

Burhân Al-Ma`Rifah: Theological Spiritual Effort of Shaikh Ismail Abdul Wahab against Colonialism

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Abstract—Shaikh Ismail Abdul Wahab (1897-1947 AD) was a warrior executed by the Dutch in 1948 in Tanjungbalai Asahan. One of the medias of his struggle was the book of *Burhân al-Ma`rifah*. This book was written to reorganize the fatalistic theological ideology to be more dynamic. It was published as a theological spiritualization of the people to mobilize resistance to seize the independence of Indonesia. How he wrote the work, and why the theological spiritualization was used as a mobilizer of popular resistance were necessary to study. The main purpose of this study was to answer the two issues above. The study used a historical and theological approach with the primary data of the book *Burhân al-Ma`rifah*. This study found out: 1) theological understanding has relevancy with the movement of popular resistance against a regime; and 2) Wahab with his work was a noteworthy in the history of Indonesia as a hero because he made a great contribution, both in thought and movement.

Keywords—Shaikh Ismail Abdul Wahab, *Burhân al-Ma`rifah*, a theological spiritualization, the independence of Indonesia

I. INTRODUCTION

Burhan al-Ma`rifah is the theological work of Shaikh Ismail Abdul Wahhab (1897-1947 AD). This was the Jawi book that was importantly oriented in the theological spiritualization and purification of Indonesian Muslims in struggling and maintaining the independence. In his work, Wahab assured Muslims that every promise of God is absolute true. Allah who has the nature of *al-Mu`id* will reward heaven for the martyrs who died in *jihad fi sabilillah*. In Muslim's faith, the belief in God's promise is a basic principle that cannot be doubted. The Mu'tazila even the rational people, considered it as *ushul al-khamsah* (five basic teachings). Therefore, the construction of this teaching led to a logical consequence that God is obliged to place the perpetrators of jihad into heaven [1].

Allah has doctrinated this teaching in His holy book, the Qur'an. This is what is implicitly understood when interpreting the text and context in the writing of *Burhan al-Ma`rifah*. The role of Wahab throughout the years from 1920 to 1947, had made him a prominent figure that was recorded in the history of this country. He was intellectually involved in the process of intellectual and political movements against colonialism to realize independence and oppose the Dutch aggression after Indonesian independence, especially around Tanjungbalai Asahan North Sumatra [2]. The faith as the basic principle of

Muslim's belief was used as a spirit to provoke theological awareness about the importance of independence.

This paper is prepared for an analysis of the *Burhan al-Ma`rifah* manuscript. Reading the manuscript text is not only to understand theological doctrines as the purification of the creed but also to interpret it in the social context that surrounded Shaikh Ismail Abd al-Wahhab when this work was launched.

It is expected that by the reading of the manuscript (text and context) that a finding about theological spiritualization transmitted by the book *Burhan al-Ma`rifah* to the spirit of resistance of the Muslim community of Tanjungbalai Asahan not only limited as findings, but also a study of *Burhan al-Ma`rifah* will prove the existence of Shaikh Ismail Abd al-Wahhab as a figure who must be noted since he has contributed in pioneering independence and maintaining it.

II. METHOD

This qualitative research was a kind of discourse analysis that utilized the book *Burhan al-Ma`rifah* as the main data sources. The authors read all articles and identified sentences representing Wahab's ideas and thoughts discussing the theological concepts. His theological thoughts, then analyzed to see whether they influenced Muslims to apply the Islamic teaching purely as what the prophet Muhammad SAW did in his era; and fight against colonialism.

III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A. Doctrines of *Burhân al-Ma`rifah*

The writing of *Burhan al-Ma`rifah* begins from the introductory chapter. He began his writing with a discussion with Shaikh Hasyim Tuo. The discussion revolved around the request for permission submitted by Wahab to write a book of *usul al-din* and the teacher's advice on the object of discussion of *Burhan al-Ma`rifah*. He also stated the background of why he wrote *Burhan al-Ma`rifah*, which was to move from his desire to contribute knowledge to the Nusantara Muslim society, especially related to the improvement of the faith [3]. This introduction ends with a statement that he will write the book in four volumes. However, he continued, he first published the third volume of the book because of several urgent matters [4].

Actually, there are three reasons that can be raised as to why scholars have written *ats-tsana* (praise to Allah) at the beginning of the discussion. First, the existence of the Prophet's hadith was found as legitimacy. In one history it is mentioned that the Prophet said, "Every action that does not start by mentioning in the name of Allah is an act that is *abtar*," that is not a blessing. Second, the Al-quran always started a *surah* by mentioning in the name of Allah (*basmallah*) firstly. Third, in the letters of the Prophet Muhammad, he always included in the beginning of the preamble the mention of Allah's (name) *asthma*. From this reason it can be understood why Shaikh Ismail and other Muslim writers still practiced the tradition of writing *ats-tsana* when starting a writing [6].

After expressing words of praise, Shaikh Ismail quoted two opinions of the famous *kalam* scholars in the *Asy'ariyyah* sect, Shaikh as-Sanusi and Shaikh ad-Dusuqi. Moving on from this excerpt the author began his description of the doctrine of *jâ'iz* on the substance of Allah Almighty. *Jâ'iz* on the substance of Allah, as quoted from the *ulama*, it is possible that Allah can do something or not do it. Therefore, everything related to *jâ'iz* is all the possibilities made by Allah. However, *jâ'iz* in this case is seen from the perspective of the substance of Allah which has the nature of *qudrah* (power), not from the perspective of *irâdah* (willing) and *'ilm* (knowing) Allah who is *ta'alluq* (which is connected with the object). This latter doctrine can indicate that God has an obligation, which is called the '*arad*' *wajj*. Here, the respect for the existence of obligations for Allah is not absolute [7].

In this discussion, *Burhan al-Ma'rifah* as the authors described the description in understanding of *jâ'iz* and the objects which related to that. The title of this article is "*Al-Jâ'iz*". *Jâ'iz* is a doctrine which states that Allah can make all things possible. In this case, he gave a relevant sketch between the *jâ'iz* doctrine and the nature of God. There are *qudrah*, *irâdah*, and *'ilm*. The relevance that he meant in this case was the connection with *ta'alluq* and *mumkin*. From the concept of *ta'alluq*, systematically Shaikh Isma'il explained about the essence "*wajib aradi*" doctrine which became the role of this study.

The next article was entitled "*Qudrah, Irâdah, and 'Ilm Allah Ta'ala to Mumkin*." The review of this discussion is a continuation of the previous article. Substantially, it is the maturation of an understanding of the explanation that has been given. The authors concluded the doctrine to three categories. First is *Jaiz* Allah make it possible, second is impossible for Allah to make *mumkin* and the third is obligatory of Allah to make possible.

The next explanation for the next article is about the case study which includes as '*wajib aradi*.' The example was about heaven that was created by God. The author gives the title "Take Comparison; Heaven." According to Syaikh Ismail, Allah created heaven, but because it has become a part of *i'ilm* and *irâdah*, so, He must make that heaven.

The next two chapters were also parts of the examples of '*wajib aradi*'. Each article entitled "The Reward from Allah" and "The Gift from Allah." In the first discussion, Shaikh Isma'il dismissed the doubts of some people that God was not obliged.

God must place the obedient people to heaven and place the bad people to hell. Whereas in the second article he asserted that God must give sustenance to everyone.

"Please Pay Attention" was the next review of *Burhan al-Ma'rifah*. This article was about some of the criticisms by Wahab to people who denied the doctrine of '*wajib aradi*'. The criticism included six points. First was that the people who did not understand '*jâ'iz*'. Second, they were stuck in one point of view, it was only review from one perspective and ignore the other perspectives. Third, they were stuck in using theological logic but they did not understand God's word, especially regarding God's promises. Fourth, they ignored the character of God such as '*ilm*' and '*iradah*', even though they know the characteristic has *ta'alluq* for *mumkin*. Fifth, the opinion of the group which said that if it was compulsory for Allah to make something, it meant that Allah had weak characteristics. because of the criticism of '*wajib aradi*' doctrine did not realize that this criticism was built from misperception and misunderstanding. it was totally irrelevant to be discussed. The '*wajib aradi*' was not related to that. Sixth, they claimed it was God's obligation, even though '*wajib aradi*' was wrong because it was built from wrong arguments.

The next article was about the author's confirmation about the feasibility of expressing the problem of the '*wajib aradi*' to society. This article entitled "Pay Attention." Here, Syaikh Isma'il started to discuss how the ways of learning the right attitude. After that he quoted *surah al-Baqarah* 26 as the legitimacy of *nass* to raise the doctrine of '*wajib aradi*'. In *istidlâl*, Syaikh Isma'il takes a comparison where Allah not hesitate to make a parable with a mosquito that is considered a despised animal.

After explaining about the doctrine of the '*wajib aradi*' and all the things that are related to that, he compared the doctrine of God's obligation in the *Mu'tazilah*, it is the obligation of *as-sâlah wa al-aslah*. He wrote that the essential difference between the two opinions were *Mu'tazila* (people who believe God's obligation (*al-sâlah wa al-aslah*) is *zati*, and *Asy'ariyyah* believes that God's obligation is '*aradi*'. This article is entitled "The Difference of *Ahl al-Sunnah* with *Mu'tazila* .

In the following discussion, Shaikh Ismail found a third group that had specific thoughts on the issue of God's obligations than *Mu'tazilah* and *Ahl al-Sunnah*. They was a group that saw that Allah makes this world, both from the perspective '*aradi*'. This group claimed to be *Ahl al-Sunnah* but still hold on the doctrine *jaiz mutlaq*. It means that they only believed around the doctrine of *jâ'iz zati* but ignored the side of *ta'alluq qudrah*, *irâdah* and *ilm*. Syaikh Isma'il gave the title with "Not *Ahl al-Sunnah* and not *Mu'tazila* .

Another article was entitled "*al-'Ilm*." In this description the authors explained the characteristics of Allah and all the things which have a correlation with that. This article was the description in the study of '*wajib aradi*'. He concluded, it was obligatory for *mukallaf* to make the point that Allah knew everything and included the '*wajib aradi*' itself. Even, all the impossible "*wajib aradi*' was impossible and all the *jaiz* was

possible to happen. The discussion about *al-'ilm* was the shortest description than the previous two discussions [5].

Besides the previous articles mentioned above, Shaikh Isma'il added some supplements in the *Burhan al-Ma'rifah*, such as prayer, answers to the questions of Shaikh al-Haj Zain al-'Abidin, and *taqriz* from two famous people (cleric) in Tanjungbalai Asahan, namely Syeikh Hasyim Tuo and Syeikh Muhammad Tahir Abdullah. The content from *taqriz* was their recognition towards validity and the truth of 'wajib aradi' doctrine, as theological doctrine with the faith by the *Sunnah Wa al-Jam'ah Ahl* [7].

B. Messages from Text and Context

There is no scientific paper that is born from the empty of human intellectual creativity. Space as a place for all human activities is influenced by various circumstances surrounding it, such as social, political, economic, geographical and theological conditions. This condition influences the thoughts contained in these intellectual works. Likewise, time as a momentum is separated as today, yesterday, and later. They have characteristics that distinguish between one era and another era. Inevitably, this also influences the ideas contained in the works produced because humans are children of their environment in times. This objective condition also occurred to Wahab. *Burhan al-Ma'rifah*, as one of the figure from Tanjung Balai Asahan certainly has a contribution in the pouring of the content and text conveyed.

Historically, *Burhan al-Ma'rifah* was as a Tanjungbalai community in the 30s and 40s. Political and religious situation became a part that motivated the author to present the doctrines of the book. People who were pressured by the Dutch controlling almost all aspects of their lives have resulted in a psychological shock. The sides of religious life, though not completely, had been limited by the expansion of colonial political and cultural influences. This condition was described into the contextuality of *Burhan al-Ma'rifah*.

Historical facts illustrated that people who worked in da'wa always concerned and also got supervision. Nusantara students who left or returned from Haramain and other areas in the Middle East were also given special monitoring. Likewise, the *hujjaj* (alumni of pilgrims) did not get an exception from this pressure. This condition had caused the society to be limited which has caused widespread negligence.

By observing the objective condition of Nusantara Muslim community Wahab tried to "resist" from both the theological as well as political side. The doctrines contained in the *Burān al-Ma'rifah* were the part of the effort to enlighten the spirit of jihad in the community to not surrender in the conditions that bind them. The presence of *Burhan al-Ma'rifah*, was a response to Tanjungbalai Asahan's socio-political conditions in particular and the archipelago.

Burhan al-Ma'rifah not only solved theological problems but also gave spirituality to political temporal awareness. Implicitly, the doctrine of the '*wajib aradi*' tried to realize that there was no lie in the word of Allah, there was no contradiction between

God's absoluteness and God's promises, what was contained in the message is a necessity that must be believed as the truth [7].

Actually, there is no reason for a Muslim not to believe that God will give victory to the good side and destruction to the bad side. There is no doubt that people who obey and repent from their mistakes will be put into the heaven, and there is no convincing argument that unbelievers (kafir) do not go to hell. Likewise, there's no worries that a *mujahid* who died in the way of Allah will not be rewarded favorably. Thus the theological doctrines were described by this figure as two enlightenments: theological justification and political awareness.

Burhan al-Ma'rifah wanted to fix the content "conventional" theology which was misunderstood in the theological process of Tanjungbalai society, and also to some Muslim communities. The society had already been taught to understand that there was no obligation for God to put obedient people, such as the *mujahid* and *shuhada*, into heaven, and in the other hand there was no obligation of God to put kafir people into the hell. This disproportionate understanding in hypothesis of Wahab needed to be straightened out, because more or less it certainly affected the weakening of the *jihad* ethos against colonialism. Therefore, it can be said that the significance of the theological doctrine carried out by *Burān al-Ma'rifah* how the efforts to awaken the public to believe that all their behavior in the world will be rewarded in the "akherat" according to what God said. Something that included to word of Allah was something that became *irādah* and '*ilm*. *Irādah* and *ilm* are absolute truth. If there is contradiction here, it means that there is disharmony in the knowledge and God's desire. Understanding correctly the doctrines that have been mentioned was expected to have implications for the awareness of the political-theological attitude of society towards the political temporal conditions that shake it [6].

Beside what has been said, *Burhan al-Ma'rifah* also tried to finish a narrow understanding that contrasts between the obligations of God especially related to God's promises and the absolute power of God. The solution that is offered by him as understood, put the doctrine of 'wajib aradi' on proportional place and the doctrine of the absolute power of God on the other side. The case of contrasting the theological doctrine above in his analysis occurred not only in the Tanjungbalai Asahan area, but also in other Ash'ariyyah communities. Based on this fact, the meaningfulness of *Burhan al-Ma'rifah*'s book was contextually valid. It was an alternative to answer crucial theological problems that were difficult to understand and solve. Thus, this meaning was not only local but also national and international.

C. Theological Spiritualization of *Burhān al-Ma`rifah*

Generally, the history of figure's struggle had scientific legitimacy in their big movements as explained in various books. Books are the source of knowledge which leads to strength, enthusiasm for life, mindset, and even refers to ideology. Books can be powerful to change the direction of development of an event, whether refres to good or to bad.

Wahab believes that the effectiveness of writing in influencing human thinking patterns. Thought was like a look that had to be germinated. Sprouts were planted well and in time would produce a harvest. That's why he often made his writing as a media to influence people's thinking. These are the most influential figures in the family, community and society. They were usually the prime mover and representatives for change and determination of people's attitudes.

Something that is an important work of Wahab in responding social theological condition was the book *Burhan al-Ma'rifah*. It was based on his high motivation to participate in taking part in the purification and spiritualization of the Islamic faith. According to him, Aqidah is the life of a Muslim. Muslims without faith were considered as statues in the form of humans but have no soul and life. This view put Wahab to be motivated to build his foundation of da'wa and jihad. The steps that he took were refreshing and purifying the faith of the people that had dissolved in a misunderstanding. With the true Islamic aqidah, people will be able to be mobilized into one sacred purpose, such as opposing oppression, imperialism and injustice. Because, political and social awareness always starts from theological awareness.

Seen from the description above, it was found that there was an element of the jihad theology adopted by Wahab as had been followed by Shaikh Abd al-Samad al-Palimbani, Prince Diponegoro, and the Padri in Minangkabau. The theology of jihad in the Indonesian context as stated by Azra, can be grouped into two characteristics. The first group is characterized by outward orientation, namely jihad which is directed at colonization. Second, groups that are oriented to "in" (inward oriented), namely jihad which is directed to improve Muslims themselves [7].

Wahab among these two characteristics, was not categorized absolutely into one of them. He had described his struggle in the two characteristics above side by side. In Inward-oriented, he wished to correct misunderstandings of Islamic beliefs which are considered wrong and outward oriented also hopes that the improvement of the creed will have implications for the awareness of the Muslim community towards the colonialism in Indonesia.

Wahab has the purpose to improve the faith, born from the sense of responsibility, Wahab as a Muslim in carrying out wasarah al-Anbiya. He saw a tendency for a large group of people to be afflicted with apathy, fear, frustration and fatalism towards shackles of colonialism. The Ash'ariyyah doctrine of the destiny and power of God has been misunderstood and "unintentionally" contributed to the theological legitimacy of the negative attitudes above. In the end, the society fell into a misunderstanding which implies weakening and even killing consciousness, "*Kullu 'abd mustaqill illa fi haqqillah* (Every people is free and only as hamba Allah).

Based on the article, Wahab was regarded as an indisputable teacher in Islam. He was related to knowledge, *iradah*, *qudrah*, and *ta'alluq*. However, as a human being who was given advantages by God, he could not claim it was something as a destiny before he tried to live an ideal life. Humans should work

to earn a living, eat to feel full, marry to have children and inner peace, seek treatment to get healing, fight to overcome oppression and so on. All that is based on the *sunnah* of Allah. Human's knowledge of fate is proven after something has happened, not prior to it.

Related to the doctrine of "desire" and "absolute power of God," Wahab understood it as the '*usûl al-dîn*' theory which must be believed. The doctrine which said that God has the power to do and do anything, to include believers in heaven or unbelievers into hell is the part of the true teaching seen from one perspective. However, he intensely regretted that this doctrine was transferred to Muslim communities without comprehensive and proportional explanation and gave negative impacts. It influenced the awareness of society towards jihad, both in terms of physical jihad and material jihad. The promises of religion, such as being consistent with the God's word of getting the reward of heaven were always understood in the shadow of the doctrine and God's desire. In other words, there was no certainty and obligation that God answered human piety and sacrifice with the reward. It caused them to be more reluctant to do jihad, it's impossible that they sacrifice their lives for some uncertain results that they will receive.

Even though this is one of the variables of various possible variables that can be proposed around the weakening of the jihad spirit of Muslim community, but it needs to be observed that no matter how small it is, it must be anticipated. Not the creeds (aqidah) have an important role in the behavior of Muslims, here, Syaikh Isma'il questioned it and try to do an effort of spiritization by explaining the doctrinal position of God's obligations in the *Burhan al-Ma'rifah*.

Besides the motivation to improve the faith of the people, the *Burhan al-Ma'rifah* book was also written based on requests from several parties. Wahab then wrote a book of *usûl al-dîn* which could be used as a guide for Muslims. The strong encouragements made him increasingly determined to realize a responsive theological work that truly can answer the theological needs of the people at that time [7]. To make it happen, Wahab had sacrificed his time and treasure under his great *himmah*.

Burhan al-Ma'rifah's book is planned to be written in four volumes and printed based on the sequence binding. However, because of some reasons "the essence of ja'iz on Allah's substance" was first published, Wahab through the publisher Typ Indische Drukkerij began the printing from the third volume. The discussion about ja'iz is considered important at that time because it has become a controversial article among the society. The publication of this book is a form of clarification of Shaikh Isma'il around the doctrine of 'wajib aradi'. Because, he was the first person launch this doctrine to the people of Tanjungbalai Asahan and its surroundings.

The launch of *Burhan al-Ma'rifah* get the warm response from the society. So, in a relatively short time this third volume was sold out. Therefore, they made a reprint attempt. The plan of Wahab to continue the printing three volumes was not realized in the following periods. After the Dutch left the archipelago and were replaced by Japan, the printing conditions in this country were increasingly squeezed. Most of Printing in Medan is very

difficult to get paper and everything that related to printing through Japanese approval. Then, after Japan surrendered to the allies in World War II (1945) and Indonesia proclaimed its independence, Wahab did not succeed in continuing the next publication because he was preoccupied with the political issues in Tanjungbalai Asahan. He was chosen as chairman of the Tanjungbalai Asahan National Committee and as chairman of Bait al-Mal East Sumatra. Besides that, it was also related to the printing situation in the city of Medan, where there are printing presses that are still very difficult to rise again to do their activities by the impact of Japanese colonization. Until the end of his life, the three volumes of books that he planned did not succeed to publish.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Wahhab contributed in pioneering and maintaining Indonesia's independence. He was not only involved in organizing the youth to take up arms, but he was also serious in educating and freeing society from ignorance. He carried out purification in the people's faith which was stuck in theological fatalism. Because of this, he created a book to make people aware about the truth of faith in the struggle. According to him, God has an obligation to fulfill His promises, including to put *syuhada* into heaven. For this purpose, he wrote a book entitled *Burhn al-Ma'rifah*. The doctrines of *Burhân al-Ma`rifah* were

written to emphasize the obligation of God which he called '*wajib aradi*'. This book should not only be textually understood but must also be contextually understood in the context of struggles to oppose the colonialists. So, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between written texts in the book and the writer's opposition towards the Dutch colonialists. *Burhân al-Ma`rifah* also contained theological spiritualization to oppose oppression. Finally, this book indirectly gave the spirit to the society, especially Tanjungbalai Asahan society, to rise up to oppose colonialism and to maintain Indonesian independence.

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