

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR AND MODERN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dan menganalisis dinamika pemikiran Islam modern terhadap tokoh Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Dalam sejarah perkembangan pemikiran Islam modern, Seyyed Hossein Nasr ditempatkan sebagai salah seorang pemikir Islam yang berpengaruh di dunia Islam. Tokoh ini dianggap mampu menjembatani perbedaan cara pandang antara sunni dan syiah, sehingga ketegangan pemikiran di antara dua kutub ini dapat diredam dengan baik. Seyyed Hossein Nasr fokus mengkaji tentang ilmu-ilmu keislaman dalam kontek perubahan masyarakat di era modern. Artikel ini berkesimpulan bahwa pemikiran Seyyed Hossein Nasr bersifat komprehensif dan holistik. Nasr berhasil melihat ilmu Islam dalam satu bingkai yang utuh dan saling terkoneksi dan terintegrasi satu sama lain. Penelitian ini merupakan jenis penelitian kualitatif. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif analisis terhadap pemikiran Seyyed Hossein Nasr yang terambil dari karya-karya primernya serta dari berbagai sumber sekunder sebagai pendukung.

Kata kunci: Kosmologi, Spritualitas, Pemikiran Modern

Abstract

This article aims to explore and analyze the dynamics of modern Islamic thought regarding the figure Seyyed Hossein Nasr. In the history of the development of modern Islamic thought, Seyyed Hossein Nasr is placed as one of the Islamic thinkers who was influential in the Islamic world. This figure is considered capable of bridging the differences in views between Sunnis and Shiites, so that the tension of thought between these two poles can be well reduced. Seyyed Hossein Nasr focuses on studying Islamic sciences in the context of societal change in the modern era. This article concludes that Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking is comprehensive

and holistic. Nasr succeeded in seeing Islamic knowledge in one complete frame and interconnected and integrated with each other. This research is a type of qualitative research. The method used is descriptive analysis of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thoughts taken from his primary works as well as from various secondary sources as support.

Keywords: *Cosmology, Spirituality, Modern Thought*

A. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the name Seyyed Hossein Nasr in the arena of contemporary Islamic thought can provide new hope in providing a holistic and integral understanding of Islam to the western world. Nasr is seen as the leading contemporary Islamic thinker after the death of Fazlur Rahman. With his scientific capacity, Nasr tried to find and provide alternatives in explaining Islam. The West's frequent misunderstanding of Islam or the dislike of Muslims towards the West became Nasr's big agenda in expressing his ideas which were contained in various works which contained explanations of the dimensions of Islam that the West should know. Quoting Terry Moore's opinion in his foreword to Nasr's book *In Search of The Sacred*, Nasr was a philosopher who was able to dialogue with various religious beliefs and various cultures. He was also a thinker who voiced the revival of Islamic science and was also an agent and mediator for what he voiced (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 2010),

Nasr was present in the midst of various misunderstandings, humanitarian crises and religious secularization. Science became a "god" so that metaphysical things were neglected. Modernity, which

has ignored traditional values and has given birth to a secular lifestyle, has received strong criticism from Nasr. Modernity is often misunderstood as a cultural entity that can deconstruct human perspectives on everything achieved during their life journey (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1997). The presence of Nasr tries to position religion in the midst of scientific developments, as well as secularization which thrives on modernity. Human rights issues and the environmental crisis are also serious concerns in Nasr's thinking. This article aims to outline the ideas and themes of thinking of great figures from Iran. This is about the meaning of traditional Islam, modernity, perennialism, kalam, philosophy, Sufism and cosmology.

B. METHOD

This research is a type of qualitative research. The method used is descriptive analysis of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thoughts taken from his primary works as well as from various secondary sources as support.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Biography Of Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

Seyyed Hossen Nasr is a prominent Muslim philosopher

whose name has been immortalized in the series *The Living Philosopher*. Houston Smith in the foreword to Nasr's book, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, says that in the series the name Seyyed Hossein Nasr is compared to great philosophers such as John Dewey, Alfred North Whitehead (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1997). He is an expert in the fields of philosophy of science, Sufism, kalam and other traditional Islamic sciences. He is also a famous writer in the west as the embodiment of traditional Islamic values. His thoughts have become many references and comparisons by Islamic and western thinkers (Irwanda, 2011). Nasr explained his life journey at length in his interview with Ramin Jahan Begloo which later became the book *"In Search of the Sacred."* He was born in Tehran, Iran on April 17 1933. According to Nasr he grew up in a religious and intellectual family environment. His father was Seyyed Valiullah (Azaki Khairuddin, 2012), a doctor, linguist, and also Dean of the faculties of medicine, law and arts at Iran University, as well as being involved in the world of politics in Iran. His maternal grandfather was a famous religious figure in his time, likewise his grandfather's father was a religious figure who played an important role during the constitutional revolution in Iran in 1906 (Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ramin Jahan Begloo, 2010).

Nasr stated that his intellectual journey had been formed since childhood. He stated four stages of his intellectual journey. First, during his childhood (aged 4 years), he began to come into contact with

classical Persian poetry such as the works of Sa'di, Hafiz, Rumi and Firdawsi. In the second period, Nasr explained his interest in the Sufi world at a young age. This is based on encouragement and the reality of his family life which provides space for him to live in tolerance and apply Sufistic values. Third, when Nasr tried to enter and understand the world of philosophy at the age of only 8 years. The fourth period of forming academic knowledge through formal education that he underwent ((Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ramin Jahan Begloo, 2010).

Nasr began his education with major scholars in Qum Iran, including Thaba'Thabai, to study tafsir, philosophy, kalam and Sufism. He completed his higher education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in America and received a B.S (Bachelor of Science) degree. He obtained his MA (Master of Arts) degree in physics. During his education at MIT, Nasr met many figures such as G. Sarton, Sir Hamilton Gibb, W. Jaeger and H.A Wolfson (Irwanda, 2011). He continued his education at Harvard University to study History of Science and Philosophy and received a Ph.D degree in 1958. His meeting with Bertrand Russell (Tri Astutik Haryati, 2011). This is a golden opportunity for Nasr to get to know various schools of modern Western philosophy which essentially lead to materialistic understanding.

His contact with knowledge about philosophy and its various schools made Nasr aware of the tension that existed between east and

west, between religion and the ideas that undermine modern society, such as secularism, materialism and humanism, which prioritize human freedom and put aside religion and other things. transcendent (Azaki Khairuddin, 2011). Nasr expressed his interest in the world of philosophy as an expression of his dissatisfaction with studies in the field of physics which could not guide him to understand the ontology of the reality of physics itself (Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ramin Jahan Begloo, 2011). Nasr is an active writer, several of his books have become references and studies in various universities. Nasr's various works, both in the form of books and articles, contain Nasr's views and answers to the problems he witnessed. Therefore, if we read one of Nasr's book titles, it will indirectly feel like we are facing a problem and Nasr has come to present a solution to that problem..

2. Ideas and Thoughts of Seyyed Hossen Nasr

It is not easy to express Nasr's ideas and thoughts. The complexity of his knowledge can be an obstacle for some people to determine his character and position in the trend of contemporary Islamic thought. Some people might classify Nasr as a neo-modernist if they refer to his concern for conforming Islam to the modern world, especially when he believes that Islam with its universal character is able to answer modern spiritual challenges (Tri Astutik Haryati, 2013). Meanwhile, on the other hand Nasr himself prefers to call himself a neo-

traditionalist or adherent of perennial philosophy, by prioritizing traditional principles which always exist in the dimension of universal sacred teachings. Below are some of Seyyed Hossen Nasr's main thoughts.

3. Traditionality, Modernity and Perenniality

Seyyed Hossen Nasr is a traditionalist. Nasr's high spirit of traditionalism towards Islamic spirituality which he adheres to is based on the view that spirituality in Islam is related to the spirit and inner attitudes. This spirit then encouraged and guided Nasr to revive the Islamic heritage. Nasr floats the concept of traditionality as a solution for society facing the challenges of modernity. Modernity in Nasr's view is a worldview, because it serves various human needs, besides that modernity also provides the poverty of human life, through science and technology (Encung, 2011). In scientific discourse, tradition is confronted with modern terms. Modern is not meant to be contemporary or following the times, but rather something separate from the transcendent. In this way, modernism is contrasted with al-Din/religion. Modernism implies that everything is purely human and divorced from its divine source.

Traditionality in Nasr's view is a concept that is built as a foundation for people living amidst the crush of modernity. Traditionality is an effort to bring modern humans back to classical metaphysics in understanding the sacredness and transcendence of nature. Nasr sees

that modern society's knowledge has created a gap between humans and their spiritual happiness. This results in spiritual happiness being unattainable by reason. In this case, modern western humans, in Nasr's view, must see the superiority of eastern society's spirituality.

The question is what is meant by tradition by Nasr? The meaning of tradition according to Nasr is not as understood in today's studies in western culture as a desacralization of knowledge and the world that surrounds modern humans, but rather a response to sacred things (response of the sacred) (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1989). In his work *Traditional Islam in The Modern World* Nasr provides an understanding of tradition using an illustration. Tradition to him is like a tree. In trees there are roots as the main part (heart). Above the roots stand the trunk and branches. The tree of tradition depends on its roots (heart), namely religion, revealed truth, something that is sacred, eternal, and contains perennial wisdom (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1989). Thus, what is meant by tradition is a tradition that implies something sacred as conveyed to humans through revelation. The tradition offered by Nasr is a resistance/versus to the modern tree which breaks away from ilhiyat and transcendent values. Here we can understand Nasr's desire to make modern trees return to religious principles and spiritual values as they existed in previous times.

Nasr's concept of tradition is related to the perennial philosophy he adheres to. Tradition in relation to

perennial philosophy according to Nasr has three characteristics: First, belief in something transcendental. Second, the essence of truth can be seen in various religions and traditions handed down in different times, societies and languages. Third, in every form of tradition there are principles of truth and beauty in religious traditions that refer to the same essence. Based on this traditional concept, Nasr believes that modern civilization has been contaminated by non-religious principles, which ultimately shows the characteristics of human fall. The reality stated is the basis for Nasr to offer "Traditional Islam" as a model of perennial tradition, which according to him is able to respond to the challenges of the times, as well as being able to solve the problems of life faced by modern humans, especially the problem of religious plurality. This is based on the holy book which is used as the foundation for tradition, namely the Koran. Through "tradition" which is at the heart of religion (Azaki Khairuddin, 2012).

The idea of perennial philosophy promoted by Nasr is an extension of the concept of perennial philosophy promoted by his teacher Fritjof Schuon. The term perennial itself was first used in the west by the philosopher Augustinus Steuchus (1497-1548 AD), as the title of his work *de Perennial Philophia*, which was published in 1540, and then became popular in the hands of Leibnitz. In the view of its initiator, perennial philosophy concerns the wisdom needed to build a right life, which is the essence of all religious

traditions and major human spiritual traditions (*Nor Hasan, 2006). The core teachings in perennial philosophy are that in every religion and exoteric traditions there is the same knowledge and religious message which appears through various names wrapped in various forms of symbols. Perennial philosophy is technically knowledge that exists and will always exist. Perennial tries to relate everything that exists in nature to Absolute reality.

As a thinker who adheres to the idea of back to tradition and adheres to perennial philosophy, this certainly raises various questions. What does Nasr want to convey with these two ideas? In the author's opinion, there are two important things that Nasr wants with the idea of returning to tradition and perenniality. First, the need for modern society, including Muslims, is to return to the religious teachings and mystical traditions of their ancestors. Especially for Muslims, traditional Islam by Nasr contains a call for Muslims to return to religious traditions with the Koran and Sunnah which have been practiced by their predecessors and to make their lives within the framework of these traditions. Second, with the perennial concept Nasr tries to offer a solution to avoid conflicts of diversity and beliefs between humans.

Nasr certainly does not intend to "convert" modern society from their beliefs to Islam. Nasr also does not mean to say that all religions are the same. However, what Nasr wants is that every adherent of a religious

belief should be able to understand and realize the perennial value that exists in each of their beliefs, namely the existence of one essential, eternal thing, -peace, divinity, goodness. Every believer should adhere to this concept in order to create peace and harmony. With a perennial perspective, Nasr emphasized that other religions are not enemies that must be shunned or fought, but are friends that must be approached and dialogued with. On the contrary, other religions can enrich their understanding of Islam (Mas'udi, 2013). Perennial implementation that prioritizes dialogue can distance humans from conflict in the name of religion.

Islamic Thought: Philosophy, Sufism, Kalam

Islam is both a religion and a civilization, a historical reality, is Nasr's first sentence in the introduction to his book *Islam: Religion, History, Civilization*. This sentence emphasizes that for Nasr Islam is not just a religion, but Islam is also a civilization and history (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, tt). Nasr tries to provide an understanding of Islam with its dimensions on the one hand, and Islam as a thought and culture on the other hand. As a religion, Islam is a way of life for Muslims. Contains the principles of obedience, devotion/worship (worship), belief (faith). These are things that are private to its adherents.

Islamic metaphysics is based on belief in the Absolute (Allah SWT). Allah is Supreme Reality, absolute essence, infinite (unlimited). God is

also a transcendent and immanent Being. The immanence of Allah, as stated in the Koran (qs 2; 115): is the Being of the First (al-Awwal), the Last (al-Fin), the Exalted (al-Zhahir) and the Inner (al-Bathin). Therefore, in Nasr's view, God is the core of the experience of religious communities. As a monotheistic-monotheistic religion, the issue of divinity in Islam always occupies the top place compared to other religious issues (Irwanda, 2012). Specifically as a religion, the initial introduction of Islam to its adherents was an affirmation of the oneness of Allah as the basic axis of religion. This affirmation contains the perspective of religious adherents towards their religion which denies the existence of other essences and existence apart from Allah as their God.

In this context, monotheism fills the niches and all lines of life of Muslims in their lives. Tauhid is the frame that guides the life journey of followers of Islam. Tauhid then also becomes the spirit and standard value for all actions of Muslims in their lives. Apart from monotheism and worship (sharia), as the basic principles of Islamic teachings, another fundamental dimension of Islam is the issue of prophecy and revelation. These two things are closely related to the doctrine of divinity in Islam. These two dimensions are very important and are directly related to strengthening monotheism to Allah. The dimensions of Islamic teachings also talk about humans and the universe.

Islam is not only a religion but also a culture and history. As a

culture, Islam has created various cultural products that have spread throughout time. Islamic culture has given birth to many thinkers and influential figures throughout the history of Islam itself. Islamic thinkers, both in the fields of Sufism, Kalam, philosophy, art, music, architecture as products of Islamic culture have had a broad influence on the world. Likewise, the abilities of Islamic scientists have had a major influence on the development of medical science within and outside Islam. Thus, according to Nasr, Islamic culture exists and has had a great influence on other civilizations. For example, Jalaluddin Rumi's poetry, which originates from Persia, has become widely read by the public in contemporary literature and poetry in America. Likewise, military music developed by the Ottoman Empire became the basis for the emergence of military bands in Europe and America.

Not limited to the fields of literature, music and medicine, Islamic culture is also manifested in Islamic thought in the fields of philosophy, Sufism, kalam, cosmology and others. Especially in the field of philosophy, the existence of Muslim philosophers with their philosophical thoughts can be used as evidence that Islam as a religion gives its people the spirit to develop rational sciences. One of the dimensions of Islamic teachings is the explanation of humans and their problems. A dimension that cannot be ignored in Islam is the aspect of recognizing the nature of things, metaphysics, physics. With or without any influence at all from

outside culture on Islam in the field of rational science, from Islam a culture of philosophical thinking will still emerge. Nasr emphasized that the philosophical structure in Islam is epistemologically no less than the character of philosophy that emerged in the world of Christianity, Judaism and other religions. Even Islamic philosophy has the advantage of being able to embrace various methods and combining Sufistic and rationalistic values. The epistemology of Islamic philosophy is a combination of peripatetic, illuminative, gnostic/irfani, and theosophy/al-hikmah al-Muataliyyah philosophical frameworks illuminated by Islamic teachings (the Koran)(Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1973).

Of the four schools of thought that developed, the characteristics of Islamic epistemology acknowledge the existence of reason and the senses as a means of achieving knowledge, while also recognizing the existence of metaphysical reality. This recognition of the existence of metaphysical things is what differentiates Islamic epistemology from others (Mulyadi Kartaneggara, 2007). Therefore, in Islamic epistemology, several ways to obtain knowledge are recognized, namely; (1) Through logical proof and reasoning, called the burhani method, (2) Using the method of analyzing the text of the verses of the Al-Quran directly, this method is called bayani epistemology, (3) Through the stages of purification of the soul, this method is known as the method Irfani (Ahmad Khudari Soleh, 2008).

Thus, Islamic epistemology as an important part of philosophy discusses epistemological issues in general, and specifically discusses revelation and inspiration as sources of knowledge. Besides being centered on the belief in Allah as the source of knowledge and truth, Islamic epistemology, on the other hand, is also centered on humans, in the sense of humans as seekers of knowledge (Miska Muhammad Amin, 2009). Thus, in the area of Islamic epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and epistemology are united in mysticism. This is based on Islamic principles which prioritize knowledge based on monotheism and recognition of the omnipotence of Allah as a source of knowledge (Muji Raharjo, 2009). Nasr wants to reaffirm the existence of philosophy and epistemology in Islam which are based on religion and reason.

Likewise, Sufism and Kalam and other Islamic sciences such as tafsir and fiqh are part of Islamic civilization itself. Especially for Nasr, Sufism or mysticism is an important thing in religion in Islam. The relationship between Sufism and religion is like the relationship between spirit and body. Sufism is the esoteric dimension of religion, while sharia/worship is the exoteric dimension. Nasr has the same view in laying out the relationship between Sufism and religion as that put forward by Martin Ling, (Martin Ling, 2006). which places Sufism or mysticism as an important part of religious attitudes. Mysticism is the inner or aesthetic dimension of religion. Mysticism appears in the form of mystical experiences and

processes to achieve unity with God, or similar powers that originate from religious theological and philosophical viewpoints (R.C. Zachner, 1994). For Nasr, one of the declines in Muslims is not paying attention to the dimensions of Sufism and tarekat in their lives. Nasr criticized movements such as those carried out by the Wahhabi movement and hadith scholars in India which hindered and even tended to reject the existence of Sufism and tarekat orders (Seyyed Hossen Nasr, 1978).

4. Cosmology

Cosmology is a branch of philosophy that studies the nature of the universe, revealing the existence of nature behind physical appearances. Nasr said cosmology is the study of nature. Discussions about the universe and all its phenomena began thousands of years ago, in various civilizations such as Greece, Mesopotamia, Egypt, including the history of Islamic civilization. Cosmology in the history of its development has given rise to various theories and diverse views.

As previously stated, Nasr is an adherent of Islamic traditionalism and perennial philosophy. In accordance with these two ideas, Nasr always linked his thoughts and ideas to religious texts - the Koran and Sunnah -, as was his right when Nasr studied human and natural problems. Nasr believes that the study of nature/cosmology must be based on God's revelation, namely the Koran (Saifullah Idris, 2015). The issue of cosmology in Islam has become a

fierce debate among kalam experts and philosophers. In Kalam there is a debate about whether nature is Qadim (azali), or Muhdats. In the area of philosophy, debates between philosophers occur in determining whether nature was created from something that exists or from nothing (creation exnihilo) (Saifullah Idris, 2015).

Regardless of the debate and Nasr's side with one of the opinions of the kalam group or Islamic philosophers, Nasr began his study of cosmology by explaining the relationship between Nature and God. Islamic cosmology in Nasr's view emphasizes God's omnipotence in creation. Cosmology in Nasr's natural philosophy is an attempt to explain the map of the universe and the location and position of humans in that map. Cosmology in Nasr's view is at least in two important ways. The first is the confirmation of the existence of God as the Cause, Absolute Essence in creation. Second, talking about humans and their responsibilities to the universe.

The term cosmology itself comes from Greek. Kosmos means harmony, harmony. In Arabic it is called 'alam', which is the same as the words 'science' and 'address'. As stated by Nurcholis Madjid, the relationship between the meanings of the terms nature, knowledge and address indicates that there is a clear Creator as the source of creation (Tri Astutik Haryati, 2011). Based on this concept, there is no doubt that nature was created. In this case, Nasr agrees with the understanding that nature is muhdats, not qadim. The world was

created by Allah, maintained by Allah and returns to Him. Nasr based his opinion on the principle of Al-Quan Surata al-Hadid verse 3:.

As God is a Transcendent and Immanent Being, for Nasr, as a Transcendent Being, God is the source of the order of the cosmos. Islamic cosmology emphasizes the infinity of God and the limitations of nature (Encung, 2011). Nature is the embodiment of God. In this manifestation, humans are the highest creation. It seems that Nasr was heavily influenced by Ibn Arabi's thoughts in explaining cosmological issues. For him, human form is a reflection of the names of God's attributes. The reflection of God in humans is like a mirror that reflects the sun. The perfection of the cosmos exists in humans, as a microcosm (Azaki Khairuddin, 2012). As a microcosm, humans describe everything in the big world/macrocsm.

The cosmology proposed by Nasr is an explanation of the relationship between humans, nature and God. In relationship with God, humans are the highest cosmos because they can reach the level of perfection (insan kamil). With this degree of perfection, humans become a "mirror" for God to reveal Himself in nature. On the other hand, humans have a relationship with nature as part of nature and are also responsible for nature itself. Nasr in his cosmological concept wants to reaffirm human responsibility towards nature. Humans must realize that as the center of the cosmos, they have a responsibility to their environment.

Excessive anthropocentric reasoning has given rise to human arrogance towards nature. Anthropocentrism is a view that considers humans to be the center of the ecosystem/cosmos. In the view of this understanding, humans are the highest value and the most determining factor in the order of the eco-system is humans. Thus humans are the center of the ecosystem ((Azaki Khairuddin, 2012). This understanding then has an impact on the attitude that considers something other than humans to be considered valuable if it can be provide and fulfill human interests. Nature is only an object, tool and means (Maftukin, 2016)'

Nasr regrets the attitude of modern humans who are greedy, greedy and unable to care for and protect nature as God's trust. According to Nasr, modern humans have arbitrarily exploited and "raped" nature. This gives rise to various ecosystem crises. A scientism lifestyle without values gives rise to various negative impacts on human life. Nasr explains the tragedy of modern humans in his work *Man and Nature: Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*. Due to the conditions that occurred, Nasr tried to make modern humans aware of traditional and perennial Islam. That all human actions must return to the noble principles that exist in each religion - of course the Koran and Sunnah for Muslims..

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the description that has been described, it can be concluded that Seyyed Hossein Nasr is a

traditionalist thinker who echoes the term traditional Islam. The term traditional Islam for Nasr is Islam that is appropriate and practiced by the predecessors of Islam itself (the friends). Nasr was also a perennialist. As someone who adheres to perennial ideology, Nasr tries to explain that all religions, cultures and cultures are different so that they can live side by side and understand each other. In Nasr's perennial concept, in every religion, culture of every different nation, there must be a common ground in goodness that can be practiced together.

Nasr is also a thinker who tries to explain that Islam is not only a religion that has dimensions of belief,

sharia, but Islam is also a culture and history. As a culture and history, Islam is a product of its adherents who can and does have an influence on world culture and history outside of Islam. Another thought from Nasr that deserves attention is Nasr's cosmological thought which emphasizes theistic cosmology. Placing God as the center of the cosmos, and humans as God's appearance of Himself. Nasr's cosmological thinking is related to his desire to emphasize the existence of religious and spiritual values in managing nature. The natural crisis is a sign of weakening spiritual power, especially what is happening in modern society.

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