

# Hamka and the Rise of Kaum Muda (the Modernist) in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** The paper aims to study the historical background of the Islamic reform movement in West Sumatra with particular reference to the idea of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah or his pseudonym Hamka (1908-1981). His religious ideal was instrumental in driving the new consciousness and unprecedented religious struggle that erupted in the late 20th century in the Malay Archipelago, which reflected the force of modern ideas of Shaykh Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) that had brought decisive and greatest influence in the region. The reform movement he inaugurated was carried out by Kaum Muda (the young faction) in the Malay Archipelago, who disseminated his dynamics ideas and aspirations through journals and newspapers such as *Al-Imam*, *Al-Munir*, and *Saudara*. One of the leading figures and pioneers in the struggle of Kaum Muda was Haji Rasul dan Kiyai Ahmad Dahlan, whose legacy was continued by Hamka, who was hailed as the foremost advocate of Abduh's reformist ideas through his influential writing and activity. To highlight this significant work and idealism, this research presents and analyzes Hamka's struggle to lead this unprecedented religious movement for reform (*islah*) and renewal (*tajdid*) in the Malay world. This research aims to develop his legacy and monumental contribution to the history and tradition of reform in the Malay world.

**Keywords:** Hamka; Muhammad Abduh; Tafsir al-Azhar; Reform; Modernist

## INTRODUCTION

The paper offers an extensive study of the historical background of Islamic reform movement in Minangkabau especially the rise of Muhammadiyah in its formative years and its profound influence in the religious work and struggle of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, or his pseudonym Hamka (1908-1981). Based on substantive review, there were significantly lacking of comprehensive works that discussed the crucial role and contribution of Hamka in advocating for unprecedented reform in the Malay world. Only few writings in the form of thesis that has briefly discussed aspect of modern reform and renewal that he projected especially in *Tafsir al-Azhar*.<sup>1</sup> However,

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<sup>1</sup> Wan Sabri Wan Yusof, "Hamka's "Tafsir Al-Azhar": Qur'anic Exegesis As a Mirror of Social Change" (PhD's thesis, Temple University, 1997).

there are several important works of Hamka himself that presented the religious idealism and aspiration for reform in Indonesia. Among his principle works which focus on the theme of reform are *Ayahku: Riwat Hidup Dr. H. Abdul Karim Amrullah dan Perjuangan Kaum Agama di Sumatera*,<sup>2</sup> *Teguran Suci dan Jujur Terhadap Mufti Johor*,<sup>3</sup> *Pengaruh Mubammad Abdub di Indonesia*,<sup>4</sup> and *Said Djamaluddin Al-Afghany: Pelopor Kebangkitan Muslimin*.<sup>5</sup>

*Ayahku* documented the historical struggle of Kaum Muda in West Sumatera led by Shaykh Abdul Karim Amrullah (1879-1945) to advocate modern aspiration of Islam based on Abduh's idealism and school of thought. His legacy was continued by Hamka through *Kulliyah al-Muballighin* of Sumatera and in the movement of Muhammadiyah that has significantly influence the socio-religious course in Indonesia. *Teguran Suci dan Jujur Terhadap Mufti Johor* articulated the intense struggle of Kaum Muda (the young faction) to combat heresy and superstition in Indonesia and their dispute with Kaum Tua (the old guard) on trivial issues that has brought unrest in local dispute of religious doctrine and thought. It illustrated Hamka's attempt to reconcile the different and restore the fundamental unity of ummah as *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah* (people of the tradition and the consensus of the ummah).

*Pengaruh Mubammad Abdub di Indonesia* is a historic speech he delivered in the momentous event for the conferment of the title of Doctor Honoris Causa upon him in 1958 from the University of al-Azhar, Egypt. It described in detail "the influence of al Ustadz al Imam Syeikh Muhammad 'Abduh's teaching and thought in Indonesia" and his impact in the development of thought, culture and dakwah in the region. *Said Djamaluddin Al-Afghany: Pelopor Kebangkitan Muslimin* is a political biography of the Pan-Islamist reformer Jamal al-Din al-Afghani that highly appealed to Hamka's intellectual formation and his rational outlook.

In addition, there were many other writings in the form of books, thesis and dissertation that gave concise exposition on the aspects of reform and renewal espoused by Hamka and his role to reinvigorate the spirit of reform and to restore the dynamism of the ummah in the Malay world. These, summarily, were discussed by H. Rusydi<sup>6</sup>, Karel A. Steenbrink<sup>7</sup>, Milhan Yusuf<sup>8</sup>, Muhammad Jamil<sup>9</sup>, Murni Djamal<sup>10</sup>, Ahmad Ishak, Md Sidin ed.<sup>11</sup>, Giora Eliraz<sup>12</sup>, Fadzilah Din<sup>13</sup>, Abdul Rahman Abdul

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<sup>2</sup> Hamka, *Ayahku* (Jakarta: Djajamurni, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> Hamka, *Teguran Suci dan Jujur Terhadap Mufti Johor* (Singapura: Persatuan Muhammadiyah Pusat, 1958).

<sup>4</sup> Hamka, *Pengaruh Mubammad Abdub di Indonesia* [Pidato diucapkan sewaktu akan menerima gelar doctor honoris causa dari Universitas Al Azhar di Mesir pada tgl. 21 Djanuari 1958] (Jakarta: Tintamas, 1961).

<sup>5</sup> Hamka, *Said Djamaluddin Al-Afghany: Pelopor Kebangkitan Muslimin* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> Rusydi, H., *Pribadi dan Martabat Buya Prof. Dr. Hamka* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Steenbrink, Karel A., "Hamka (1908-1981) and the Integration of the Islamic Ummah of Indonesia", *Studia Islamika* 1 (3), 119-147, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Milhan Yusuf, "Hamka's Method of Interpreting the Legal Verses of the Qur'an: A Study of his Tafsir Al-Azhar" (M.A.'s diss., Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Jamil, "Hamka's Views on Some Major Religio-Political Issues in Indonesia" (M.A.'s diss., Kulliyah of IRKHS, International Islamic University Malaysia, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Murni, D. "The Origin of the Islamic Reform Movement in Minangkabau: Life and Thought of Abdul Karim Amrullah", *Studia Islamika* 5 (3), 1-45, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmad Ishak, Md Sidin ed., *Pemikiran dan Perjuangan Hamka* (Kuala Lumpur: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Giora, E. "The Islamic Reformist Movement in the Malay-Indonesian World in the First Four Decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Insights Gained from a Comparative Look at Egypt", *Studia Islamika* 9 (2), 47-87, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Fadzilah, Din, "The Contribution of Tafsir Al-Manar and Tafsir Al-Azhar Towards Understanding the Concept of Ta-ah and its Observance: A Theological Inquiry" (PhD's thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2003).

Aziz<sup>14</sup>, Muhammad Hilmi Jalil & Fakhru Adabi Abdul Kadir<sup>15</sup>, Mohammad Hafiz Ahmad<sup>16</sup>, Kevin W. Fogg<sup>17</sup>, James R. Rush<sup>18</sup>, Khairudin Aljunied<sup>19</sup>, Taufik Abdullah<sup>20</sup>, and Rahmi Nur Fitri<sup>21</sup>, as well as from Hamka's own journalistic columns, notes, novels and memoirs such as *Angkatan Baru*<sup>22</sup>, *Dari Hati ke Hati*<sup>23</sup>, *Tuan Direktur*<sup>24</sup>, *Empat Bulan di Amerika*<sup>25</sup>, *Kenang-Kenangan Ku Di-Malaya*<sup>26</sup>, and *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*<sup>27</sup> that reflected his vision of modern Indonesia, outlining his idealism and insightful vocation in gearing significant change and transforming the ummah from his classic worldview, that underlie his philosophical and religious writings.

Some of the main objectives underlying this research are: (a) to investigate the outstanding contribution and role of Hamka in leading the modern struggle of Kaum Muda in Malay Archipelago; (b) to analyze the theoretical foundation and method he inspired to realize the aspiration for reform and renewal; (c) to illustrate his contributions in advocating change and reform through his extensive writings and activities; (d) to study his significant influence and legacy in the modern history of Islam and reform tradition in the Malay Archipelago.

While the significance important brought forth by this research are: (a) to implement the reform ideas advocated by Hamka in Muhammadiyah organisation and other socio-religious movement in the Malay Archipelago; (b) to develop his ideal framework as module in the subject of Asian Civilization and Islam in Southeast Asia as indispensable syllabus for IPT; (c) to apply his inspiring ideas of reform in transforming the contemporary ummah; (d) to mobilize enlightening discourse on reform, *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) *'aql* (reason), *kalam* (Islamic theology) and *maqasid shariah* (the higher objective of Islamic law) and to break the friction between Kaum Tua (the old guard) and Kaum Muda (the young faction).

## METHOD

The method of study is based on inductive and deductive approach. It analyses the

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<sup>14</sup> Abdul Rahman, Abdul Aziz, *Pemikiran Etika Hamka* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publication & Distributors, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Muhammad Hilmi Jalil, Fakhru Adabi Abdul Kadir, "Comprehensive Human Development Through Physical and Spiritual: Studies on the Novel "*Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck*", *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* (55), 1118-1123, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Mohammad Hafiz Ahmad, "Karya Nusantara Hamka" *Kosmo*, 6 Mei, 22-23, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Kevin, W. F. "Hamka's Doctoral Address at Al-Azhar: The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in Indonesia", *Afkaruna* 11 (2), 125-156, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> James R. Rush, *Hamka's Great Story: A Master Writer's Vision of Islam for Modern Indonesia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Khairudin Aljunied, *Hamka and Islam: Cosmopolitan Reform in the Malay World* (Ithaca: University of Cornell Press, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Taufik, A., *Sekolah & Politik: Pergerakan Kaum Muda di Sumatera Barat 1927-1933*, terj. Muhammad Yuanda Zara (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> Rahmi, N. F. "Relasi Intelektual Minangkabau dengan Mesir Awal Abad XX", *Jurnal Thaqafiyat* 20 (1), 82-105, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Hamka, *Angkatan Baru* (Kota Depok: Gema Insani, 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Hamka, *Dari Hati ke Hati* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Hamka, *Tuan Direktur* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1966).

<sup>25</sup> Hamka, *Empat Bulan di Amerika* (Jakarta: Tintamas, 1954).

<sup>26</sup> Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Ku Di-Malaya* (Singapura: Setia Darma, 1957).

<sup>27</sup> Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1974).

views and principal work of Hamka that presented the major framework of reform and religious idealism as formulated in his works. These critical ideas and exposition were derived from fundamental text and primary sources he produced. It also based on secondary sources from previous works that critically analyze Hamka's modernist thought and perspective of Islamic modernism. This material and data were accessed mainly from archives and manuscripts in the Cornell University's Library's collection that keep the entire corpus of works and personal collection of Hamka. Exclusive interview with families and students of Hamka were also conducted to gather some unclassified data.

Some of the expected outcome / *deliverables* results and impact of this study are: (a) to establish Hamka's prominence and his extensive influence in the reform movement in Malay Archipelago; (b) manifesting his inspiring work that projecting the reform ideas especially *Tafsir al-Azhar*; (c) expounding his contributions in advocating dynamic and rational Islam in Malay Archipelago (d) to reclaim his rightful position and legacy in the reform tradition in the Malay world.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The modernist impact of Muhammad Abduh had a remarkably profound and lasting impact in the Malay Archipelago, whose reformist ideas had strong repercussions in the political and social landscape of the region and were readily adopted by Hamka in his deeply influential tafsir, *Tafsir al-Azhar*.

The reformative force initiated by Muhammad Abduh in Egypt had a phenomenal impact in the Malay-Indonesian world. Many great scholars and reformists branded as Kaum Muda (the young faction) were deeply influenced by his ideas and aspirations. Notable among them were Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (Haji Rasul) (1879-1945) and his son Haji Abdul Malik bin Abdul Karim Amrullah (1908-1981) who were hailed from West Sumatera. Muhammad Abduh's indelible legacy in the Malay-Indonesian world is evident in the scholarship he inspired among reform-oriented scholars in the form of *tafsir*, journals, press, magazines, schools, religious movements and institutions that flourished in the 19th and 20th century.

The spread of Muhammad Abduh's ideas begin with the birth of the modernist reformist Pan-Islamism advocated by al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, that attracted amasses of audience from young students. The network established between the Middle East and the Malay Archipelago begin at the centre of Cairo metropolis, at the height of colonial times and particularly in the 1920s, that provided a fertile ground for the Malay-Indonesian students. Cairo was the cornerstone of tradition and the epicentre of cultural and religious movements, in which it has been and will always be a citadel of faith and a centre of Islamic activity for the general welfare of the people. In early 20th century, the wide circulation of "islamic-oriented" journals, magazines and newspapers such as *al-Imam* (whose headquarters was in Singapore), *al-Munir* (West Sumatera), *al-Ikhwān*, *Saudara* and other influential works in Malaya contributed to extend Muhammad Abduh's influence and sparked an unprecedented reform movement for Islamic revival in the Malay world.

*Tafsir al-Manar*, dictated by Muhammad Abduh and later published by Muhammad Rashid Ridha in his periodical *al-Manar*, was highly influential in the Malay Archipelago and had extensive impact on *tafsir* produced in the 20th century. It showcased an

important methodology of Qur'anic exegesis that celebrated the power of reason, besides encouraging critical understanding and definitive *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). The volume featured commentaries based on a systematic exposition of rational principles and scientific framework.

One of the most outstanding *tafsir* dedicated to the revival and reform of Islam in modern times was *Tafsir al-Azhar*<sup>28</sup>, a major work by Shaykh Haji Abdul Malik bin Abdul Karim Amrullah that played a crucial role in realizing the aspiration for reform and renewal in Indonesia. It was compiled from Hamka's lecture on the commentary of the Qur'an delivered at Al-Azhar Mosque, Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta in the *kulliyah subuh* (seasonal class after dawn). Since 1959, the commentary was published in *Gema Islam*, an influential periodical which profoundly reflected the idealism of Muhammad Abduh, the "leading exponent of modern Islam in Egypt", as indicated in the style and approach of the *tafsir*.

The largest part of the *tafsir* from *surah al-Mu'minun* (the Believers) to *al-Baqarah* (the Heifer) was composed in jail (27 January 1964 until 21 January 1967) when Hamka was falsely charged and accused of plotting to topple the Sukarno's old-order regime of guided democracy. Dedicated to young Muslims with an inadequate knowledge of Arabic who were trying to understand the Qur'an, the *Tafsir* served as *dakwah* materials for leading *mubaligh* and cadre of Muhammadiyah.

Released in 1961, the *Tafsir* clearly portrayed the impact of Muhammad Abduh's reformism in its exposition, whereby having been influenced by the Muslim reformist ideas championed by Muhammad 'Abduh and his colleagues, Hamka attempted to disseminate the reform ideas in his country, Indonesia, through the means available to him, that is by preaching and writing.<sup>29</sup> The principal influence of Muhammad Abduh's rational ideology and critical philosophy of jurisprudence that impacted the *tafsir* was his *Risalah al-Tamhid* that influence Hamka's conception of the law, by way of his portraying the challenge and struggle towards the abolishment of *taqlid* (uncritical acceptance of the past legal opinions) and the implementation of *ijtihad* (personal judgment).

Muhammad Abduh's phenomenal influence is acknowledged in the introduction of *Tafsir Al-Azhar*<sup>30</sup>: "A very interesting and captivating commentary to be an example for the commentator is *Tafsir al-Manar*, penned by Sayyid (Muhammad) Rashid Ridha based on the teachings outlined by his teacher Imam Muhammad Abduh. His *Tafsir*, besides interpreting science pertaining to religion, comprising hadith, jurisprudence and history and others, also synchronize the verses with the current development of politics and social, corresponding to the time the *Tafsir* was composed and crafted".

Hamka had been exposed to the exhaustive tradition of reform brought from the Middle East since his early years, as evidenced in his immaculate keynote address on the occasion of receiving a honorary doctorate from al-Azhar University: "I admit that I never learned, either in al-Azhar or at Cairo University, but my intimate relationship with Egypt had long been rooted, since I managed to read Arabic books, especially of Muhammad Abduh and Sayyid (Muhammad) Rashid Ridha".<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hamka. *Tafsir al-Azhar*. 10 jil. (Singapura: Pustaka Nasional, 1982).

<sup>29</sup> Milhan, Y., op. cit., 1.

<sup>30</sup> Hamka, 1982, op. cit., 15.

<sup>31</sup> Hamka, 1961, op. cit., 1.

The approach of *Tafsir al-Azhar* was primarily based on the critical framework of commentary and rational interpretation outlined by Muhammad Abduh in *Tafsir al-Manar*, which defended the supremacy of reason and upheld the principle of *ijtihad* based on *maslahah* (general welfare), reverberating Muhammad Abduh's principles in asserting a claim to "renewed interpretation" (*ijtihad*) of Islamic law based on the requirements of "social justice" (*maslahah*) of his own era. According to Muhammad Abduh, where there seems to be a contradiction between "texts" (*nas*) and "social justice" (*maslahah*), then social justice must be given precedence. Muhammad Abduh supports the principle based on the notion that Islamic law was revealed to serve, inter alia and human welfare. Hence, all matters which preserve the well-being of the society are in-line with the objectives of the sharia and therefore, should be pursued and legally recognized. Muhammad Abduh believed that independent thinking (*ijtihad*) would enlarge the scope of knowledge because most of the aspects of human welfare (*mu'amalat*) can be further elaborated with the use of reason (*'aql*).

*Tafsir al-Azhar* radically challenged the status quo and emphasized the need to transform the worldview and reclaim the authentic values of religion as promulgated by the "*salaf*". Hamka, himself a reformer, argued in his interpretation of Qur'anic verses, in the context of his reform ideas in which *bid'at* (innovations in the realm of religion) and superstition were the main targets.<sup>32</sup> This clearly resonates Muhammad Abduh's aspiration and struggle to advocate Islamic modernism, by outlining an approach to "return" to a pure understanding of Islam by interpreting the Qur'an and the sunnah through the use of independent and rational investigation (*ijtihad*) above the allegedly blind reliance (*taqlid*) upon the opinions of the medieval jurists.

The *Tafsir* also developed a scientific methodology of exegesis which emphasized the central role of *'aql* (reason) and its high place in textual exegesis, in which a visible concern in his *tafsir* was the issue of *'aql* (reason), rationality and reason. This concern is definitely related to his support of the reformist movement and the neglect of Muslims over the use of reason and their dependence over *taqlid*, arguing that it is *'aql* that enables man to distinguish between good and evil and to appreciate God's creation around him. The use of *'aql* is essential in examining ambiguity and the meaning of the Qur'an.

The *Tafsir* also portrayed the political and social life in Indonesia acting as a mirror of social change. In analyzing the significance of the *tafsir* as a reflection of the socio-political experience of Indonesia we can concluded that *Tafsir al-Azhar* was a mirror of social change pre-independence and post-independence Indonesia. All such issues were used to contextualize the meanings of verses of the Qur'an so that they were understood and related better to the Malay-Indonesian people.<sup>33</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article had attempted to provide an overview of Hamka's instrumental role in driving the new consciousness and unprecedented reform in the Malay Archipelago in light of his struggle in Muhammadiyah that inspired the momentous movement of religious modernism of Kaum Muda. Such an

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<sup>32</sup> Wan Sabri, op. cit., 1.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

unprecedented work and struggle was manifested in his intellectual and socio-political vision and insight that influence the masses and help to transform the Malay-Indonesian world into a progressive and modern nation. The production of his Qur'anic exegesis was instrumental in keeping the pace of reform and social change and which left such a profound legacy of his religious writing and monumental struggle.

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