

Roles of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Toward the Development of Knowledge and Ulama

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Abstract

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the largest Islamic countries lies in Arabian Peninsula. The government bases its legitimacy on its interpretation of Sharia (Islamic law) and the 1992 Basic Law. The Basic Law sets out the system of governance, rights of citizens, and powers and duties of the government. The law also provides that the Qur'an and the Traditions (Sunnah) of the Prophet Muhammad serve as the country's constitution. As an Islamic country which is rich in culture and natural resources, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia plays prominent influence in Islamic world for various aspects in politics, culture, economics, trading and education. The contribution of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia can be clearly seen in education sector, particularly in Al-Quran and Sunnah studies. The country provides a wide opportunity and great facilitation for those who wants to study in Saudi Arabia in their own country. The founding of the Institute of Islamic and Arabic Science (LIPIA) in Indonesia as an important affiliation of Al Imaam University is regarded as real concern of Saudi Arabia in Islamic studies development. Further, pursuant to history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, ulama plays respected crucial roles in the government. They are not merely respected for the high and exclusive knowledge in religion, but they are also regarded having capability in balancing the stability of the country. It implies that the government and ulama mutually work to protect the glory of Islam and the Kingdom.

Key words: Roles, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, al-Quran, Sunnah, knowledge, ulama

Abstrak

Arab Saudi atau secara resmi lebih dikenal dengan sebutan kerajaan Arab Saudi, adalah sebuah negara Arab di Asia Barat yang mencakup hampir keseluruhan wilayah semenanjung Arabia, dan merupakan salah satu negara Islam terbesar di Jazirah Arab. Al-Quran dan Sunnah merupakan Undang-Undang Dasar negara sebagai landasan diterapkannya hukum syariat Islam pada pemerintahan dengan sistem Monarki Absolut ini. Sebagai negara sumber kebudayaan Islam dengan kekayaan alam yang sangat melimpah, Arab Saudi mempunyai pengaruh yang begitu kuat bagi dunia Islam baik pada bidang politik, budaya, ekonomi, perdagangan dan pendidikan. Pada bidang pendidikan, khususnya pengembangan ilmu al-Quran dan Sunnah peran dan sumbangsih Arab Saudi sangat terlihat jelas. Misalnya, keberadaan Universitas Islam Madinah (Jamiah Al Islamiyyah), semenjak berdiri pada 1961 hingga sekarang sudah ribuan mahasiswa muslim dari seluruh penjuru dunia yang mendapatkan beasiswa dan belajar disana. Berdirinya Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab (LIPIA) di berbagai negara Muslim seperti Indonesia, kampus ini juga menyediakan beasiswa yang berafiliasi langsung dengan Universitas Islam Imam Muhammad bin Saud, Riyadh. Fakta di atas hanya bukti sebagian kecil sumbangsih Arab Saudi terhadap pengembangan konsep keilmuan dalam al-Quran dan Sunnah yang dapat penulis gambarkan. Selanjutnya terkait perhatian Arab Saudi terhadap ilmu dan Ulama. Dalam sejarah kerajaan Arab Saudi, ulama sebagai seorang ilmuwan merupakan orang yang paling dihormati, bahkan ulama dapat sebagai legitimasi aktor sekaligus penjaga stabilitas negara. Artinya ulama dan raja memiliki kesepakatan kekal bahwa keduanya bekerjasama untuk menjaga kejayaan Islam, dan ikut andil memelihara raja dalam menjalankan kerajaan Saudi.

Kata Kunci: Peran, Arab Saudi, al-Quran, Sunnah, ilmu, ulama

Introduction

As the birth place of Islam, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is unconditionally regarded as the pivotal center of both Islamic culture and studies. The perspective emerges for one of the cities is the birth place of the Prophet Mohammad pubh and introduced Islam to the world (Aswar, 2015). The city is undoubtedly a holy city for all Muslims in the world where Masjid al Haram and Ka'bah, the *kiblat*, are situated. The city is also visited by millions of people every year for doing Hajj. Those are the reasons that make the Kingdom of

Saudi Arabia as the important and prominent country for all Muslims in the world.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a monarchy situated in Arab Peninsula. The country was initially proclaimed by Abdul Aziz ibn Abdurrahman al-Sa'ud, known as Ibnu Sa'ud, on September 23rd 1932 as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (*al-Mamlakah al-'Arabiyah al-Su'udiyah*) by uniting the area of Riyadh, Najd (Nejed), Hail, Asir, dan Hijaz (Bosworth, 1967). Ibn Saud becomes the first king of the monarchy. It can be understood that the name of Saudi is taken after the family name of King Abdul Aziz al-Sa'ud (Haif, 2015).

It is important to know that the modern history of Saudi Arabia was started by the resurrection of Muwahiddun movement. The Muwahiddun refers to the movement to purify the Islamic teachings as taught by the Prophet Muhammad pubh (Gibb, 1990). It is inspired by Mazhab of Hambali in which Ibn Taimiyah is one of the important characters in this Mazhab. The followers of this teaching can be found in Hijaz, Iraq and Palestine.

The Wahabism was inspired by the teaching founded by Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahab from Nejad. The movement was fully supported by Muhammad bin Sa'ud (James, 2004). The teachings of the Wahhabism become the pivotal conservative mazhab in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia until today.

A brief description of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabis will be sufficient to explain the detailed history of the kingdom. However the article will be merely focused on: first, the concern of Saudi Arabia on Muslim in general; second, the roles of Saudi Arabia in developing the scientific concept in Al-Quran and Sunnah; third, the concern of Saudi toward the development of knowledge and Ulama.

The Contribution of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Muslims in the World

The contribution of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Muslims in the world refers to the political contribution and material aids distributed to many Muslim countries. Many Muslims think that Saudi Arabia gives less contribution toward Muslim countries like Palestine. Press and media tend to hide the kindness of the country to the Palestine though the country has paid great attention toward the conflict country, Palestine, since the King Abdul Aziz bin Abdurrahman ruled the monarchy (Madawi, 2007; and Kechichian, 1986).

According to Qomar (2015) the contribution of Saudi Arabia toward Palestine can be described in the article authored by Mustofa Syaahin and Abdul Hamid Jamal Al Harrani related to the effort conducted by the kingdom in solving the conflict in Palestine as quoted in the article:

“The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, started from the King, government and citizens have given high attention and aids to the Palestinians. The help is based on the faith believed as the implementation of Sharia. The Kingdom has given material aids and war personnel as well as soldiers the combat the Jewish, the kaffir. “

Further Qomar (2015) explains that the King Faishal bin Abdul Aziz had delivered a speech in front of leaders of Muslim countries stating his empathy on Palestine issues as it is quoted:

“A lot of efforts have been done to solve the conflict of the Palestine including contacting some influencing countries. However, the effort has not been successful. Thus, we order all Muslims in the world to do Jihad against Jewish. There is no other way to defend the Palestinian but jihad fi sabilillah. And if Allah has not accepted it, may Allah brings me to death soon.”

And by His power, Allah has not accepted the order of the Jihad. He passed away after delivering the speech. He was shot to dead. May Allah bless him?

During Afghanistan war, war of Muslim against the USSR, the government, ulama and citizens of the Kingdom of Arab Saudi clearly stated their support. There were many Saudis and lecturers of Jamiah Islamiyah who got involved in the war, including Syaikh Rabi' Hafizhahullah. According to World Bank report, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia belongs to the biggest donor countries for the developing countries, particularly in *Official Development Assistance* (ODA) program during 1973-2010 by funding 472 projects in 77 countries; 43 African countries, 27 Asian countries and 7 other countries. (Ibrahim, 2000).

Moreover, it is still remembered that His Majesty King Salman ibn Abdul Azis al-Su'ud had conducted bilateral visit on 1-9 March 2017 in Indonesia with 1500 personnel, 10 ministers and 25 princes. The visits is the second visit of the King of Saudi Arabia. The first visit was conducted by the King Faisal, the third king of Saudi Arabia who brought 58 personnel to Indonesia on 10 June 1970. The investment values gives by the King Salman is US \$ 25 billion, and aids for establishing 3 higher institutions in 3 provinces, namely Makassar, Surabaya and Medan as well as the aid for establishing mosques in Bali (Ibrahim, 2000).

However, the negative perspective regarding to Arab Saudi which is related to the existence of Wahhabism viewed as threat to the world. In fact, Indonesia has close relation with Saudi even before the independence. Arab Saudi's support toward Muslim countries like Indonesia bring positive impacts, especially in preserving and developing Islamic teachings.

The Roles of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Developing the Scientific Concept in Al Al-Quran and Sunnah

Since the beginning of the establishment, the base of the kingdom is Islamic sharia which is based on al-Quran and Sunnah. There are two crucial characters which played important roles in the establishment, namely the King

Muhammad ibn Su`ud and an ulama called Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab. The Two, 270 years ago, were mutually agreed to use al-Quran and Sunnah as base of the Kingdom and developing the Islamic teachings in both Islamic sources.

“We have to see the cause of Allah curse to us, hampering His blessing to us. We have to avoid this to happen to us, all Muslims, our leaders, ulama, noblesse, and citizens. We explain the issues and we decided to help any da`wah institutions in whole Muslim countries” (al-`Aidiy, 1431 H).

As a country where divine revelation took place, the Kingdom becomes the pioneer of Islamic moral standard and the implementation of shariah. The movement is strengthened by the founding of *al-Ri-asat al-`Ammah li Hai-at al-Amr bi al-Ma`ruf wa an-Nahy an al-Munkar*, which is fully supported by King Abdul Aziz ibn Abdur Rahman, the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Nowadays the institution *al-Ri-asat al-`Ammah li Hai-at al-Amr bi al-Ma`ruf wa an-Nahy an al-Munkar* shows the significant development and it even has many unit of *kursiy* in every university in Saudi Arabia. It conducts international seminars and conferences regarding to issues related to concept and strategies of *dakwah islamiyyah* in any Muslim countries. (al-Tuwaijiriyy, 1433 H : 1). *Kursiy* of King Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz in sector of *al-Amr bi al-Ma`ruf wa an-Nahy an al-Munkar* in King Saud University Riyadh has recently conducted an international conference on 3-4 Rabi` al-Tsaniy 1433 H.

Another impact of Arab Saudi's high concern toward the development of scientific concept in al-Quran and Sunnah is that there were a lot of prominent scholars like Syaikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, Syaikh Abdullah ibn Saif and Syaikh Muhammad Hayat al-Sanadiy. Those are scholars who then develop and disseminate the Islamic teachings in some vital cities in Arab peninsula like Baghdad, Damaskus, Bashrah, etc. (Asbar, tt).

The Concern of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia toward the Islamic Knowledge and *Ulama*

The prominent roles of Ulama, Syaikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, cannot be forgotten in the initial establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thus, the teachings of Syaikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab is progressively developed that it becomes important religious concept of Arab people and the religious leaders (Asbar, tt).

It can be generally understood that the movement of Salafiyyah which was initially taught since the era of Syaikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab has been successful as the kingdom fully support the religious movement and teachings conducted by *ulamas*. Thus the successful dissemination of the Islamic teaching is based on the full support of the Kingdom. The support of the Kingdom in developing the Islamic teachings is not merely on giving the space for the ulama to disseminate their teachings and religious work, but also facilitating the educational sectors and infrastructures.

Historically, the dissemination of religious teaching in Saudi Arabia has a very long and complicated story. In the beginning, Islamic teaching was mostly conducted in mosques, religious study groups in learning al-Qur'an al-Karim, al-Sunnah al Nabawiyyah, Arabic and other religious teachings. The traditional method was applied before the founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Any areas in Arab Saudi had not introduced to structured teachings in formal schools. There were some private schools founded in Hijaz which was aimed at teaching the children of some noble families with general knowledge like Math and science as well as religious teachings and Arabic.

Nowadays there are officially three levels of religious teaching in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. First: Shari'a, which has the biggest portion in the

educational syllabus and materials in any levels of education in Saudi Arabia. Second, the school of tahfizul Quran integrates the materials of Islamic teaching and material of tahfiz. Pursuant to the statistical data published by the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, there are 1764 school of tahfizh al Quran (207.857 students) in 1426-1427H/ 2005-2006. Third: religious teachings, secondary and high level boarding schools cooperated with some Islamic universities like Imam Muhammad ibn Su`ud University in Riyadh and International Islamic University in Madinah (According to data published by the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, there are 124 boarding schools (19.370 students) cooperated with Imam Muhammad ibn Su`ud University, and 5 boarding schools (1545 students) cooperated with International Islamic University in Madinah (al-Isa, 2009).

Moreover, there are 46 public and private higher institution in Saudi Arabia consisted of various faculties and departments. It is imperative for those institutions to integrate the Islamic teachings in any subjects, both explicitly and implicitly based on regulation of *Siyasat at-Ta`liim* (teaching and learning strategy) set by *Wazarat al-Tarbiyah wa al-Ta`liim* of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Among those great Islamic institutions which disseminate Islamic teachings based on al-Quran and Sunnah, there are some universities which provide opportunity for the Indonesian students to study Islam every year like Ummul Qura University in Mecca, King Saud University in Riyadh, Imam Muhammad ibn Su`ud Islamic University in Riyadh, International Islamic University in Madinah, etc.

There are some branches of Imam Muhammad ibn Su`ud Islamic Univesity in Islamic countries. In Indonesia, this university has a campus called

Lembaga Ilmu Pendidikan Islam dan Arab (LIPIA) or al-Ma`had al-`Aliy li Tarbiyat al-Ulum al-Islamiyyah wa al-`Arabiyyah. This campus is situated in Jakarta and also has some branches in some provinces in Indonesia; Medan, Surabaya and Palembang.

Besides formal institutions, there are non-formal religious education conducted in many places in Saudi Arabia (halaqah) which can be found in some corners of Masjidil Haram, Masjid Nabawy in Madinah under the guidance of excellent religious scholars. The halaqahs are also conducted in some mosques outside of Mecca and Madina; halaqah Syathibiyah Syeikh Aiman in Jeddah who teaches tahfizh al-Quran and Qiraat Quraniyyah.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia consistently applied the scientific concepts which are based on al-Quran and Hadits in every subject offered in any institutions. In introduction of *Siyasat al-Ta`lim* in the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it is stated that:

“ Teaching strategy (al-Siyasat al-Ta`limiyyah) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is based on Islam which becomes the religion of every citizens of the Kingdom in every aspect; faith, worship, morals, shari`ah, law and any complicated regulation in the county. The strategy is a fundamental political strategy of a country”.

The Islamic education is not exclusively limited to male. The equality of right in having equal education between male and female as it is clearly stated in al-Quran and Hadits is also implemented by the Kingdom. The right equality to have education as a good deed is explicitly stated by Allah swt in surah an-Nisa verse 124:

“And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer – those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed.”

The education for women has been started before the formation of the kingdom. Education for women is not rapidly conducted and merely limited in some private schools in Hijaz, some villages in Nejd and Ahsa'. Some sources stated that the first school for women was established in Mecca in 1326 H (1941) named *Madrasah al-Banat al-Ahliyyah*, the followed by some schools for women in Jeddah and Madinah.

Among the schools for women there is a school named *Madrasah Dar al-Hannaan* in Jeddah, founded by the late King Faishal ibn Abdul Aziz when he became the governor of Hijaz. The school was under the supervision of his wife, Queen Iffat (al-Isa, 2009).

Although the establishment some schools for women reaped some political challenge, the King Su`ud insisted to publish a regulation stipulated in Regulation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia dated on 20-4-1379 H (1958 M) to open some schools for women in some big cities in Saudi Arabia. The schools were under supervision of a particular directorate called *al-Ri-asah al-`Ammah li Ta`lim al-Banat*. Besides he initiated a prominent political milestone by establishing an organization under the guidance of Muftiy `Amm, Syaikh Muhammad Ibrahim Al-Syaikh. The special education for women was officially started in 1960 that the number of female students exceeds the number of male students recently (al-`Isa, 2005: Bab Ta`lim al-Banaat).

In 1427 H, during the rule of King Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz, based on his order No 3139/MB dated 18/4/1427 a university called *Jami`ah al-Amiirah Naura binti Abdurrrahman* (Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University) has been officially opened in Riyadh which has 14 faculties, including faculty of Islamic Studies. It is the first university which is exclusively for women in the Kingdom of

Saudi Arabia. The first rector was Dr. Al-Jauharah binti Fahd Al-Su`ud, the daughter of King Raja Fahd ibn Abdul Aziz.

Conclusion

The history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia cannot be exclusively separated from the history of Islam during the Prophet Mohammad pubh, the history of Islam during the caliphate until the era of Sa`udiyyun. The Kingdom was firstly proclaimed by Abd. Aziz ibn Abd. Rahman al-Sa`ud in 1932. The development of Islam in Saudi Arabia since the monarchy is marked by the growth of Wahhabism founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The teachings is spread and widened in Saudi Arabia during 19th and 20th century. The development of Islamic schools and studies significantly occurs along with the growth Wahhabism. The leadership of King Salman is a new nuance for the Kingdom as he is known for being moderate leader. He usually uses diplomatic approach in solving any political, economics and religious issues. It is highly expected that the forthcoming policies will be more moderate in solving any issues and conflicts related to the Middle East. It is also hoped that he could bridge or provide the platform for deeper religious understanding to those who blaspheme Islam that image of the religion can be positively internationally appreciated.

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