

# Muhammadiyah; Modern Thinking and Progress

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**Abstract:** This research explores modern Muhammadiyah thought and the development of its role in the social, religious and educational context in Indonesia. Muhammadiyah, founded by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan in 1912, was one of the Islamic organizations that pioneered the renewal of Islamic thought by prioritizing rationality, education and social charity. This article analyzes the basic principles of modern Muhammadiyah thought, such as the purification of Islamic teachings from the practices of superstition, heresy and khurafat, as well as the integration of religious values with the dynamics of modern progress. Using a qualitative approach, this research highlights how Muhammadiyah formulates strategies in facing global change through education, health and economic development of the community. The findings show that Muhammadiyah has succeeded in maintaining its relevance as a modern Islamic movement by building a progressive network of educational institutions, health services and charitable businesses. This study also identifies the challenges faced by Muhammadiyah in maintaining the values of moderation amidst various social and political dynamics in Indonesia. The results of this research contribute to understanding how Muhammadiyah realizes modern ideas in building an inclusive and dynamic Islamic civilization.

**Keywords:** Muhammadiyah; Modern; Thinking; Ijtihad

## INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah is one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia which has played an important role in the transformation of society through modern thought and its reform movement.<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1912 by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, Muhammadiyah existed as a response to the socio-religious challenges faced by Muslims at that time, including the rise of religious practices mixed with local traditions which were considered to deviate from pure Islamic teachings. By carrying out the spirit of reform, Muhammadiyah strives to purify Islamic teachings while responding to the needs of modern society through charitable efforts in the fields of education, health and social affairs.

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<sup>1</sup> Tinuk Dwi Cahyani and Sholahuddin Al-Fatih, "Peran Muhammadiyah Dalam Pencegahan Dan Pemberantasan Tindak Pidana Korupsi Di Kota Batu," *Justitia Jurnal Hukum* 4, no. 2 (October 26, 2020): 117–23, <https://doi.org/10.21532/apfj.001.18.03.01.14>.

Muhammadiyah's modern thinking is based on efforts to integrate religious values with rationality and progress of the times. This organization emphasizes the importance of education as the main means of building an advanced and civilized society. Apart from that, Muhammadiyah also plays an active role in encouraging religious reform based on the Koran and Hadith with a progressive approach. In its development, Muhammadiyah not only focused on religious issues, but also took part in facing social, economic and political challenges in Indonesia.

However, Muhammadiyah's journey in combining modern thinking with Islamic principles faces various challenges.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, Muhammadiyah must adapt to global and technological changes. On the other hand, this organization needs to maintain its relevance amidst other diverse currents of Islamic thought. This article aims to examine in depth Muhammadiyah's modern thinking and its development in responding to the various challenges it faces, both in the past and currently.

The existence of Muhammadiyah at the beginning of the 20th century was inseparable from the worrying socio-religious context of that time. At that time, Indonesian Muslims faced various problems, such as low levels of education, weak understanding of religion, and widespread poverty due to colonialism. In addition, the religious practices of the people are often mixed with local traditions that are not in accordance with Islamic teachings, such as *tahayul*, *bid'ah*, and *khurafat* (TBC).<sup>3</sup> This encouraged K.H. Ahmad Dahlan to establish Muhammadiyah as a reform movement aimed at returning Islamic teachings to their original sources, namely the Koran and Hadith.

Muhammadiyah took a different approach compared to other religious organizations of its time. This organization prioritizes real charitable efforts, such as the establishment of schools, hospitals and orphanages, as an applicable form of *da'wah*. Muhammadiyah's modern thinking prioritizes the importance of science and technology, without abandoning Islamic values. This is what makes Muhammadiyah the pioneer of the modern Islamic movement in Indonesia.<sup>4</sup>

However, over time, Muhammadiyah faced various challenges. Globalization, social change and technological developments have had a major impact on people's lives, which requires Muhammadiyah to continue to innovate in its charitable efforts. Apart from that, political dynamics and the emergence of various schools of Islamic thought that are more conservative and liberal also influence the role and position of Muhammadiyah as an Islamic renewal movement.

Therefore, a study of Muhammadiyah's modern thinking and its development is important to understand how this organization is able to survive and remain relevant amidst changing times. This study can also provide insight into Muhammadiyah's contribution to building a progressive society, both from religious, educational and social aspects.

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<sup>2</sup> Saefudin Saefudin, "Transformasi Doktrin Al-Ma'un Terhadap Penguatan Gerakan Ekonomi Muhammadiyah," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi Islam* 8, no. 2 (July 19, 2022): 2120–34, <https://doi.org/10.29040/JIEI.V8I2.5354>.

<sup>3</sup> Marlina Rachman et al., "Reinterpretasi Peran Ideologi Muhammadiyah Terhadap Pemberantasan TBC (Tahayul, Bid'ah Dan Churafat)," *Masterpiece: Journal of Islamic Studies and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (January 16, 2024): 40–52, <https://doi.org/10.62083/8G49TE55>.

<sup>4</sup> Abdul Halim Sani, *Manifesto Gerakan Intelektual Profetik, Manifesto Gerakan Intelektual Profetik*, vol. 6 (Samudra Biru, 2016).

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach<sup>5</sup> to examine modern Muhammadiyah thought and its development. The qualitative method was chosen because it is able to explore in depth the social, cultural and religious phenomena behind the Muhammadiyah movement. This research will use the following data collection techniques:

1. Document Study

Document studies are carried out by collecting and analyzing written sources, such as books, scientific articles, Muhammadiyah archives, and official organizational documents. These sources provide insight into the ideological foundations, history, and development of modern Muhammadiyah thought.

2. Data analysis

The data obtained will be analyzed thematically to identify patterns, themes and relationships that are relevant to modern Muhammadiyah thought. This analysis aims to present a comprehensive picture of the development of this organization.

It is hoped that the results of this method will provide a deep understanding of Muhammadiyah's modern thinking and its contribution to forming a progressive society.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Muhammadiyah is a big house for all levels of Islamic society who have a vision of Islam, Renewal & Purification. It is not only limited to Muhammadiyah administrators, Muhammadiyah citizens, and Muhammadiyah sympathizers. However, it is also for the people who have modern Islamic thinking. Muhammadiyah has a characteristic in moving Islamic Renewal, namely by practicing authentic Islamic teachings and sourced from the main teachings of the Islamic Treatise. This understanding cannot be separated from the journey of spirituality and intellectuality of the Founder of Muhammadiyah KH. Ahmad Dahlan who is observed from Islamic reformers in the Middle East. Like; Shaykh Muhammad bin Abdil Wahhab, Shaykh Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, Shaykh Muhammad Abduh, Shaykh Muhammad Rashid Ridha, and Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah. In 1902 AD, after performing the hajj, he again deepened his religious knowledge to a number of scholars in Makkah and several scholars from Indonesia who lived there, such as; Sheikh Muhammad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, Kyai Nawawi al Bantani, Kyai Mas Abdullah, and Kyai Fakih Kembang. After deepening his religious knowledge in Mecca for the second time, KH. Ahmad Dahlan returned to the country in 1904 AD.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Sholahuddin Al-Fatih and Ahmad Siboy, *Menulis Artikel Karya Ilmiah Hukum Di Jurnal Nasional Dan Internasional Bereputasi* (Malang: Inteligencia Media, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Margono Poespo Suwarno, *Muhammadiyah Islamic Movement*. (Yogyakarta, Persatuan Baru, 2005), 13-24.

Suddenly in the country, KH. Ahmad Dahlan saw that there was something that had to be fixed from the way the people of Yogyakarta were religious at that time. In particular, KH. Ahmad Dahlan rebuilt the purity of Islamic teachings. Remembering, the condition of the people in the Yogyakarta area has been shaken by the currents of *superstition*, *bid'ah* and *superstition* which are very thick with activities that tend to be shirk to God. The social and religious conditions at that time made KH Ahmad Dahlan struggle with all his might to convince the public about Islam which is *rahmatan lil'alam*. In view of this fact, some circles recognize KH Ahmad Dahlan and Muhammadiyah, as an association that carries the spirit of modernization of Islamic teachings. It continues to develop as a modernist Islam.<sup>7</sup> The modernist Islamic movement, which was built by KH. Ahmad Dahlan through Muhammadiyah was able to answer the challenges of the times by modernizing the education system and restoring Islamic teachings by encouraging *da'wah amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*. The *da'wah* movement takes the essence from Surah Ali Imran verse 104 "*Let there be among you a group of people who call for virtue, instruct (do) the makruf, and prevent from the ungodly*". This teaching, not only immersed in by KH. Ahmad Dahlan but also implemented in a real movement.

In 1909, KH. Ahmad Dahlan visited Dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo's house in Ketandan Yogyakarta. He said various things about the Budi Utomo association. After hearing the complete answer and according to his thoughts in accordance with his ideals, he declared that he wanted to enter as a member. The founder of Budi utomo Yogyakarta branch agreed to accept KH. Ahmad Dahlan was included in the Budi Utomo Organization Movement and was even asked to be part of the management.<sup>8</sup> Then in 1910 KH. Ahmad Dahlan became a member of the *Jami'at Khair* Jakarta association. A reformist Muslim organization initiated by Muslims of Arab descent in Indonesia. What is interesting is that this association is not only building religious and Arabic schools, but also engaged in the social field, which is very active in building relationships with leaders of developed Islamic countries. KH. Ahmad Dahlan considered that this organization was the first modern organization in Islamic society, with articles of association, a list of registered members, periodic meetings and the establishment of schools.<sup>9</sup>

From the experience of the organization that has been participated by KH. Ahmad Dahlan, we can understand that Muhammadiyah which has a modern Islamic Movement cannot be separated from the experience of a very mature organization. Ahmad Dahlan. KH. Ahmad Dahlan was able to draw the essence and essence of various organizations that had been followed to be penetrated into the big house of Muhammadiyah, this is very important to be understood by the Muhammadiyah movers to always learn to organize the reformist movement not only limited to Muhammadiyah, but also to learn from various other modern organizations. So it is not wrong if the author says that Muhammadiyah exists as a Renewal Movement because of the idea of KH. Ahmad Dahlan who is progressing. The Islamic reform thought movement developed by KH. We can still feel Ahmad Dahlan to this day. Therefore, as cadres of the Muhammadiyah movement, we must have a mindset that

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<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Sholeh Marsudi and Zayadi Zayadi, 'Muhammadiyah's Progressive Movement in the Reform of Islamic Education and Socio-Religious Education in Indonesia', *Mawa Izh Journal of Da'wah and Social Development of Humanity*, 12.2 (2021), pp. 160–79, doi:10.32923/maw.v12i2.2035.

<sup>8</sup> Nelly Yusra, 'Muhammadiyah: Islamic Education Reform Movement', *POTENSIA: Journal of Islamic Education*, 4.1 (2018), p. 103, doi:10.24014/potensia.v4i1.5269.

<sup>9</sup> Mustafa Kemal and Ahmad Adaby Darban, *Muhammadiyah as an Islamic Movement: Historical and Ideological Perspectives* (Yogyakarta: Institute for Islamic Studies and Practice, 2003), 115.

continues to move and follow the progress of the times, so that Muhammadiyah will always be present in every second and time in the cycle of life. The writer believes that with the advancement of Muhammadiyah's driving thoughts, Muhammadiyah will always exist until the end of time.

The idea of modern Islamic thought in the early 20th century was born through the Muhammadiyah organization which could not be separated from the socio-political situation and conditions seen by Muslims at that time. The socio-political condition at that time where Muslims were in the grip of Dutch imperialism was an external factor for the revival of Muhammadiyah. The internal factor that added to the entry of Muhammadiyah was the firm attitude of Muslims at that time which was seen as very *syncretic* and included in Hindu-Buddhist practices in carrying out worship rituals. The religious mentality of the people, which is still irrational, is mixed with many practices that lead to shirk, *bid'ah* and *taqlid* because of the great impact of Hindu beliefs and animism such as the cycle of Islamization that smells of Sufism and magic. The *unrelenting development of Christianization* and *westernization* then presented new science and culture from the west without being balanced with religious education by the Dutch government.<sup>10</sup> So that it produces a very traditional and backward understanding of Islam in all aspects of religious life.

It is undeniable that Muhammadiyah was born from the creative 'reading' of KH. Ahmad Dahlan for the holy message of the Qur'an. In understanding Islam, Muhammadiyah does not look at it from a *formalistic* point of view but Islam is understood as an *integral* value and does not narrow it. This can be seen in the way Muhammadiyah places reason as a 'knife' to dissect Islamic teachings to be applied in the praxis plain. The message of enlightenment of reason through philosophy and logic by KH. Ahmad Dahlan can be observed in the manuscript of his last speech entitled Tali Pengikat, at least, implying three key sentences, namely: (1) The highest knowledge is the knowledge of the unity of life that can be achieved with a critical and open attitude by using common sense and *istiqamah* towards the truth based on a pure heart; (2) Reason is the basic need of human life; (3) The science of *mantiq* or logic is the highest education for human intellect that will only be achieved if humans surrender to the guidance of Allah SWT.<sup>11</sup>

On this glorious occasion, the author would like to invite Muhammadiyah administrators to think clearly and purely about Modernist Islam, especially Islam with a Muhammadiyah perspective. Muhammadiyah is one of the movements that continues to update the mindset in religion. Muhammadiyah is able to answer the challenges of the times, in accordance with the rule once conveyed by the companion Ali bin Abi Talib "*educate your children according to the times*". So moving with Muhammadiyah means that not only *the body* is mobilized to serve the ummah, but also the mindset must move towards progress. In order to present a cool and soothing understanding of Islam, we do not want Muhammadiyah movers to have thoughts that are not in line with the motto of Muhammadiyah which is always echoed, namely Modern and Progressive Islam. In line with that, Muhammadiyah movers must be able to contribute to progressive Islamic thought and *rahmatan li'alamin*.

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<sup>10</sup> H. Abuddin Nata (ed), *History of the Growth and Development of Educational Institutions Islam in Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2001), p. 256. 166 in Marsudi and Zayadi Zayadi

<sup>11</sup> Anwar Nuris, 'Ahmad Dahlan and Islamic Boarding Schools: The Movement for Educational Reform, Da'wah, and Community Empowerment in Indonesia', *Dirosat : Journal of Islamic Studies*, 1.2 (2017), p. 243, doi:10.28944/dirosat.v1i2.15.

For this reason, the context of Muhammadiyah people's Islam does not only dwell on the realm of *maḥḍah* worship, but also penetrates into the realm of *ghairu maḥḍah*, namely in the effort of how Islam can form a just, prosperous society and a true Islamic society. The real Islamic society is not shown by the Islamism of all Indonesian people or mankind, but shown by the grounded Islamic teachings as *rahmatan lil'alam* in Muhammadiyah's view, piety in the realm of ritual and social is not a thing that needs to be chosen which is higher, but these two things are seen as two sides of a piety that must be intertwined.<sup>12</sup>

Muhammadiyah has a very important role in spreading the ideas of Islamic reform and has a very strong influence among the Indonesian middle class. Muhammadiyah can be said to *be a trendsetter* and can be likened to a locomotive pulling the carriage of the Indonesian Islamic reformist movement.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the movers of Muhammadiyah must have a vision and mission far ahead, so that the slogan of reform is not eroded by the shallow and short-term current of thought. The Muhammadiyah management must also fortify the ideology of independence that enters the body of Muhammadiyah, so that there is no movement to take over the organization and moderate Islam becomes a radical Islamic nature. Of course, this will be very detrimental to the Muhammadiyah movement which has a progressive Islamic vision.

The current of dynamics and upheavals continues to flow and move towards various increasingly complex life problems. Thus, the role of Islamic education and teachings has become increasingly important and strategic to always receive serious attention. This is because Islamic education and teachings are a very strategic medium to educate the people. Through this media, the people will be more critical and have sharp analytical skills and read a dynamic map of future life. In this context, at least the educational thought and Islamic teachings of KH. Ahmad Dahlan can be placed as an effort as well as a discourse to provide inspiration for the formation and development of a more proportional future civilization of the people.<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of the process of the establishment of Muhammadiyah, in fact, KH. Ahmad Dahlan said that Islam is understood as a charity religion, meaning that a person has not been called a religion before carrying out activities in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an and al-Sunnah. Religious activities are not only vertical rites but also horizontal social communication. This is understandable because in many ways Islam provides an opportunity for the intellect to read the social phenomena that occur. There are many verses of the Qur'an that encourage mankind to think about natural phenomena, social phenomena, ranging from what we tell ourselves to the readings of social reality that occurs through the mind. A person who practices Islam correctly and understands Islam in the right way, will think about the changes and dynamics that occur in the community around him, so that there is a social sensitivity that appears as a reflection of his faith in Allah SWT. From this understanding, it can also be understood that a true Muslim is required to have a high social sense of social entities, so that any problems that occur in the community around him can be solved based on the instinct of faith embedded in his

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<sup>12</sup> Nuris.

<sup>13</sup> Yusra, "Muhammadiyah: Gerakan Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam."

<sup>14</sup> Mahsun, 'Muhammadiyah as a Tajrid and Tajdid Movement', CV. Perwira Media Nusantara (PMN), Surabaya, 2014, pp. 30–45.

heart.<sup>15</sup>

The pioneering reform of KH. Ahmad Dahlan, who became the milestone of the establishment of Muhammadiyah, was also shown by pioneering the Aisyiah women's movement in 1917, whose basic idea was that Muslim women should not only be in the house, but must be active in the community and specifically instill Islamic teachings and advance women's lives. This pioneering shows the broad Islamic attitude and vision of KH. Ahmad Dahlan regarding the position and role of women, which was born from her intelligent and *tajdid* understanding. In 1922 Aisyah officially became part of Muhammadiyah. In later years, the Aisyah movement paid attention to adolescent girls, and a special section was formed, namely *Nasyatul Aisyah*.<sup>16</sup> For the point of the renewal movement, Muhammadiyah continues to maintain and improve as it has been carried out continuously, both by the early generation and the generation that has experienced current developments, of course with new nuances that are in accordance with the challenges of the development of the times. Meanwhile, at the point of the victory movement in the Islamic world, Muhammadiyah continues to cooperate with all the potential of Muslims, both those who depend on social organizations, politics and those who do not.<sup>17</sup>

The *tajdid* strategy carried out by Muhammadiyah is an understanding that Islamic values should not be "pawned" and should not be compromised with non-Islamic values, but should not be completely rejected against what comes from outside Islam. Anything that comes from outside is not necessarily a bad thing, so acceptance of *westernism* or *modernism* can occur, in contrast to the response of traditionalists who reject it. However, it also does not take modernism for granted until it abandons Islamic values itself.<sup>18</sup> For Muhammadiyah, the door of *ijtihad* is still open all the time. Therefore, Muhammadiyah as a da'wah movement *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* by modernizing Islam for the Indonesian people as well as progressively revolutionary resistance to the threat from the Dutch colonial government. In that way, *ijtihad* is still always carried out as long as the Qur'an and *the Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad are guidelines and not only limited to existing schools, Muhammadiyah in this case is only a tool to always follow and continue the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, so Muhammadiyah as a tool that is the subject in carrying out its da'wah to the Indonesian people who are the object.<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSION

From the above description, the author can conclude that the Muhammadiyah mobilizer must be able to answer the challenges of the times as exemplified by KH. Ahmad Dahlan. The mover is not to be taken care of, but the mover must take care of the ummah so that the development of Muhammadiyah can be felt by the

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<sup>15</sup> Mahsun.

<sup>16</sup> Noer, 'The Modern Islamic Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942', 90 in Irpan Iskandar and Dede Wahyu Firdaus, 'Deliar Noer's Thoughts on the Indonesian Modern Islamic Movement 1900-1942', *Jazirah: Journal of Civilization and Culture*, 1.1 (2020), pp. 16–38, doi:10.51190/jazirah.v1i1.2.

<sup>17</sup> Cecep Suryana, 'Political Work and History of Muhammadiyah Organizations in Indonesia', *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies*, 4.14 (2009), pp. 625–38.

<sup>18</sup> Peni Hapsari, 'The Role of Muhammadiyah in Islamic Renewal in Sukoharjo', *Tajdid*, Vol 10.No. 2 (2012), pp. 103–36.

<sup>19</sup> Hapsari.

community. The management should not dwell on administrative issues that are trivial, but must think and move for the long-term development of Muhammadiyah. Muhammadiyah is in dire need of *The Next* KH. Ahmad Dahlan to always think about and advance a modernist Islamic civilization, not only limited to the educational civilization but also a progressive social civilization.

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