

A Bird's Eye View on the Islamic Literature Discourse in Indonesia

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Abstract

*This study takes a quick look at the Islamic literature discourse in Indonesia. This study seems essential considering the fact that the names of many Indonesian writers, especially Hamka, have been mentioned on several occasions in the discussions on Islamic literature in Malaysia. The arguments presented in this study have been carefully chosen from previous studies, carried out by E.U. Kratz (1986, 1997), Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir (1990), Peter Riddell (2001) and articles published in the Indonesian journals, *Horison* and *Panji Masyarakat*. A point to be noted from the beginning however, is that we do not propose a detailed study of the Islamic literature discourse in Indonesia but merely to look at it as a whole. This is because the Indonesian Islamic literature discourse deserves an extensive study of its own. However, for the purpose of general comparison, some points in the Indonesian discourse, which stand out even at a cursory glance, are taken up for discussion.*

Key words: Islamic literature, Indonesia, aesthetics, dakwah, Muslim writer

Introduction

In Indonesia, Islamic literature has been an issue discussed and formulated as early as the 1930s, when religion played a part in the conceptual discussion of modern Indonesian literature (Kratz, 1986: 144; 1997:1). The above is best exemplified by the arguments presented by Hamka in the 1930s and 1940s and Muhammad Dimiyati (1943). Hamka in 1938 had already argued about several guidelines for an Islamic literature. He prescribed clear and simple basic characteristics for Islamic literature. In concert with other modernist writers of his age, he strongly opposed and criticised what he regarded as a tendency towards syncretistic practice. In this he sought to draw a clear demarcation between orthodox Sufi belief and non-orthodox teaching, in an effort to shore up Sufi approaches at a time that the mystical quest was being increasingly marginalized (Riddell, 2001: 219).

Islamic Literature in the Eyes of Indonesian Writers

According to Kratz, "true literature of a religious nature has always been a natural and integral part of modern Indonesian literature, albeit rarely noticed. There were always artists who made their own personal religious beliefs, inner struggles, doubts and convictions, the focus of their literary work" (Kratz, 1997: 1). Kratz adds that the discussions in Indonesia have always concentrated on "what is good literature?" instead of the religious aspect of writers, whether Islamic or not. It is a matter of how you decide to express your faith through the arts and what are your main criteria, the intensity of religious faith, the way it is expressed implicitly or the quality of literary writing. The above evokes a view held strongly by Hamka, who believed that if the literature is good, the faith is therefore evident (In a discussion with him in 1999). Just by observing the above point, one can already sense the contrast to the discussions in Malaysia where the focus has generally been the religious aspect of writers and writings whether Islamic or not. However, it is worth noting, that very few Indonesian Muslims with a good command of Arabic have been men of letters or are interested in *belles lettres*. Among the Indonesian authors who had an involvement in and a commitment to literature from the Middle East and in particular from Egypt, were Ali Audah, Hamka, Muhammad Fudoli, and K.H. Mustofa Bisri (Kratz, 1997: 1).

Aesthetics in Islam

On the importance of truth in aesthetics, according to Baharum Rangkuti (1951) the discussion on literature should centre on blending the idea of *Nan indah*, the beautiful, *Nan baik*, the good, and *Nan benar*, the true (Baharum, 1951: 91), i.e. the aesthetic character of literature, its function in society and its realism in dealing with all aspects of life and society.

With reference to Islamic literature this meant that: “*Islam sebaliknya menghendaki seni jang dapat menjatuhkan nan indah, nan baik dan nan benar, atau dalam istilah Islam: husn, ihsan, dan al haq, dengan ketegasan pula bahwa al- haq, itu ialah nama dari Tuhan jang melingkupi segala keindahan, kebaikan, kebenaran, hukum- segala d.s.b. Maksudnja, bahwa manusia itu beroleh seluas- luas kesempatan akan menjijatkan seninja, dengan tanggapan bahwa buruk dan baik itu, menjadi mazhar (manifestasi) dan sifat-sifat Tuhan.*” (Baharum, 1951: 21)

Islam requires literature that is able to adjoin the beautiful, the good and the true or the *husn, ihsan* and *al-haq* in Islamic terms, [this is carried out with] the assertion that *al-haq* is the attribute of Allah, which encompasses all kinds of beauty, righteousness, and regulations, etc. This indicates that man is given the widest opportunity to create his or her art, manifesting evil and good and the attributes of God. Responding to Bahrum Rangkuti in the above, Hamka takes Baharum’s discussion further and discusses the merits of the slogans ‘*l’art pour l’art*’ and ‘art for society’ which were hiding behind Bahrum Rangkuti’s terms *indah, baik* and *benar*. Hamka argues that a narrow interpretation of the term *l’art pour l’art* was utter nonsense since art could never be separated from society (1951: 19-20).

By the above assertion, Hamka has defined “*keindahan*”, beauty as something that does not contradict Islamic values, “*tidaklah terlarang agama.*” According to Hamka, as long as “*roman*”: (dime novels) does not recommend and indicate anything that contradicts Islam, it is not *haram*. There are two dimensions to beauty, in Hamka’s opinion, the genuine (*jang aseli*) and the imitation (*jang tiruan*). The beauty of the universe with its mountains and valleys, its ocean and shore, its sky and land and the very creation of man itself go under the dimension of genuine beauty. The second dimension of beauty is depicted in art. Art is the result of man’s effort to depict the captivating feeling and emotions stimulated by the sight of these beauties surrounding him. Thus the writer depicts his attraction to the above in the form of “*sjair*”, “*pantun*”, prose, poetry, calligraphy and the like. The aim of *keindahan* is *keindahan* itself. Art is not to be employed as a tool to achieve certain goals (*tudjuan*). In fact art by itself is an aim and goal. However the product (*buah tjiptaan*) is merely an object of beauty and man himself is the subject of beauty. This is because the product [of art] depicts the writer’s perception and evaluation of beauty (Hamka, 1951: 19).

Hamka asserts that the religion and teachings of Islam were neutral (*mubah*) towards the question of literature. This is in the sense that Islam neither approves nor bans literature. Hamka states, “*Roman termasuk kesenian, kesenian ertinja keindahan. Allah soeka akan keindahan, asal sadja keindahan itoe tidak melanggar akan perintah agama. Sebab itoe semata- mata roman tidaklah terlarang oleh agama. Tetapi kalau sekiranya roman itoe akan mengandjoerkan perboeatan tidak senonoh, perboeatan tjaboel, meroesakkan budi pekerti, maka haramlah hoekoemnja.*” (Hamka, 1940: 66).

Abdul Hadi W.M. (2000) on the other hand argues that in the Islamic aesthetic tradition, “*Yang Satu*” (The Al-Mighty) is named “*Yang Hakiki*” (The Rightful). The Al-Mighty is the base of every figure (*bentuk*), every facet (*rupa*) and every *meaning*. The Rightful (*al-Hakiki*) is the Most Beautiful and is in fact beauty itself. The vast aspects of God’s beauty, are embedded in His attributes as The Most Compassionate and The Most Merciful. Abdul Hadi asserts that in Islamic aesthetics, everything in this world in its diversity carries a spiritual bond and link with the divinity of God. Islamic aesthetics, according to Abdul Hadi, proposes to transport the soul, during which the soul experiences a transformation. Hence, Islamic aesthetics is “a transcendental and transformative aesthetics” or “an upgrading aesthetics”. The intention behind this upgrading is to symbolically or indirectly enlighten the soul about the divine reality of God, or to offer a spiritual setting, which generates piety (*kekhusukan*) and serenity (*kekudusan*). It is therefore incumbent on those who are devoted and produce Islamic literature to attain the ability and capacity to penetrate the worldly form and step into the world of meaning equipped with imagination, the vision and a “meditative heart” (Abdul Hadi, 2000: 337). Abdul Hadi argues that Muslim writers are to realise an aesthetic vision, which is founded on morality, spirituality and Islamic metaphysics (Abdul Hadi, 2000: 337).

On the issue of Islamic aesthetics, Ali Audah (1999) argues that their foundation may be derived from the story of the Prophet Sulaiman in *Surah Saba*: 13. In this story, Prophet Sulaiman’s love of beauty is illustrated through the beautiful decorations and ornaments which fill his palace. Prophet Sulaiman had a whole range of priceless collections of cutlery, sculptures and for horsemanship. The above is understood by Ali Audah to indicate that Muslims are allowed to pursue their love and quest for beauty. Furthermore, the above view according to Ali Audah gains support from a *hadith*, in which Prophet Muhammad indicates that a Muslim should carry out every task in life in the best and in the most beautiful manner. In a separate *hadith*, according to Ali Audah, Prophet Muhammad states that “Allah is Beautiful and He loves beauty”. To top it all, the attributes of Allah are given the name, “*al-Asma’ al-Husna*”, which means “Beautiful names” (Ali Audah, 1999: 36-37).

Ali Audah further argues that whether one likes it or not, the discussion and issue of aesthetics depends on the issue of personal taste and intuition, "*akan kembali pada masalah selera dan intuisi.*" (Ali Audah, 1999: 37). Each individual retain their own personal perception on beauty, which cannot always be understood or forced by others. However, the difference lies in the "*nilai*", value. One nation's perception of beauty is not necessarily shared by others. The question that poses itself here in Audah's opinion is whether these perceptions of beauty are actually all about beauty or are there other criteria hidden behind the scenes, such as the influence of ethics and religion. Unlike the West, ethics in the Islamic tradition cannot be separated from religious values, which are known as *akhlaq*. Audah insists that there is a great difference between ethics, which are based on philosophy, and *akhlaq*, which is based on religion. The former is concentrated in the mind and thought, while the latter is concentrated in the spiritual heart (*hati nurani dan rohani*) of humans (Ali Audah, 1999: 37).

The Islamic Stand on Foreign (Non-Islamic) or Non-Religious Influence and Elements in Literature

Abdul Hadi (2000) sees Islam as an "open minded religion". Forever, foreign cultural elements have been allowed the freedom to manoeuvre freely in the intellectual and creative tradition of the Muslim nation. As long as these foreign elements can be integrated with Islamic principles, which are founded on *Tauhid*, they are acceptable as a source for conception and as a base for experiment for Muslim writers, previously and in the future (Abdul Hadi, 2000: 338). However, foreign elements, which bring about apostasy (*syirik*), nihilism, idolising for a certain social class, group or rank, artificial fetishism, materialistic hedonism, distortion of the history of the revelation and prophecy, denial of matters which are of a metaphysical and exiotologist in nature, are unacceptable, in Abdul Hadi's view (Abdul Hadi, 2000: 338).

Muhammad Dimiyati (1943) expresses his regret that Muslims still seemed to misunderstand the meaning of the terms Seni (Art), *Kesoesteraan* (Literature) and *Poedjanga* (Poet), and associated them with worldly entertainment. Dimiyati explains the term pujangga as "a man skilled in composition, skilled in painting with life and shaking the soul of the reader" (*seorang jang pandai mengarang, pandm meloekiskan sesoetoe dengan hidoep dan menggetarkan jiwa pembatjanja...*) (Muhammad Dimiyati, 1943: 9). To make his point he invites his readers to go to the window, look at nature and be moved by God's greatness. "Sir, while standing behind that window in meditation you have become a poet. And if you then take a pen and put down precisely what moves your soul at this very moment - even if there are only a few lines - this is a piece of literature, a composition with the character of art, for art is the shaking of the soul" (Muhammad Dimiyati, 1943: 9).

Turning to the function of literature Dimiyati argues that literature could be put to good use in disseminating Islam since "each cause has to have a literature helping it. The Islamic cause, Islamic culture in Indonesia, have to be supported by literature" (*tiap-tiap aliran haroes ada kesoesteraan jang membantoenja. Aliran Islam, keboedajaan Islam di Indonesia haroes disokong oleh kesoesteraan!*) (Muhammad Dimiyati, 1943: 9).

According to Muhammad Dimiyati, the artist is closer to the people and shares their feelings more intimately than the *ulama* does and therefore finds it easier to speak to their heart and soul. "Hence when looking at it from the aspect of Islamic propaganda a servant of the arts who is a Muslim would earn great merit in the advancement of Islam, if he were to become a sincere preacher. With his poems which have an Islamic soul, with his writings which have a religious spirit, it would become easy for the general public to follow the religious ideology disseminated by the man of letters because his portrayal can shake the soul; he is skilled at linking soul to soul, feeling with feeling" (Muhammad Dimiyati, 1943: 9). Clearly Muhammad Dimiyati attempts to satisfy both sides in this conflict. While trying to persuade traditional Muslims to recognize the propaganda value of literature he endeavours simultaneously to introduce literary criteria held by the mainstream poets and writers of the time. In his definition of art and its function, it seems that, in fact, he would like to go even further. "On purpose we use a short yardstick here: What is art for? The answer is: Art is an instrument of education. If we were to analyse the problem of *l'art pour l'art*, which is being stressed by Jacques Perk, we feel this yardstick would be too long. I know from where I take off. Especially now, in the days of the development of the new Indonesia and the new Asia, art is necessary to educate the soul of the nation, to make it conscious to develop the national culture and to refine the character of the masses! We are just waking up, regaining our senses from the stupor caused by the spell of Western art, Western culture and Western spirit. We are about to return to our own pen. Thus at present we had better first put down the slogan *l'art pour l'art!*" (Muhammad Dimiyati, 1943: 9).

Dual Commitment of the Muslim Writer

On the dual commitments of the Muslim writer to serve Allah and none other and to ensure the well-being of his fellowmen, an issue introduced by Shahnnon Ahmad in 1977, is another point which has been addressed in Indonesia, as early as in the 1940s by Hamka. Hamka also emphasises on the commitment of the writer. In his opinion a writer should have an intention and motivation to write.

A writer depicts the immoral and evil (*jang pintjang*) in his writings. For instance observing the danger of tradition, the danger of unrestricted relationships (*pergaoelan bebas*), the danger of compelling marriage [on to others] (*bahaya kawin paksaan*), the danger of *polygamy* and the like, the writer should depict these issues in literature. Writers write in conformity to the discipline (*peradaban*) that he encounters daily, to the relationships that he has adept, to the education that he has had and other aspects of life that he is exposed to. According to Hamka, the above is the reason why writings of most writers depict the Western trend (*aliran*) because the Western trend is what he sees and is exposed to daily (Hamka, 1938: 1033). According to the 1963 Islamic Culture and Art Manifesto in Indonesia, Islamic culture and art are the manifestation of the senses and the talent to create. It is the product of a Muslim in his or her attempt to serve Allah for the good of mankind, “*Manifestasi dari rasa, karsa tjipta, dan karya manusia Muslim dalam mengabdikan kepada Allah untuk kehidupan ummat manusia*” (Kratz, 2000: 510). The Manifesto continues to assert that the Muslim writer is a person who writes in the field of Islam, based on the teachings in God’s revelation and in accordance to the human instinct, “*Seniman Muslim ialah jang berkarja dibidang Islam jang bertolak dari adjaran wahju illahy dan fithrah insani.*” *Islamic art according to the manifesto, is art for the sake of Allah, for the good of mankind, “Seni Islam adalah seni kerna Allah untuk ummat manusia (l’art par dieu et l’art pour humanite)”* (Kratz, 2000: 510).

Prior to the above manifesto, in the congregation of Islamic writers and culturist (*Musyawaharah Seniman dan Budayawan Islam*) in 1962, the following issues were agreed upon by Islamic writers and culturists:

1. Culture is a manifestation of the soul (*ruh*), intuition or taste (*zawq*), desire (*iradah*) and action (*amal*) in every aspect of human life as a natural phenomenon (*fitrah*), as created by Allah.
2. Islamic culture is a manifestation of the soul (*ruh*), intuition or taste (*zawq*), desire (*iradah*) and action (*amal*) in every aspect of the lives of Muslims, founded and characterised by the teachings of Islam (Kratz, 2000: 476).

On the Islamic ruling on art, the following is stated:

1. Islam allows the production and writing of all the varieties or art [as long as] the art is with the intention to purify character (*akhlak*) and to gain piety to Allah. Art must not be characterised with immorality, evil doings, decadence and apostasy. Art must also not contradict with the rules and prohibitions set by Allah and as presented by the Prophet. (*Islam memperkenankan karya segala cabang Kesenian untuk keluhuran budi (akhlak) dan tidak berunsur a-susila, maksiat, cabul dan syirik serta melanggar larangan Allah dan Rasul*).
2. Islam allows the art of calligraphy for the purpose of displaying as ornaments, in the form of toys, for the purpose of teaching and educating. On the other hand Islam prohibits the art of calligraphy for the purpose of worshipping, which is considered as apostasy and if this art is used for immoral and unethical purposes and for boasting, therefore it is *haram* (Islamically prohibited). (*Islam memperkenankan seni pahat untuk perhisan, permainan, tarbiyah dan ta’lim, kecuali seni patung untuk taabud, maka hukumnya syirik dan untuk maksiat a-susila dan pengagungan, maka hukumnya haram*) (Kratz, 2000: 476).

In an issue of *Hanson*, Irawan Sadhya Wiraatmaja urges Muslims to take up art and apply it as a medium and tool by which acceptance and recognition of and gratitude for God’s generous bounties may be expressed. A good Muslim poet, he says, is conscious that in creating his art he is at the same time performing an act of worship as well as discharging his duty as “*khalifah*” or God’s vicegerent (Irawan, 1984: 253).

The Issue of Faith

Another issue in the Indonesian Islamic literature discourse is the issue of the writer’s belief. By and large Malaysian Islamic and literary scholars have maintained that only works by Muslims may be considered and those by non-Muslims whatever their qualities cannot qualify as *Sastera Islam*. This is however, not the case in Indonesia. Discussions on the subject of Islamic literature in Indonesia hardly touch on the question of writers’ religious faith for purposes of categorisation. This omission, and indeed evidence available, would suggest that the discourse accepts a priori that Islamic works may and can only be produced by Muslims. This observation is supported by writings on concrete literary works, all of which deal with works written by Muslims. Similarly, examples that are cited by way of representing Islamic writers are Muslim names only. Indeed, the whole discourse is singularly characterised by Muslim participation. Interviews conducted by Ungku Maimunah with various people, over a broad spectrum, yield similar perceptions. For example, to the question of works by non-Muslims, which uphold values consistent with Islam, the general response is in favour of maintaining the distinction on lines of writers’ religious convictions. Pedro Sudjono, for example, uses the terms “*batiniah*” (internal/spiritual) and “*lahiriah*” (external/physical) to distinguish between works by Muslims and non-Muslims respectively (Ungku maimunah, 1990: 19). Kuntowidjoyo explains that “objectively” he would be able to accept works by non-Muslims but “subjectively” he would hesitate to do so (Ungku maimunah, 1990: 19).

Emha Ainun Nadjib on the other hand, explains that his *Dinasti* group is made up of members from various religions and they subscribe collectively to “*inna lillahi wa-innailaihi raji ‘un*” (from God we originate, to God we return) (1984: 240). In Ungku’s interview with Emha however, he concedes the distinction between what he calls “*Sastra Islam*” (Islamic literature) and “*Sastra Islami*” (literature of Islam), the former being works by Muslims and the latter those by non-Muslims (Emha, 1984: 21). The general writings on “religious literature” (*sastera keagamaan*) and “religious writers” (*penulis keagamaan*) however, according to Ungku, are explicit about the distinction, inevitably citing Abdul Hadi W.M, Muhammad Diponegoro and Taufiq Ismail, to name a few, as Islamic writers and M. Poppy Hutagalong, Andre Jardjana, Satyagraha Hoerip, Soeprbo, I3akdi Soemanto and J. Sijarana Mual as Catholic or Christian writers (Emha, 1984: 20).

The Nature of Islamic Literature

According to Hamka, Islam does not prescribe to any specific form of literature. The nature and characteristic of Islamic literature are left to the discretion of humans and in accordance to the ever-changing needs and aspirations of each Muslim nation. Hamka asserts that religion and teachings of Islam were neutral (*mubah*) towards the question of literature. In the sense that Islam neither approves nor ban literature. Hamka states, “*Roman termasuk kesenian, kesenian ertinja keindahan. Allah soeka akan keindahan, asal sadja keindahan itoe tidak melanggar akan perintah agama. Sebab itoe semata- mata roman tidaklah terlarang oleh agama. Tetapi kalau sekiranya roman itoe akan mengandjoerkan perboeatan tidak senonoh, perboeatan tjaboel, meroesakkan budi pekerti, maka haramlah hoekoemnja*” (Hamka, 1940: 66).

Hamka contends that there is no specific prescription in the Qur’an on the personality of the writer, in the sense that the Qur’an did not indicate on who should and should not be a writer. ‘*Ulama*’ had been known to carry out the work and role of camel traders. In fact it is important for the ‘*ulama*’ in accordance with his abilities to write novels in order to pour religious sentiments into literature (Hamka, 1940: 67). *Hikajat* (traditional literature) for instance, is employed to depict the ability and responsibility of humans. It follows the “*aliran jang nampak, jang nyata*”, the perceptible and observable. Accordingly, because humans are indifferent from angels and genies thus, the character of man as depicted in *hikajat*, illustrates the human character [good and evil], his struggles and conflicts [internal and external], his mind and spirit and his attitudes and characters. The character is not continuously evil because the character is not a devil. Similarly, the character is not continuously good because it is not an angel and it is not alike the prophet who is sinless and impeccable (Hamka, 1938: 1033).

Furthermore, Hamka asserts that in the creation of this wide universe, lies the Ultimate Greatness. God created both good and evil. God created both light and darkness. One will not be able to appreciate goodness before seeing what is bad and evil. One will not comprehend with light before confronting darkness. In Hamka’s opinion, the ability of the writer to depict in his writings the poverty the destitution and the improvident of capitalists is as beautiful as the sight of a *Kijahi* (religious teacher) who teaches his students in a small prayer venue (*surau*) without expecting any compensation or human recognition (Hamka, 1938: 1033). Hamka indicates that he is able to relate to Chairil Anwar irrespective of their indifferences with each other, because of Chairil’s sincerity (*kedjudjurannja*) as an artist. Hamka claims that it is based on the same context (truthfulness and sincerity as an artist), that Islam honours poets such as Abu Nawas. Abu Nawas [irrespective of his weaknesses as a Muslim] is honoured because Islam acknowledges his ability as a “*Pudjangga jang bermutu tinggi*” great poet (Hamka, 1951: 19-20).

Hamka condemns those fanatics in religion who eliminate art as “*telandjang*” (naked). Hamka implies that these people are ignorant in the field of art because their knowledge is restricted to “*Fikhi*” (Jurisprudence in Islam). He suggests that these people retrieve their memory to the history of Arabic literature. This is because in Arabic literature there are literatures that are a hundred times more disrespectful (*kurang adjal*) than Chairil Anwar’s “*binatang djalang*”. Ironically these Arabic disrespectful literatures are written and copied down by the same people who condemn art (Hamka, 1951: 19-20). It is amazing that Bukhari Lubis states more or less the same view on the religious scholars in Malaysia who condemn art-literature but at the same time studied Arabic art-literature in Middle Eastern universities and had nothing to say about art-literature at the time (Bukhari Lubis and Sastera Islami in an interview 1999). Hamka urges conscientious and committed Islamic writers to play their part in preventing repulsive elements from entering the field of literature. This is because, their absence in the perpetual developments in the genre of novel, has caused many elements [Western] to enter the genre. Kratz contends that by the above indication, Hamka has indirectly “introduced the nationalist argument into the discussion. In the sense that from a literary and linguistic point of view this kind of literature had to be welcomed, as it not only improved knowledge and command of Bahasa Indonesia but it also had to be considered a commendable and truly Indonesian effort in the field of literature. In the past literature had been in the hands firstly of Sino- Malay writers and secondly of Balai Poestaka.

Here now was the Indonesian answers” (Hamka, 1940: 67). According to Kratz, Hamka acknowledges the many linguistic and literary imperfections of the Medan novel. Nevertheless, he admits that it did not yet carry the desired element of Islamic propaganda. However, Hamka states that its good intentions are worthy of acknowledgement therefore to deny it is unjust (Hamka, 1940: 69). Hamka emphasised that art-literature must not be used as a tool to dictate. In other words art-literature must not be didactic. His argument is that the two differ in the system. In the sense that to dictate one does not necessarily need to be artistic or have the ability of aesthetic-beauty literary techniques. Art on the other hand relies on aesthetic-beauty aspects. This is what differs artistic from non-artistic writing. In fact Hamka agrees that art should be for art sake. However, it must convey something [good and useful] for the community. Nevertheless, as Muslims, writers should take from the “art for art” what conforms to their religious [Islamic] beliefs and values and discard whatever contradicts with these values (Hamka, 1951: 20). Hamka even expresses his acceptance of modern literary theories and trend such as realism, existentialism, surrealism and the like. The issue though in Hamka’s opinion, is that the writer realises his conviction as a conscientious Muslim and asserts this realisation in depicting beauty in art. The reason for Hamka’s rejection to the slogan “art for the people” lies in the absence of the above factor (Hamka, 1951: 20).

Writing in *Panji Masyarakat* on Islamic art in general, E Muttaqien (1976), on the other hand, raises four questions, which he deems crucial to the understanding of the subject. These are: “what is meant by Islamic art”, “what is the purpose of Islamic art”, “what is the rule which governs art within Islam” and “what is the task of art in the Islamic struggle”. With references to relevant Qur’anic verses, he summarises Islamic art to be that which submits to Allah and devotes itself to ensuring the general well-being of mankind. (“*pengabdian kepada llahi dan kebaktian kepada rakyat*”). Concomitant with this art should work within the larger Islamic struggle to further the cause of “*da’wah Islamiyah*” (propagation of Islam) and create a strong brotherhood of believers (“*Ukhuwwah Islamiyyah*”). He concludes with the hope that Islamic art with the meanings and purposes he has suggested will come to pass (Muttaqien, 1976: 38-40).

In an article entitled “*Sastra Islam: Sastera Karena Allah Untuk Manusia*”, Yusril Ihza Mahendra attempts to crystalise the concept of “*Sastera Islam*”. Yusril first refers to two general schools of thought regarding art and literature, which are prevalent. According to him, the first group subscribes to the notion of “art for art sake” and sees art as man’s activity, which is neutral and free from religious and ethical values, both of which constitute the foundation of society. Using the motto “in freedom we create”, this school uses as its aesthetic yardstick the writers’ taste or sense of beauty (“*selera keindahan*”). In contrast to the first group, the second group submits to the notion of art for a purpose or an end, be it for oneself, society’s welfare or a particular “ism” or ideology. He maintains that in both instances the source of inspiration for art is man’s mind, which is relative. Works produced within the perceptual framework of the first group makes a writer feel fulfilled, liberated and free, regardless of the effect of his work on others. His work, Yusril contends, which is devoid of social function and is immersed in imagination, which is meaningless, is oriented towards directing man to an individualistic life. By way of an example he refers to recent Indonesian literary works, especially poetry, which he says are made up of strings of words or even alphabets, and dismisses them as meaningless.

He suggests that such excessive imagination as manifested in those works is perhaps the kind, which Allah abhors, as stated in the verse al-Syuaraa. In regard to the second group Yusril grants its orientation towards social welfare and well-being. However, he continues, this preoccupation is rooted in man’s mind (“*ukuran akal*”) which he suggests is relative. It is thus relativity, which assumes importance and becomes a fundamental underpinning for this particular school of thought (Yusril, 1984: 14). Looking at both groups with their respective orientations, Yusril sees art which both produce as that which is created in the name of man, by man and for man. He contends that both groups may never concur; indeed they aspire for the other’s invalidation. “Art for art”, for example, sees little possibility for “art for a purpose” to develop fully, having allowed itself to serve as a tool for something which is not art. In this sense then “art for a purpose has violated art as man’s activity which can exist on its own (“*mandiri*”). On the other hand, “art for a purpose” sees “art for art” as egoistic and individualistic and is an activity, which brings no gain to society. Such an activity, it is contended, is a mere waste (Yusril, 1984: 14).

Yusril dismisses both notions as incompatible with Islam. According to him Islam is a religion of faith (*Tauhid*), which integrates man’s activities to a central point namely the religion itself. Within this conception nothing can exist on its own because everything depends on Allah. Viewing literature from this perspective, he suggests that literary activities are not free from values but are a form of worship for they are underpinned by faith, religious ethics and sincerity of the artist or doer. Thus, he urges, literary and creative endeavours must be undertaken solely for Allah and none other. However, as in all forms of worship such as fasting, praying and the like the benefits accrued are not for Allah for He asks for nothing from man.

The benefits so derived are for man. It is therefore within this perceptual framework that Yusril succinctly defines “*Sastra Islam*” as literature in the name of Allah and for mankind, the title of his article (Yusril, 1984: 14). Whilst expressions and manner of elaborations may differ according to Ungku, there is a consensus of opinion among Indonesian writers, regarding a conception of Islamic creative works and the philosophy, which underpins it. The discourse which resounds with expressions such as “*sastera kerana Allah*” (*literature in the name of Allah*), “*sastra sebagai ibadah*” (*literature as a form of worship*), “*sastra sebagai amal saleh*” (*literature as an act of piety*) in Ungku’s opinion, affirms and validates in literature man’s dual roles of servant of Allah and His trustee on earth, both of which are crystalised in the definition of “*Sastra Islam*” (Yusril, 1984: 15).

A. Hasjmy (1984) on the hand, goes a step further than the above Indonesian writers, and proposes the characteristics for Islamic literature. Writing his book *Apa Tugas Sasterawan Sebagai Khalifah Allah* (What is the duty of a writer as the vice-regent of Allah), A. Hasjmy, sets the following guidelines for the ideal *sastera Islam*:

1. It motivates the reader to enjoin what is just (*amar ma’aruf*) and forbid what is evil. (*nahi munkar*). This is based on the following verse from the Qur’an:
“*The Believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His Mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise*” (Surah al-Taubah: 71).
2. The writing is aimed to uphold (menegakkan) the teachings of Allah, as the main characters in the plot, consist of true believers (*orang yang beriman*) who do righteous deeds (*beramal saleh*). In addition to the righteous main characters, evil characters are brought forward as rivals to the good. They are addressed in the plot as savages (*durjana*) and the outcast in society (*sampah masyarakat*).
3. The writing continues to promote the truth and forbid the forbidden because the leading character is portrayed as someone who is righteous, pious, observe regular prayers, who fast [in Ramadhan], practise regular charity, assist those who are in need such as an orphan, never lies/deceives and never carries out reprehensible actions in any form what so ever.
4. The writing encourages the transcendence of a society, which is just (*adil*) and peaceful (*makmur*). It is portrayed as the protagonist of truth, piety and justice.
5. The writing makes an impression (*mengesankan*) as to deny the right to live for those who practise evil.

The writer specified above, is a believer that everything descends from Allah and is for the sake of Allah (Hasjmy, 1984: 24). On the other hand, the characteristics of literature, which contradicts with Islam, are as following:

1. Writings, which encourages/lure the reader to do evil and atrocity such as consuming of alcohol, gambling, commit adultery, robbery etc.
2. Writings, which continuously take an anti- religion and anti-God, stand because the leading characters in the plot consist of those who are atheists, communists, socialists and others. These characters are portrayed as those who are truthful and righteous.
3. Writings, which allow the forbidden and forbid the righteous, because the leading characters commit adultery, consume alcohol, gamble etc. They belittle those who worship God and are not observant of the prayer, as though worshipping [God] is a forbidden deed. This gives an impression to the reader that those portrayed above [who allow the forbidden], are good.
4. Writings, which encourage the transcendence of a savage society by introducing an unjustified cycle in life; filled with sin. The author does not give the impression that the above practices do not coincide with the teachings of Islam. On the contrary, the author idolises the leading character [evil], as the defendant and saviour of mankind.
5. Writings, which give mankind the right of unrestricted freedom to follow his inhumane desires; totally ignoring the rules set by Islam (Hasjmy, 1984: 24).

The Concept of “Dakwah” as a Function in Islamic Literature

According to Ungku (1990), those engaged in the Islamic literature discourse in Indonesia, agree on the definition of Islamic literature. However, its interpretation in Ungku’s opinion, seems to generate excitement. Ungku sees this as obvious in reference to the function of literature or art and its implementations. The definition, which argues for a particular role and purpose for Islamic creations underlies “*dakwah*” as intrinsic to art and literature. A. Hasjmy, for instance, devotes his extensive writings on the subject to giving credence to the notion of “*dakwah*” in literature. In an article characteristically entitled “*Peranan Seniman Muslim dalam pelaksanaan da’wah Islam*” (The role of Muslim artists in implementing Islamic “*da’wah*”), for example, he cites the example of *Hikayat Prang Sabf* by the great “*ulama*” Tengku Chik Muhammad Pante Kulu which he says was instrumental in inspiring the Acehenese to resist the Dutch (Ungku Maimunah, 1990: 15).

Ungku argues that the term “*dakwah*” is freely and openly used in the Indonesian literary scene. Some writers openly support this orientation and point to the moralistic intent of their works. Taufiq Ismail, for example, sees “*dakwah*” as the structural basis from which he works, adding however that he “strives to make his work beautiful” (*berusaha untuk mengindahkannya*). Mohammed Diponegoro on the other hand, was explicit about the “*dakwah*” commitments of his works, a point of view shared by Motinggo Bosye and Ike Soepomo. However, variations with regard to perceptions of “*dakwah*” are evident. Kuntowidjoyo, for example, points to “*tasbih*” (rather than “*dakwah*”) as a term which better describes his works. Emha Ainun Nadjib claims that he does not force the “*dakwah*” intent, preferring it to emerge in his works as a natural expression (Ungku Maimunah, 1990: 16). From the evidence provided by Ungku in the above, it would appear that the notion of “*dakwah*” in literature and culture elicits much discussion, which points on the one hand to a perceived awareness of the notion and, on the other, to a general feeling of the need for further clarification and refinement. The latter in particular is felt to be necessary lest “*dakwah*” is misunderstood.

Ungku argues that the discussions on the subject of *dakwah* often address three main aspects. First, it is felt that explicit adherence to the demands for “*dakwah*” per se would render works as a tool and reduce them to the level of propaganda. Such works, it is argued, would suffer aesthetically for they are not conceived as art. The second aspect pertains to the general perception of “*dakwah*”, what it means and its implications. It is argued that in general the duties of “*dakwah*” have traditionally been assigned to a particular group in society namely those regarded as “*ulama*”, “*kiyai*” or “*guru agama*”. “*Dakwah*” for this group, it is suggested, is often associated with and takes on a certain characteristic namely “*khutbah*” (sermon). When this association is in turn brought to bear upon literature, the element of sermonising is often erroneously perceived as a desirable aspect in literature. This mistaken notion, it is argued, is rooted in the conception of Islam, which emphasises the legal and formal aspects, thereby rendering Islam narrow and restrictive. Within literature it gives rise to an ill-informed idea of “*karya dakwah*” (*dakwah* works).

Writing in the special *Horison* issue mentioned above, Emha, a poet who had spent some time in a *pesantren*, outlines the reason for prevalent religious formalism as due to traditional Islamic religious culture which was regulated by legalistic formalism. In post-traditional era, he continues, there emerges a “life style” in which “intellectual administration” (“*administrasi intelektual*”) becomes very important. By way of an example he points to *Horison*’s special Ramadhan issue in which his very writing appears. He urges readers not to view the issue as the only “month” in which *Horison* commits itself to “*dakwah*” but that so far it has done so “qualitatively”. In sum, the thrust of his paper is avoidance of formal legalistic thinking (Ungku Maimunah, 1990: 17). The distinction between legal and formal on the one hand and non-formal on the other is similarly pointed out at a forum held in 1978 by Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN), Jakarta. It affirms writers’ strong “*dakwah*” tendencies and strategies but maintains that “the language’ (they) use is not necessarily the same as that employed by the *ulama*” (“Meskipun ‘bahasa’ yang dipakai tidak mesti sama dengan bahasanya’ para *ulama*”). The view, which allows for a different “language” for literature paves the way for a discussion of the third aspect, which pertains to form and manifestations of “*dakwah*”.

By and large discussions on the subject are apt to view the scope and manifestations of “*dakwah*” in a broad and general way. “*Dakwah*”, it is argued, needs not confine itself to explicit didacticism or obvious Islamic colours; indeed, writers are urged to avoid creating in the minds of the audience and readers the impression of “being taught” (“*digurui*”), the term often used. The “*dakwah*” intent, it is stressed, may be accomplished by less strident means. By way of an example, Pedro Sudjono, Head of Teater Muslim and himself a firm believer of “*dakwah*” in art, points to the presence in drama of a simple question “*sudah sembahyang maghrib?*” (Have (you) offered the *Maghrib* prayers?) as indicative of having discharged the “*dakwah*” responsibility. Commenting on the subject Ali Audah, a respected Islamic scholar who has translated several Arabic works into Indonesian, similarly grants “*dakwah*” a flexible interpretation “... sometimes we see (it) faintly, although it is not obvious that the work has “*dakwah*””, (which is not apparent). Whether the writer does so consciously or not, I don’t know.

But if the reader is touched it is enough as “*dakwah*” (“*kadangkadang juga kita lihat sama-samar, sekalipun tidak menonjol karya itu membawa da’wah yang tidak terlihat. Apakah pengarang itu sengaja atau tidak, saya tidak tahu. Tapi jika pembaca sudah tergugah itu sudah cukup sebagai da’wah*”) (Ungku Maimunah, 1990: 17). Elsewhere, Audah (1999) states, “*Ajaran Islam itu sangat kuat. Tanamkanlah dengan lemah lembut, pesan Rasulullah. Bahasa Agama, bukan hanya bahasa fikih, bahasa ritus, bahasa politik, bahasa ilmu dan seterusnya, tapi juga bahasa estetika, bahasa seni, dengan dasar kebenaran, kebaikan dan keindahan*” (Ali Audah, 1999: 5). “The Prophet proposes, “The teachings of Islam is very forceful. Implant [the teachings of Islam] benevolently. The language of religion is not entirely the language of Islamic jurisprudence or the language of politics, or the language of knowledge and so on.

However, it is also an aesthetic language, artistic language based on the foundation of truth, righteousness and beauty". Audah argues elsewhere that in Islam, religion does not participate in culture (*kebudayaan*). Audah states, "Agama (Islam) ciptaan Tuhan, kebudayaan ciptaan manusia. Tuhan menciptakan segalanya dari tak ada menjadi ada" (*Surah al-Baqarah*: 117; *Surah al-Nisa*': 101-102) (Ali Audah, 1999: 27). (Religion (Islam) is God's creation, culture is the creation of man. "To Him (God) is due The primal origin" (*Surah al-Baqarah*: 117; *Surah al-Nisa*': 101-102), whereas humans create [something] out of God's creation, from something which already exist". By the above, Audah indicates that the form and matters pertaining to culture is left by God to the discretion of humans. This is a point made earlier in the study by Prof. Abdel Haleem. Audah's view is interesting especially coming from a 'religious' person, especially considering the fact that such a controversial view such as Audah's will be frowned by many in the Islamic world. Furthermore, not many may even consider giving such a bold statement publicly even though many may agree with Audah personally. Having said that, it may be safe to say that Audah may be the first 'religious' writer to openly make such a statement.

Conclusion

Suffice it to say, based from the views presented above, most Indonesian writers accept the worship of God as a natural part of their art without much theorizing. On the notion of "dakwah" however, apart from various interpretations and a refinement of "dakwah" and general exhortations to avoid strident didacticism as mentioned above, the discourse by and large pays scant attention to the expression of Islam and its philosophy in concrete literary works. It would appear that the question of aesthetics and literary expression is left very much to the individual writer. Indeed it is suggested that the absence in Islam of specific aesthetic theory is a blessing in disguise for it allows literature to retain its creative and experimental nature. Ali Audah suggests that within Islamic moral pattern art moves unhindered by religious specifications. Man's intellectual reach and development of artistic creation will be wider and more open when the basic principle is moral (Ali Audah, 1984: 67).

Based on the preceding arguments, we think it safe to say that many of the issues raised and argued in the Islamic literature discourse in Malaysia have been addressed and resolved much earlier in Indonesia. On the other hand many of the Islamic literary views presented by Indonesian writers have also been addressed earlier on in the Malaysian literary scene. Ironically, no reference and acknowledgement of the other is given in the discussions. This is interesting, especially when considering the fact that according to Shafie Abu Bakar before the 1970s, the concentration and interest of the Malaysian literary scene was towards Indonesia. Moreover, the fact that there are similarities in views and opinion between Malaysian and Indonesian writers in the issue of Islamic literature does not make it any easier to speculate whether either sides quoted or benefited from each other views. Can the similarities be a mere coincidence or can it be due to the fact that both nations are Muslims and therefore, they share common values and conceptions? Surely, the answers to the above invite a separate study.

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