two parts: first, physical colonialization or land acquisition, and second, mental or mind colonialization.<sup>44</sup> He stated:

From year to year, the Malay were becoming weaker and weaker, exploited, and defeated. As a result of this they were easily being manipulated, and ruled by the imperialist according to their interest.<sup>45</sup>

He further said that:

The mental colonialization can be felt as the result of the colonial control over our land, which continues to influence our method of thinking, philosophy of life and our way of interaction. All these are parts of colonialization which continue to oppress our people.<sup>46</sup>

Dr. Burhanuddin opposed the notion of independence, which was aimed by UMNO because it was only a fake in the sense that UMNO would like to maintain the colonial way of ruling. As a result of this he claimed that the democracy that was practiced by UMNO was 'bad' democracy.<sup>47</sup>

The only means to free the people from both types of colonialization is through a political movement which is based on the spirit of patriotism and Islam as the foundation. Only through this independence can the teachings of Islam be practiced and implemented. As he stated, "How can we revive the teachings of our religion, until they can be fully practiced according to the will of Allah, if we have not yet gain independence and freedom?"

Lastly, he stressed that to achieve independence, all Malays must be united based on their strong feeling of patriotism. Other ethnic groups who are ready to show their obedience can also join together in the struggle for independence. The people must also show high moral standards like honesty, respect, generosity and help each other when they struggle for independence. Lastly, independence for him is not only to free one particular land in the Malay states from the colonial power. It requires all the Malay states to get their independence so that they can stand together equally.<sup>48</sup>

## The Spirit of Patriotism

Many authors translate the word '*kebangsaan*' that Dr. Burhanuddin used in his writings to mean 'nationalism.' This can be seen in the writings of Saliha Hj. Hassan, Kamaruddin Jaafar and Wan Azam Wan Amin. However, since many contradictions can be found between the term 'nationalism' and what he tried to convey through the word '*watan*,' therefore, I will use the word 'patriotism' as a theme in Dr. Burhanuddin's political struggle. I

argue that the love for the 'waṭan,' to which Burhanuddin himself defined as 'nationalism' which is also used by some other writers on Burhanuddin, is not accurate. There is a big difference between patriotism, love towards one's homeland, and nationalism, putting nation above everything including God and religion.

In his 'Falsafah Kebangsaan Melayu,' (Malay National Philo-sophy) Dr Burhanuddin said: "the strong government which introduced the Malays until today started from the Sri Vijaya Empire and lasted by the Malay Sultanate of Malacca."<sup>49</sup> These two empires became the foundation to the spirit of 'Melayu Raya' or bigger Malay land. He strongly believed that this Malay patriotism should become the 'soul and the foundation for the Malay state.' He stated:

We want to form a Malay territory, on the spirit of Malay patriotism, based on justice, wider and equal humanity, not based on the racism or prejudice sentiments.<sup>50</sup>

He also said that:

Islam looks at the feeling of patriotism as a means and not an objective. ....It is same like the life in this world, is temporary, just as means for another life in hereafter.<sup>51</sup>

He always emphasized that Malay patriotism is not a negative feeling, because it is not based on blood relationships as a condition for membership. Therefore, according to him anyone, from any racial groups, who are ready to show their respect and obedience to this land, is qualified to be an indispensable part of Malay patriotism. [My emphasis here is on Malay patriotism not Malay nationalism]. He then also stated, that even Malays themselves cannot qualify for this feeling of patriotism, if they could not show obedience or respect to the country. Therefore, it can be understood that his spirit of patriotism is opened not only to Malays, but also to Chinese and Indians. This is suitable for a multiracial state like Malaysia.<sup>52</sup>

To support his argument that the spirit of patriotism does not contradict Islamic teachings, he quoted the *ḥadīth*: "ḥubb al-waṭan min al-īmān" which means love towards one particular land is part of belief. He stressed that the land or *waṭan* is like the foundation or the root, the land will become strong through a strong nation, a nation will be strong through healthy body and the body will be strong if there is *īmān* or belief in the mind.<sup>53</sup> He then reiterated his concept of patriotism through the following verses.

The first is Sūrat al-Baqarah: 213,

Mankind was one single nation, and Allah sent messengers with glad tidings and warnings.

Another verse is from Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt: 13,

O mankind, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other.

Both verses clearly indicate Muslims are all brothers and they should not be divided based on tribe or colour. They must cooperate and then only they can live together in a strong territory. As Muslims they should not claim that they are more superior than others. He then quoted the famous *ḥadīth*, "lā 'aṣabiyyah fī al-Islām." He equated this feeling of *'aṣabiyyah* as a fanaticism and chauvinism, which is dangerous to the society.

## Islam, and the Political Foundation of His Thought

Islam shaped Burhanuddin al-Helmy's political thought and political activity until the end of his life. From his writings, it can be gleaned that he always tried to accommodate his political struggle with Islam. In his famous writing, *Perjuangan Kita* (Our Struggle) he quoted the following Qur'ānic verses which served as the basic principles for the formation of his political thought.

The first is Sūrat al-Rad: 11,

Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves.

He interpreted this verse to mean that it all depends on a particular community whether it wants to be a master or a servant, to be independent or bonded. Thus, based on this verse, he tried to suggest that Malays should struggle hard to ensure a bright future for their future generations.

The second is Sūrat Al-ʿImrān: 139,

So lose not heart, nor fall into despair: for ye must gain mastery if you are true in faith.

For him his people will be highly respected if they become good Muslims, and if they are ready to give sacrifices for the sake of their belief in Allah (s.w.t) and His injunctions.

The third is Sūrat al-Mujādalah: 22,

Thou wilt not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day,  
loving those who resist Allah and His Messenger.

This verse describes another characteristics of a good Muslim. The verse urged the Muslims to oppose those who are against Allah, His Messenger and the believers. Thus, through this verse Dr. Burhanuddin wanted the Malays to oppose foreign invaders who occupy their land.

The fourth is Sūrat Āl 'Imrān: 118,

O ye who believe, take not into your intimacy those outside your ranks:  
They will not fail to corrupt you.

Based on this verse he persuaded the Malays not to appoint outsiders as their leaders because these people should not be trusted. Furthermore, the Malays should start to become independent and not rely on others to lead them.

Lastly, Sūrat Āl 'Imrān: 110,

Ye are the best of people, evolved for mankind, enjoying what is right,  
forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah.

This is the most important responsibility for Muslims, that they always enjoin others to do right and forbid the wrong. However, according to Dr. Burhanuddin, they could not perform these functions if they themselves were still being colonized by others. Thus, the Malays should free themselves from foreign occupation in order to perform this responsibility.

He also quoted from the Qur'ān, verse 13 from Sūrat al-Hujurat, which stated that:

O thee Human beings, We created you men and women, and We created  
you with different tribes and groups, therefore you can know each other.  
Indeed the best among you are the most righteous among you.

He also said that there was no '*asabiyyah*' in Islam, since the Prophet (p.b.u.h) totally rejected it.

Dr. Burhanuddin stated that Islam is sent by Allah for the complete guidance of one's life and to maintain peaceful relationship among human beings with Allah s.w.t. at its centre. Thus, through his writings we can observe that to him Islam and politics are inseparable. He said that the purpose of politics in Islam is to achieve justice, to differentiate between the right and wrong, to lead to a new civilization, to establish a strong and united *Ummah*, to strengthen the good relationship among all nations, and

to ensure equal rights. This is why he strongly stated that "religion cannot be adjusted to politics, but politics has to be in line with the religion."<sup>54</sup>

As a committed Muslim activist, he always stressed that in the al-Qur'ān there are many verses which remind the people to be good servants of Allah. He stated that from the 6,000 verses in the Qur'ān, only 150 verses deal with Islamic rituals, while the others explain the causes behind the rise and fall of the nations. He then cited many examples from the Qur'ān:

The first is Sūrat Yūsuf: 3,

We do relate unto thee the most beautiful of stories, in that We reveal to thee this Qur'ān. Before this, thou too was among those who knew it not.

The second is Sūrat al-Kahf: 13,

We relate to thee their story in truth, they were youths who believed in their Lord, and We advanced them in guidance.

These two verses and several other verses of the Qur'ān testify the fact that people who follow Allah s.w.t. will be blessed with felicity and success here and hereafter. These are the people who are well-balanced and always strive to witness the truth of Islam unto mankind as the Qur'ān mentioned:

Thus have We made of you an *Ummah* justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations (al-Baqarah: 143 ).

Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah ( Āl 'Imrān: 110).

## Conclusion

Dr. Burhanuddin, through his political activities and writings, tried to emphasise that the Malays must always unite under one umbrella. They must oppose all types of colonialization. They must live together with all groups of people who are ready to share the same feeling. This struggle to oppose the colonial power and to live together is in line with Islamic teachings. As Muslims the Malays must always strive to attain independence for Islam, so that they can become a strong nation.

His call to the Malays to be united and to strive for an establishment of an Islamic institution can be considered as a shift in Malay politics. The reason is that while his contemporaries were propagating communism, nationalism and secularism as means for changes, he bravely propagated

Islamic values through all the political movements in which he participated. He managed to show that Islam is not a mere religion of a few rituals and obligations, but it is a complete way of life which can make people achieve real independence from all kinds of colonizations and dominations and can help man to establish peace and prosperity in the world and attain success in the hereafter.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Kamaruddin Jaafar, 'Perjuangan dan Pemikiran Politik Dr. Burhanuddin Al-helmy, *Akademika*, no.15, Julai 1979, p. 31. Dr Ramlah Adam stated that he was born on 26 November 1911, (Ramlah Adam, *Sumbanganmu DiKenang* (Kuala Lumpur: DBP, 1999) p. 124. Saliha Hj. Hassan, Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmi 1911-1969, in Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali (eds.) *Biografi Tokoh Piliham Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 1997), p. 20.
- <sup>2</sup> Saliha Hj. Hassan, 'Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmi, 1911-1969,' *Jebat*, no. 14 (1986), pp. 153-154.
- <sup>3</sup> Ramlah Adam, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy: Kajian Mengenai Kegiatannya dalam PKMM 1946-48* (Kuala Lumpur: University Malaya, Akademi Pengajian Melayu, 1993), p. 2.
- <sup>4</sup> Wan Mohd Azam Mohd Amin, in Dali Muin, "Malam kenangan Prof. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy," in *Majalah Wangi*, 1985, vol. 7, p. 3. See also Wan Mohd Azam Mohd Amin, *Antara 'Asabiyyah Dan Nasionalisme Menurut Pandangan Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Pengajian Media, Universiti Malaya, 1997), p. 58.
- <sup>5</sup> Kamaruddin Jaafar, *Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, Pemikiran dan Perjuangan* (Kuala Lumpur: Ikdas, 2000), p. 4.
- <sup>6</sup> Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, *Simposium Tasawwuf dan Tarīqah*, (Pulau Pinang: Maktabah Haji Abdullah, 1949) p. 37.
- <sup>7</sup> Kamaruddin Jaafar, *Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, Pemikiran Dan Perjuangan*, p. 4.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- <sup>9</sup> Ahmad Boestamam, *Merintis Jalan Ke puncak*, (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Kejora, 1972), p. 13.
- <sup>10</sup> W. Mohd Azam Mohd Amin, *Antara 'Asabiyyah Dan Nasionalisme Menurut Pandangan Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy*, p. 60.
- <sup>11</sup> Kamaruddin Jaafar, *Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, Pemikiran Dan Perjuangan*, p. 4. See also W. Mohd Azam Mohd Amin, *Antara 'Asabiyyah Dan Nasionalisme Menurut Pandangan Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy*, p. 62.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- <sup>13</sup> Saliha Haji Hassan, "Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy; The Ideals of Malay Nationalist," in *Malaysia in History*, vol. XIII, No. 1, (June, 1974), p. 2.
- <sup>14</sup> Kamaruddin Jaafar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Pemikiran Dan Perjuangan*, p. 9.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.
- <sup>16</sup> Kamaruddin Jaafar, 'Perjuangan dan Pemikiran Politik Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy,' *Akademika*, p. 33.

- <sup>17</sup> Wan Mohd Azam, *Antara 'Asabiyyah dan Nasionalisme Menurut Fahaman Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, p. 63.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> Ramlah Adam, *Sumbanganmu Dikenang*, p. 126.
- <sup>20</sup> Srivijaya was a Kingdom centered in Sumatra, recorded from the late 7<sup>th</sup> century into the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The capital was Palembang, and during its height, its rule extended over Sumatra, Java, Western Borneo, the Malay peninsular including the isthm of Kra. The Kingdom of Majapahit, with its capital in East Java, flourished at the end of what is known as Indonesia's 'classical age.' It began in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, with the first appearance of Hinduized kingdoms and collapsed in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Malay Sultanate of Malacca was established by Parameswara who was a Palembang prince, fleeing from a Javanese enemy, escaped to the island of Temasik (present-day Singapore). During its peak period, it was a cosmopolitan port, attracting hundreds of ships each year.
- <sup>21</sup> Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, "Perjuangan Kita" in Kamaruddin Jaafar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Pemikiran dan Perjuangan*, p. 31-32.
- <sup>22</sup> Burhanuddin al-Helmy, "Perjuangan kebangsaan Melayu", in Kamaruddin Jaafar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Pemikiran Dan Perjuangan*, p. 33.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- <sup>26</sup> Kamaruddin Jaafar, "Perjuangan dan Pemikiran Politik Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy," *Akademika*, p. 32.
- <sup>27</sup> Firdaus Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origin and Development* (Singapore: Pelanduk Publications, 1985), pp. 63-66.
- <sup>28</sup> Those who were detained were from the 'inner circle' that had established secret relationships with Japanese agents, especially in Singapore.
- <sup>29</sup> He was a communist and a leader of the Malayan Communist Party's guerilla organization MPAJA (Malayan people's Anti-Japanese Army). He was a financial backer of Suara Rakyat.
- <sup>30</sup> Ahmad Boestamam, *Carving the Path to the Summit* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Kejora, 1972) p. 26.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33-7.
- <sup>33</sup> Cheah Boon Kheng, *The Masked Comrades*, (Singapore: Times Book International, 1979), p. 65.
- <sup>34</sup> Burhanuddin al-Helmy, "Perjuangan Kita," in Kamaruddin Jaafar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Pemikiran Dan Perjuangan*, p. 58.
- <sup>35</sup> Ramlah Adam, *Sumbanganmu DiKenang*, p. 139.
- <sup>36</sup> Safie Ibrahim, *The Islamic Party of Malaysia: Its Formative Stages and Ideology* (Kota Bharu, Kelantan: Nuawi Ismail, 1981), pp. 120-2.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- <sup>38</sup> An excerpt from the Presidential address delivered by Dr. Burhanuddin, 1956.
- <sup>39</sup> Ramlah Adam, *Sumbanganmu DiKenang*, p.139.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.140.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> Burhanuddin al-Helmy, *Agama dan Politik* (Singapura: Buana, 1954), p. 27.