



Buya Ahmad Syafii Maarif's Islamic Thought: Morality, Nationalism, and Humanity

Gusnanda*, Awis Karni, Zaim Rais

Faculty of Usuluddin and Religious Studies
Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia
email: gusnanda@uinib.ac.id*

Abstract : *This article examines the distinctive Islamic thought of Buya Ahmad Syafii Maarif, a prominent Indonesian Muslim intellectual whose ideas integrate morality, nationalism, and humanity. Unlike political interpretations of Islamism, Buya Syafii emphasized a moral-ethical framework of Islam as the foundation for responding to radicalism, identity politics, and moral decline. Using a qualitative library research method, this study analyzes his major works, writings of his disciples, and relevant literature. The findings show that Buya Syafii consistently placed morality at the core of Islamic interpretation, rejecting religious symbolism devoid of substance, and strongly criticizing transnational radicalism that threatens Indonesian unity. His intellectual contribution lies in positioning Islam not only as a personal faith but also as a moral force that upholds justice, inclusivity, and solidarity. Concretely, he integrated Qur'anic ethics with the spirit of Indonesian nationalism and universal human values, offering a model of "moral Islam" that resists exclusivism and violence. Theoretically, this study contributes by mapping Buya Syafii's thought as a framework of moral Islam in contemporary Indonesian discourse. Practically, it proposes the internalization of these values in education, public debate, and religious movements to strengthen an inclusive and humane Indonesian Islam.*

Keywords: *Islamic Thought; Morality; Nationalism; Humanity; Moderate Islam; Indonesia.*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic discourse in Indonesia has always occupied a central position in the nation's intellectual journey. Since the early 20th century, Islamic thought has existed not only in the form of theological studies or rituals, but has also been transformed into social, political, and cultural discourse (Huda et al., 2025). Modernization, globalization, and rapid social change have influenced the way Indonesian Muslims interpret their religious texts. In this context, a number of Indonesian Muslim thinkers have emerged with new paradigms (Silaen et al., 2024; Zarkasyi et al., 2023). Among them, Ahmad Syafii Maarif (1935–2022) is known as a figure who placed morality, nationality, and humanity as the three main pillars of Islamic thought. His

ideas presented an Islam that was not trapped in symbolic formalism or the spirit of identity politics, but instead emphasized the ethical substance of religious teachings that could dialogue with the context of nationality and universal humanity. However, academic attention to Buya Syafii is often partial. This figure is often understood primarily through his organizational activities, particularly during his time as Chairman of Muhammadiyah, or through his role in national politics. In the literature, there are studies that emphasize his biography and life journey, highlighting his policies and leadership strategies within Muhammadiyah (Faujiah, 2023; Saputra, 2019).

Then, a study of his political position in the relationship between religion and state (Arifin et al., 2023; Haliyah, 2009; Sholikin, 2013). Others discuss the influence of Islamic thought on the concept of moderate education (Darmawan & Nugroho, 2025), religious pluralism (Riki et al., 2021), and feminist studies (Sa, 2019). These contributions are certainly important, but they have not yet deeply explored the intellectual dimensions of his distinctive thought. Research examining Buya Syafii's primary texts as a basis for mapping the conceptual framework of his thought, particularly regarding how the integration of moral, national, and humanitarian values was consciously formulated as a moderate Islamic orientation, is still rare. The limitations of these previous studies have created the need to fill this research gap. Buya Syafii's thought cannot be understood simply as a personal moral reflection or a momentary political response, but as an intellectual construct born from interactions with Islamic scholarly traditions, national experiences, and struggles with global humanitarian issues.

As a student of Fazlur Rahman, he adopted a hermeneutic approach that emphasized the dialogue between sacred texts and social contexts, while simultaneously adding a distinctive touch by emphasizing morality as the center of interpretation. Unlike Cak Nur, who emphasized the synthesis of Islam and modernity, or Amien Rais, who brought the idea of political Islam, Buya Syafii is known for his ideas of moral Islam rooted in Quranic ethics, combined with the spirit of Indonesian nationalism, and supporting universal humanity (Bashori, n.d.; Putra, 2014). Within this framework, this study focuses on the construction of Buya Syafii's thought, which emphasizes the integration of three main aspects: morality, nationality, and humanity. This focus is important because his thinking offers an alternative to the rise of religious radicalism and identity politics that have developed in recent decades. Buya Syafii rejects Islam reduced to external symbols or merely a tool for political legitimacy, and instead advocates reading Islam as a value system that teaches justice, honesty, and solidarity.

By placing morality as a foundation, he aims to ensure that national and state life does not lose its ethical direction. By linking it to nationalism, he asserts that Islam in Indonesia must be integrated with the nation's historical reality, not negate

national identity. By connecting it to universal humanity, he asserts that true Islamic teachings cannot contradict the principles of justice and respect for human dignity. This study also seeks to emphasize that Buya Syafii's thought can be positioned as a unique analytical framework. Theoretically, he paves the way for understanding Indonesian Islam from a moral-ethical perspective, rather than merely political-ideological. Thus, his ideas contribute to the academic debate on a more sustainable and contextual model of moderate Islam. In practice, his thinking has the potential to serve as a guideline for religious education, public discourse, and socio-religious movements to build an inclusive, just, and humanistic society. In a nation facing the threat of radicalism, political polarization, and a moral crisis, Buya Syafii's intellectual legacy is relevant and urgent, requiring continued exploration and development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with library research as its primary method. The primary sources are Buya Syafii's major works — *Islam dalam Kerangka Keindonesiaan dan Kemanusiaan*, *Al-Qur'an*, *Realitas Sosial*, *dan Limbo Sejarah*, and *al-Qur'an untuk Tuhan atau untuk Manusia*—which were selected because they explicitly articulate his views on morality, nationalism, and humanity. In addition, his popular writings in the *Republika* "Resonansi" column were considered as they reflect his applied thought in response to contemporary issues. Secondary sources include scholarly books, journal articles, and studies on Buya Syafii's disciples, chosen based on their relevance to the themes of Islamic thought, morality, nationalism, and radicalism.

The data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical method combined with interpretive reading. The process involved (1) identifying Buya Syafii's core ideas from the primary texts; (2) interpreting them through a hermeneutical approach that relates textual meaning to socio-historical context; and (3) conducting a comparative analysis with other reformist Muslim thinkers to highlight the distinctive features of his thought. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation. This involved comparing (a) Buya Syafii's own writings, (b) interpretations by his disciples, and (c) independent scholarly evaluations. Such triangulation ensured that the reconstruction of his ideas was not dependent on a single perspective, but reflected a balanced and critical synthesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Construct of Buya Syafii's Understanding of Islam

The Islamic ideas brought by Buya Syafii were certainly not born in a vacuum. They are the result of a long dialectic between personal life experiences, the traditions of the organizations that shaped him, and interactions with the thoughts of prominent figures in modern Islam. His life journey, full of concerns from his

youth—the loss of his mother as a toddler, his father as a teenager, and the hard struggle to pursue his education until he earned his doctorate at McGill University formed a character that is steadfast, principled, and possesses a high moral sensitivity (Ghazali & Daulay, 2005). In addition to his life experiences, affiliations with the Islamic Students Association (HMI) and Muhammadiyah significantly shaped his intellectual outlook. Membership in HMI and Muhammadiyah Youth introduced him to the doctrines of Islamic modernism, although his popularity was not as great as that of Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur), who once led HMI nationally. Muhammadiyah, with its orientation toward progressive Islam, exerted the strongest influence. His two terms of leadership within Muhammadiyah demonstrate how this organization shaped his thinking and strengthened his ideas about a contextual, progressive, and morally grounded Islam.

Initially influenced by Mohammad Natsir and Masyumi's ideology, Buya Syafii's orientation shifted significantly after his intellectual encounter with Fazlur Rahman in Chicago (Mahendra, 1995). However, an intellectual encounter with Rahman in Chicago changed his orientation (Bashori, n.d.). Rahman emphasized a hermeneutic dialogue between text and context, and this approach greatly influenced Buya Syafii. Like Rahman, he rejected rigid legalism and mere symbolism, but differed in focus. Rahman offered a global methodological framework for the reformulation of Islamic law (Fauzi & Winarto, 2025), while Buya Syafii emphasized the implementation of Qur'anic moral values within the context of Indonesian nationality. This distinction demonstrates that Buya Syafii channeled his teacher's inspiration into a local horizon that emphasized the integration of morality, nationalism, and humanity.

Comparisons with his contemporaries highlight Buya Syafii's distinctive position. Cak Nur, for example, emphasized the dialogue between Islam and modernity, with his famous slogan "Islam Yes, Islamic Party No," rejecting the formalization of Islamic politics (Ahmad, 2021, pp. 2–3). Amien Rais positioned Islam as a transformative political force, emphasizing the idea of the ummah as the basis of political movements (Aji, 2023). Unlike both, Buya Syafii emphasized morality as the primary foundation of Islam. For Buya, political symbolism or modernization without ethics were insufficient to address the nation's crises. He proposed moral Islam—an Islam that blends with Indonesian nationalism and respects universal human values—as a middle ground in the face of radicalism and identity politics.

Besides Rahman, the influence of other great thinkers is also evident in his writings. He frequently quoted Muhammad Iqbal, both for his philosophical insights and for his affinity for poetic literary language. From Iqbal, he absorbed a spirit of renewal rooted in freedom and courage of thought (Huzaery, 2012; Maarif, 2019a, p. 5). In the context of politics and nationalism, Bung Hatta's ideas also greatly influenced his perspective, particularly Hatta's critique of "lipstick politics" versus

"salt politics," which he frequently repeated to emphasize the importance of politics oriented toward moral substance (Maarif, 1996, 2019b, 2021, pp. 28–30). All of these factors demonstrate how Buya Syafii engaged in dialogue with various sources to formulate his original ideas. Thus, Buya Syafii's thought occupies a unique position within the landscape of Indonesian Islamic thought: offering a model of moral Islam that integrates morality, nationalism, and humanity, while rejecting both empty symbolism and imported radicalism."

Buya Syafii's Moral-Ethical Approach to Understanding the Qur'an and Hadith

Many skewed assumptions have emerged from lay circles about Buya Syafii's "clericalism," especially after he defended Basuki Tjahya Purnama, also known as Ahok, in the alleged blasphemy case. Insults, insults, and curses have flown from those who have been described as "short-tempered" by Buya Syafii. These words have been circulating, especially online. Buya Syafii's Islamic credentials have also been questioned for siding with non-Muslims. This reality is certainly very sad and heartbreaking. Someone as pious and humble as Buya Syafii received "cruel" treatment precisely from their fellow believers. How is Buya Syafii less pious with his myriad of works? Is it because his religious expression does not wear a turban? Or because his forehead is not black? Or perhaps because he does not wear a robe and robe everywhere? We, or the majority of this community tend to not understand Buya Syafii. Let's not let our hatred due to differing opinions with Buya Syafii make us act unfairly in judging him.

After all, this principle is clearly stated in one of the verses of the Quran, Surah Al-Maidah verse 8, which emphasizes that "let not hatred for a group of people prevent us from being able to treat them fairly." This community must be educated rather than "easily" judging someone only based on their *zahiriyah*. It's true that Buya Syafii doesn't use religious symbols to express his religious beliefs. He doesn't wear a turban or robe, but that doesn't mean his "ulama" is less valuable than other clerics who are synonymous with turbans. Our paradigm regarding this standard of "ulama" needs to change. If we read all of Buya Syafii's works, we will discover how he used the Quran as a source of his thought. For Buya Syafii, the Quran has remained theoretically unchanged over a very long period of time, a revelation that must be followed. However, it should not stop there; the extent to which this revelation plays a role in regulating the behavior of Muslims is questionable. (Maarif 2022:19) .

In fact, almost all of Buya Syafii's conceptual-theoretical statements are based on the Quran. For example, when he explains whether the Quran was revealed for the benefit of God or humanity, his answer is clear and direct: "I (the Quran) came from God for the benefit of humanity." This illustration aligns with the meaning of Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 2. However, Buya Syafii's method differs from the principles of tafsir scholars, especially the classical ones. This is understandable, given his

background as a historian. It seems that for Buya Syafii, the Quran, as an ethical and moral foundation, must be understood in a fresher way, and its messages must address the fundamental problems of today's society. This methodology is also used by Fazlur Rahman in understanding the Quran. This means that Buya Syafii's method reflects the influence of his teacher's thinking. We can also see that in understanding the Quran, Buya Syafii tends to grasp its substance and then dialogue with existing issues. There, a dialogue occurs between the text and space and time. This dialogue then gives rise to progressive Islamic thought. In other words, Buya Syafii's goal is to directly address the "heart" of the Quran.

Meanwhile, to answer Buya Syafii's accusation of being a follower of the Sunnah denialism, it also needs to be refuted. However, before that, it is necessary to explain here what is meant by Sunnah denialism. In classical theory, Sunnah denialism is defined as a school of thought that rejects the existence of the Sunnah and its competence as a source of teachings second only to the Quran, which must be adhered to. Groups holding this understanding are divided into three: those *who* reject the Sunnah completely; those who reject the Sunnah *completely*; *those who reject the Sunnah* if it contradicts the Quran; and those who reject the Sunnah in its entirety. However, this movement disappeared after facing resistance from Imam Ash-Syafii (Yuslem 2001:132). In the modern era, the understanding of Sunnah denialism has resurfaced, especially among reformers identified with liberals. (Ammar 2017:168–69).

For the author, modern-day denial of the Sunnah is more synonymous with the term "*syibhu mungkiru sunnah*," or "resembling denial of the Sunnah." They reject the term denial of the Sunnah because, in their understanding of Islam, they still believe the Sunnah is the second source of Islamic teachings after the Quran. However, they often believe that the Sunnah in the modern era must be abandoned because it causes the community to become stagnant and backward. The Sunnah is considered archaic and outdated. Liberal Muslims' criticism of the Sunnah seems to be directed at orthodox and traditional religious expressions, which are preoccupied with displaying religious symbols such as turbans, beards, veils, and so on.

Based on the above classification, is it true that Buya Syafii can be categorized as one of them? Categorizing Buya Syafii as a Sunnah denier is problematic, as his consistent reference to the Qur'an and Sunnah within Muhammadiyah's framework indicates otherwise. His thoughts align with Muhammadiyah's slogan "return to the Quran and Sunnah." This means that Buya Syafii could not possibly ignore the Sunnah in practicing his religious teachings. In Buya Syafii's understanding, returning to the Quran and Sunnah means using them as sources of inspiration that give birth to intellectual spirit and so on. However, other groups view returning to it in a physical sense, namely becoming a human being fourteen centuries ago when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) lived.

This understanding often clashes with Buya Syafii's visionary views. For them to progress, they must emulate the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Unfortunately, they are mistaken; they imitate only the attributes that symbolize religion, not the spirit of Islam. These groups often consider themselves the most Islamic and become preoccupied with the afterlife. At a certain point, they will easily declare each other infidels. This is precisely the phenomenon that Buya Syafii is most concerned about. Furthermore, Buya Syafii himself was a devout and pious person. This devotion was witnessed directly by those closest to him. For example, the confession of Moh. Shofan and Abd. Rohman Ghazali, ideological children of Buya Syafii who now continue his *legacy* at the Maarif Institute, stated that Buya Syafii always made time to read the Quran (Gusnanda 2022) . Another confession, heard directly by the author from "Anak Panah" Buya Syafii, who now serves at Sumpur Kudus, that he diligently performs Tahajud prayers, fasts on Mondays and Thursdays, and performs prayers on time (Gusnanda 2022) .

Buya Syafii's daily life certainly illustrates his devotion to practicing the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. Hadith or sunnah in Buya Syafii's understanding are not merely symbols but more a matter of ethos and morality. Theoretically, this attitude is called *living hadith* , or bringing hadith to life in everyday life. Therefore, it is impossible for him to have the belief of denying the Sunnah, let alone *the belief of denying the Sunnah*. There's at least one compelling reason why Buya Syafii rarely cited hadith in his works. As a historian, he was very careful in understanding and evaluating past events. The Sunnah or hadith are part of past history verbalized in hadith books. The history of hadith differs from that of the Quran. The process of canonization of hadith occurred long after the Prophet Muhammad's death, allowing for historical errors due to ideological conflicts and interests. My analysis of Buya Syafii's infrequent citation of hadith suggests that this cautiousness stems from his lack of *interest* in hadith and its science.

Radicalism Maintaining Islam and Indonesianness Amidst the Threat of Radicalism

Buya Syafii's thoughts on Islam are not merely theoretical but also serve as a social critique of the rampant radicalism and identity politics in Indonesia. In his view, Islam is a religion that should bring blessings to all humanity. Therefore, any form of religious expression that leads to violence, discrimination, and dehumanization is considered a deviation from the true spirit of Islam. According to Buya Syafii, radicalism in the Indonesian context poses a serious threat to national unity. He calls the growing radical movements "imported junk" that is incompatible with the peaceful culture of Islam in the archipelago. On numerous occasions, Buya has emphasized that Islam understood solely through external symbols without a moral dimension actually breeds exclusivity and intolerance. Therefore, he strongly

rejects transnational ideologies that seek to replace the foundations of Indonesian nationhood.

Buya Syafii's distinctive thought is evident in his proposal for a moral Islam that aligns with Indonesian and humanitarian values. For him, morality is the strongest bulwark against the tide of radicalism. This critique also serves as a self-criticism for Indonesian Muslims, preventing them from getting caught up in identity euphoria and instead presenting an inclusive, just, and capable of strengthening the nation's social cohesion. Buya Syafii's understanding of the Quran and Sunnah is highly contextual, as discussed in the previous section. This understanding of Islam has faced challenges from radicals and fundamentalists. As a result, Buya Syafii's ideas often clash with "radical" groups in Indonesia. Essentially, Buya Syafii's Islamic ideas stem from his concern about the development of "Islamism" with its radical tendencies. If allowed to develop, this ideology will undoubtedly tarnish the sanctity of Islam itself as a religion blessed *with mercy for all the worlds*, and it is feared that it could destroy the nation's unity. Therefore, Buya Syafii has consistently played a role in stemming this radical tide, especially in the last decade, which has seen the strong influence of radicalism in the religious and political life of the Indonesian nation. (Maarif 2009:27).

Radicalism often destroys human values. Whatever the reason, whether it's for the sake of better change, "disappointment" with the ruling dictatorship, or upholding the truth, violence still violates human values. Throughout history, thousands, even millions of lives have been lost due to this radical-conservative spirit. It's clear that acts of violence are like a snowball, only giving birth to disaster after disaster for humans and humanity. In fact, radical actions in this world have made history. Karen Armstrong, author of *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism*, says one such event is the ethnic cleansing of Jews and Muslims from Europe in 1492 AD. They were faced with two choices: baptism or deportation. Those who opposed either option chose death. (Armstrong 2001:29–30).

This kind of action is certainly a form of radical movement that is cruel and ruthless. In recent developments, the issue of radicalism has been consistently identified with and associated with Islam. This *framing* stems from the fact that a number of terrorist acts are often driven by "radical" Islamic groups. This generalized justification must be rejected to avoid harming Muslims. In the Indonesian context, the government has attempted to stem the spread of radicalism. However, the deradicalization "project" appears to have been far from optimal and satisfactory. Karen Armstrong, as quoted earlier He stated that in the late twentieth century, a "militant piety" popularly known as "fundamentalism" emerged in every major religious tradition. Armstrong further asserted that these fundamentalists were willing to wage war and murder in the name of religion and sought to bring the "sacred" into the realm of politics and national struggle. (Armstrong 2001:15–16).

This phenomenon occurs almost everywhere in the world. A particularly heartbreaking recent fact is the massive massacre of Rohingya Muslims by the Myanmar military and Buddhist monks. This incident has actually occurred repeatedly, but to this day, no resolution has been found. It is ironic that Buddhism, which values human life so highly, even forbidding the killing of an ant, is actually so cruel to carry out massacres and oppression.

Not only in a global context, but the chaos of radicalism is also mushrooming in Indonesia. Radical acts disguised as religion frequently occur. Following the Thamrin bombing on January 12, 2016, a series of bomb attacks erupted again, including one on May 24, 2017, in Kampung Melayu, Jakarta. This attack killed five people and injured ten. (Elmi 2018) . Furthermore, the results of a Wahid Institute survey indicate that the potential for radicalism at the grassroots level is truly concerning. This survey, conducted on 1,520 respondents using a *multi-stage random sampling method* , concluded that 11 million people are willing or ready to commit radical acts. This is quite surprising data and facts, indicating that radicalism is haunting the integrity of this country (Son 2017) .

It must be acknowledged that Islamic radicalism and radical groups in Indonesia emerged from networks originating in the Middle East. This is perhaps why Buya Syafii criticized them, calling them imported junk. At a National Symposium on Dissecting the 1965 Tragedy in Jakarta on April 18, 2016, he stated, "*This is junk imported here by a defeated region. Unfortunately, this civilizational filth is exploited by corrupt politicians. They believe in the 'Theology of Death,' they don't dare to live, they are truly a group of despair.*" Buya Syafii fully understands the dangers of radicalism to the integrity of this nation and state. This awareness is clearly evident in his statement above. For Buya Syafii, the perpetrators of this radicalism are immoral. They only use religion as justification to achieve their goals. Unfortunately, the stakeholders in this country are no less "savage" than these perpetrators of radicalism. They instead use this radical ideology as a political tool. For both groups, Islam is often used as a justification for flawed and immoral political behavior. (Maarif 2009:26–27) .

As previously mentioned, Zuly Qodir in a study said that the embryo of the emergence and development of movements such as transnational Islam is estimated to have occurred since the collapse of the New Order era. (Qodir 2014:8) In fact, many variants of Islam have developed in Indonesia since the New Order era, from radical to liberal. Both have certainly influenced the socio-religious and political life of the Indonesian nation because they operate from different perspectives. Amidst the onslaught of imported ideologies and beliefs that influence the religious life of Indonesian society, Buya Syafii seems to be trying to act as a shield against their spread. Or at least, its influence on the life of the nation and state in this country has been somewhat reduced. For some, Buya Syafii's understanding of Islam is

considered erroneous and even heretical. This is especially true since he crossed paths with the majority of the community in the BSP alias Ahok case when interpreting verse 51 of Surah Al-Maidah. This claim of heresy seems excessive because it is driven by emotion and anger. It is precisely for this reason that Buya Syafii is right to say in one of his books that we too often blame others but rarely blame ourselves. (*"I have repeatedly said that Muslims should not only be good at pointing their fingers at others, but should more often point those fingers at themselves"*).

Moral Islam: The Distinction of Buya Syafii's Thought

In several simple interviews the author conducted with several academics at an Islamic university in West Sumatra regarding their views on Buya Syafii's Islamic ideas, most expressed hurt by his remarks. A similar sentiment can be observed online, with its torrent of insults directed at the founding father of the nation, particularly regarding his defense of Ahok, also known as Basuki Tjahaya Purnama, in the 2016 blasphemy case. From the comments, it can be concluded that many people felt hurt and hurt when hearing Buya Syafii's views and stance on tolerance and pluralism. Before continuing on with the main ideas brought by Buya Syafii, I would like to reiterate that he was a reformist scholar whose knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence is unquestionable. If anyone still disagrees with this conclusion, I suggest they reread Buya Syafii's thoughts in his books. I especially extend this advice to his own village, the people of West Sumatra. To this day, some among them still doubt Buya Syafii's character and scholarly credentials.

Regarding the main ideas promoted by Buya Syafii, they encompass three aspects: Islam, Indonesianness, and Humanity. In Buya Syafii's view, the relationship between these three aspects must be integrated into one. (Maarif 2009:26) . This big idea is also seen from the introduction to the interpretation published by the Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council which published *the Thematic Interpretation of the Qur'an on Social Relations Between Religious Communities* in 2000. At that time, Buya Syafii served as the general chairman of PP Muhammadiyah, in the interpretation, Buya Syafii gave an introduction, one part of which stated (Buya Syafii on the Qur'an and Interpretation - Suara Muhammadiyah nd) :

"In our diverse society and nation, the publication of this commentary is expected to mature us as religious communities, enabling us to remain a united nation and equal human beings. Religious differences and diversity are a reality that should not be regretted. The diversity of religions embraced by the people of this country allows for mutual understanding and cooperation for good. We must not allow religious differences and diversity to become a trigger for conflict."

This introduction illustrates how Islamic values should align with Indonesianness and humanity. For a Muslim living in Indonesia, Islam, Indonesianness, and humanity are inseparable. His comprehensive understanding of these three main aspects can be found in his book, " *Islam in the Framework of Indonesianness and Humanity.*" The important message in this book is that, as the

majority population in this country, Muslims should no longer be preoccupied with questions about Islam, Indonesianness, and humanity. Once again, these three concepts must be integrated into one, so that the Islam presented is friendly, open, and inclusive, capable of providing solutions to the major problems facing the nation and state (Maarif 2009:15) .

The three basic concepts mentioned by Buya Syafii later became *the platform* for building national unity. This formulation can be classified into three main points: *Islamic brotherhood* , *national brotherhood* , and *human brotherhood*. It is hoped that this concept of Islam will bring universal values, accommodate local cultures and wisdom, and position all people equally and justly. The next question is, what kind of Islamic teachings can harmonize with Indonesianness and humanity? Buya Syafii then answers in his book with an Islam that is dynamic and friendly to our diverse cultural, subcultural, and religious environments. An Islam that provides justice, comfort, security, and protection to all who live in the archipelago. Furthermore, he calls it an Islam that fully sides with the poor, even though its teachings are strongly anti-poverty, to the point that poverty has been successfully driven to the farthest reaches of this archipelagic nation. (Maarif 2009:15) .

From Buya Syafii's answer, I tried to grasp the substantive message: an Islam that can blend with Indonesianness and humanity is an Islam that emphasizes ethics and morality. This appears to be the focal point of Islamic teachings as understood by Buya Syafii, as he frequently repeats the terms "ethics" and "morals" in much of his writing. For ease of reference, I will refer to them as Ahmad Syafii Maarif's Moral Islam and Ethical Islam. Buya Syafii's Islamism was born from efforts to make the Koran a guide and moral *source* (Suaedi and Antoni 2009:262–63) . The ultimate goal is to realize justice and goodness. Therefore, in the context of Indonesian life, the Qur'an, in Buya Syafii's view, must be contextualized, not the other way around, accepted as is without critical reflection (Maarif 1985:2–7) . The reading of Buya Syafii's Islamism, as mentioned earlier, cannot be separated from the influence of Fazlur Rahman. This effort to position the Quran as a source of values can also be found in Rahman's thinking. According to him, the Quran's teachings are based on morality, emphasizing monotheism and social justice (Rahman 1992:49) .

Buya Syafii's great concern for morality is very easy to read and find in his ideas. It can be concluded that for Buya Syafii, the source of all problems of the people and nation is the issue of morality. He often made this statement. For example, Buya Syafii said that politics without a clear and definite moral reference will only lead to one estuary: betrayal of the entire spirit of Islam in the life of society, nation, and state (Maarif 1996:37) . Buya Syafii emphasized that morality alone is not enough; consistency is necessary. For him, a consistent moral attitude is a reflection of integrity. In other words, he stated, "Doing good is easy, but what is difficult is consistently doing good." At this point, Buya Syafii's understanding of Islam is clear. He aims to make Islam not only in the heavens but truly down to earth. The Islam in

question is a teaching about morality. This teaching, which emphasizes moral issues, is able to coexist with Indonesianness and humanity. This means that a Muslim should not stop at being amazed and proud of his religion, but he must translate the teachings of his religion from the Almighty Good into his daily life. He should not only provide *mercy* to his fellow believers but also to his fellow countrymen, and to all humans and other creatures of God, without distinction of religion, ethnicity, nation, or culture. Buya Syafii is certainly one of the few who has proven and practiced this.

Continuing the Legacy of Buya Syafii's Islamic Thought

The intellectual legacy of Ahmad Syafii Maarif constitutes one of the most important contributions to the development of contemporary Indonesian Islam. His thoughts did not remain the individual reflections of an intellectual, but developed into a collective inspiration that continues to be explored and actualized by students, academics, and the wider community. In his works, Buya Syafii emphasized that Islam must be understood as a moral force that integrates religious teachings with a spirit of nationalism and universal humanitarian values (Maarif, 2009, p. 15). With this framework, he sought to avoid the trap of symbolic formalism and the politicization of religion that often obscure the essence of Islam. He even wrote, "Islam loses its meaning when used to justify the lust for power, because the essence of Islam is morality that elevates human dignity (Maarif, 2009, p. 22). His thinking presents Islam as a source of public ethics relevant to building a just, democratic, and inclusive nation.

Continuing Buya Syafii's intellectual legacy means reintroducing his ideas in three main areas. First, in education, the concept of "moral Islam" that he formulated can be integrated into the curriculum and pedagogical practices. Islamic education, he argued, must produce a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also imbued with integrity, concern for others, and social responsibility. He warned that "this nation will collapse not because of a lack of legal or economic experts, but because it has lost its moral foundation (Maarif, 2009, pp. 26–27). If this principle is used as the basis of the curriculum, Islamic education can produce people who are faithful and contribute to social justice.

Second, in the realm of public discourse, Buya Syafii's thoughts need to be continually revived as a reference for religious moderation. He consistently rejected forms of Islamic expression that stop at outward symbols, such as clothing or political slogans, without ethical substance. For him, "it is better for Indonesia to be filled with moral people than with soulless religious symbols (Maarif, 1985, p. 5). His critique of transnational radicalism—which he called an "imported commodity" incompatible with Indonesian Islamic tradition—is highly relevant amidst the strong currents of global ideology. Continuing this legacy means keeping Indonesian Islam rooted in local traditions that are welcoming, open, and inclusive.

Third, at the socio-political level, Buya Syafii's legacy can serve as a normative foundation in formulating public policy and strengthening civil society. He emphasized that "politics without morality is merely a tool for domination, not for service (Maarif, 2018, p. 37). Thus, his thinking can serve as a reference for political elites in building clean and just governance, as well as an inspiration for civil society in strengthening social solidarity across religions and cultures. His ideas do not reject politics, but rather position it as a moral means to achieve justice and humanity.

When compared to other figures, Buya Syafii's distinction becomes increasingly clear. Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur) emphasized the importance of modernity and freedom of thought, with the slogan "Islam Yes, Islamic Party No" as a critique of the formalization of Islamic politics (Putra, 2014). Amien Rais, on the other hand, saw Islam as a transformative political force that must be present in the arena of power, primarily through the idea of the ummah. Buya Syafii took a different path: he did not reject modernity like Cak Nur, nor did he encourage the politicization of Islam like Amien Rais. Instead, he prioritized morality as the primary foundation, which was then combined with nationalism and universal humanity. With this position, Buya Syafii presented a unique framework of "moral Islam" within the treasury of modern Indonesian Islamic thought.

Theoretically, the continuation of Buya Syafii's thought adds to the treasury of Indonesian Islamic studies by offering a new perspective: an Islam based on public morality. This perspective enriches the discourse previously dominated by Islamic politics and theological modernization. Practically, this legacy can be translated into concrete programs. First, in education, Buya's ideas can inspire a character-based curriculum that integrates morals with knowledge. Second, in public discourse, the principles of "moral Islam" can serve as a foundation for campaigns for religious moderation and counter-narratives of radicalism. Third, in political policy, Buya's thoughts can serve as a basis for formulating policies that emphasize social justice, eradicate corruption, and protect vulnerable groups.

Thus, continuing Buya Syafii's legacy means not merely remembering the historical figure, but bringing his ideas to life in social practice, education, and policy. The Islam he envisioned is one rooted in Quranic morality, integrated with national identity, and committed to universal humanity. This legacy should be preserved, studied, and implemented to address the nation's challenges in the contemporary era.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the thought of Ahmad Syafii Maarif presents an important distinction in contemporary Indonesian Islamic discourse. By making morality the primary foundation, Buya Syafii successfully integrated Islam with national identity and universal humanitarian values. This distinguishes his position

from other figures who emphasize theological modernity or the politicization of Islam. Through his "moral Islam" approach, he offers a conceptual framework that not only enriches the study of Indonesian Islam academically but also makes practical contributions to strengthening religious moderation, character education, and just socio-political governance.

The contribution of this research lies in its systematic effort to map Buya Syafii's thought from primary texts and compare it with that of other figures. Thus, this research opens up space for the development of Indonesian Islamic studies that focus more on the dimensions of public morality, rather than solely on political or symbolic aspects. The results of this study are expected to serve as an academic reference in enriching the study of moderate Islam in Indonesia while also providing practical direction for the public and policymakers.

However, this research is still limited to textual analysis and conceptual comparison. Therefore, further research can be directed at two areas. First, an empirical study of the extent to which Buya Syafii's ideas have been implemented in Islamic education, religious organizations, and public policy. Second, broader comparative research, for example, with the thoughts of Islamic figures from Southeast Asia or other parts of the Muslim world, to examine the relevance and position of Buya Syafii's thoughts in a global context. This approach will ensure that Buya Syafii's intellectual legacy will not only be remembered but will also continue to contribute to the development of an inclusive and humanistic Islamic discourse.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmad, P. (2021). *Setelah Pluralisme, Apalagi?: Membaca Cak Nur setelah 15 Tahun Kepergiannya*. Mengeja Books.
- Aji, M. P. (2023). Analisis Dinamika Pemikiran Amien Rais Tentang Konsepsi Islam dan Politik. *Syntax Idea*, 5(10), 1754–1764.
- Ammar, W. M. (2017). Ulumul Hadis I. *Umsida Press*, 1–227.
- Amstrong, K. (2001). *The Battle of God; A History of Fundamentalism*. Mizan.
- Arifin, S., Abdeljelil, M. B., Mu'ammam, M. A., & Yusuf, M. (2023). The Ethical-Dialectic Relationship of Islam and Indonesia: Reviewing Ahmad Syafii Maarif's Thought. *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 13(1), 32–58.
- Bashori, K. (n.d.). *Pejuang dan Pembelajar yang Merdeka*. Retrieved August 19, 2025, from <https://mediaindonesia.com/opini/495649/pejuang-dan-pembelajar-yang-merdeka>
- Buya Syafii tentang Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir—Suara Muhammadiyah. (n.d.). Retrieved August 19, 2025, from <https://web.suaramuhammadiyah.id/2021/05/31/buya-syafii-tentang-al-quran-dan-tafsir/>
- Darmawan, R., & Nugroho, W. B. (2025). Pendidikan Moderasi Beragama: Kontribusi pemikiran Islam dan Kebangsaan Ahmad Syafii Maarif. *Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Kemuhammadiyah* (JASIKA), 5(1), 54–70.
- Elmi, N. (2018). *Radikalisme dalam Bingkai Media (Pemberitaan SKH Kompas dan SKH Republika Mengenai Bom Bunuh Diri Kampung Melayu dan Persekusi)*.

- Faujiah, E. (2023). *Biografi dan pemikiran kebangsaan Ahmad Syafii Maarif di Indonesia tahun 1998-2021*.
- Fauzi, M., & Winarto, T. (2025). PEMIKIRAN PENDIDIKAN PROGRESIF DALAM PERSPEKTIF FAZLUR RAHMAN. *Al-Ibrah: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Keilmuan Islam*, 10(1), 88–104.
- Ghazali, A., & Daulay, S. (2005). *Refleksi 70 Tahun Ahmad Syafii Maarif Cermin Untuk Semua*. Jakarta: Maarif Institute.
- Gusnanda. (2022). *SKK-ASM Angakatan IV* (No. Pembukaan SKK-ASM Angakatan IV). Ma'arif Institute.
- Haliyah, L. (2009). *Dinamika pemikiran politik Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif: Tinjauan terhadap idiologi negara*.
- Huda, K., Aulia, A. S., Syafitri, D., & Nujula, F. (2025). Dynamics of Islamic Political Thought in Indonesia. *PKM-P*, 9(1), 68–72.
- Huzaery, H. (2012). *Relasi antara Islam dan Negara (Studi Kritis atas Pemikiran Politik Islam Ahmad Syafii Maarif dalam Perspektif Ulama Al-Salaf Al-Shalih)*.
- Maarif, A. S. (1985). *Al-Quran, Realitas Sosial dan Limbo Sejarah (Sebuah Refleksi)*. Pustaka.
- Maarif, A. S. (1996). *Islam dan Politik: Teori Belah Bambu, Masa Demokrasi Terpimpin, 1959-1965*. Gema Insani.
- Maarif, A. S. (2009). *Islam dalam bingkai keindonesiaan dan kemanusiaan: Sebuah refleksi sejarah*. PT Mizan Publika.
- Maarif, A. S. (2018). *Islam & Politik*. IRCiSoD.
- Maarif, A. S. (2019a). *Membumikan Islam*. IRCiSoD.
- Maarif, A. S. (2019b). *Mencari Autensitas dalam Dinamika Zaman*. IRCiSoD.
- Maarif, A. S. (2021). *Percaturan Islam dan Politik*. IRCiSoD.
- Maarif, A. S. (2022). *Al-Quran untuk Tuhan atau untuk Manusia*. Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah.
- Mahendra, Y. I. (1995). Combining Activism and Intellectualism: The Biography of Mohammad Natsir (1908-1993). *Studia Islamika*, 2(1).
- Putra, A. (2014). Potret Intelektual Muslim: Sebuah Tinjauan Sosiologi Pengetahuan terhadap Pemikiran Ahmad Syafii Maarif. *MASYARAKAT: Jurnal Sosiologi*, 18(1), 54–80.
- Putra, A. (2017). Survei Wahid Institute: 11 Juta Orang Mau Bertindak Radikal. *Retrieved*, 12(10), 2019.
- Qodir, Z. (2014). *Radikalisme agama di Indonesia*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Rahman, F. (1992). *Islam* (S. Saleh, Trans.). PT. bumi Aksara.
- Riki, S., Rido, P., & Endrika, W. P. (2021). Moderasi Islam ahmad syafii maarif (Kontribusinya terhadap pluralitas agama di indonesia). *Fikrah: Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah Dan Studi Keagamaan*, 9(1), 63–84.
- Sa, M. (2019). Ibu Kemanusiaan: Pemikiran Ahmad Syafii Maarif Dan Kontribusinya Terhadap Kajian Feminisme Islam. *Merawat Pemikiran Buya Syafii*, 318.
- Saputra, D. A. (2019). *KEBIJAKAN AHMAD SYAFII MAARIF DALAM MEMIMPIN MUHAMMADIYAH (1998-2005)*.
- Sholikin, A. (2013). *Pemikiran Politik Negara Dan Agama "Ahmad Syafii Maarif"*. Universitas Airlangga.

- Silaen, P. A., Huda, K., Berutu, L. A. K., & Albani, M. (2024). Modernisasi dan Sekularisasi Pemikiran Islam di Indonesia. *Metta: Jurnal Ilmu Multidisiplin*, 4(2), 92–105.
- Suaedi, A., & Antoni, R. J. (2009). Para Pembaharu Pemikiran dan Gerakan Islam Asia Tenggara. *Jakarta: Seamus*.
- Yuslem, N. (2001). *Ulumul hadis*. Mutiara Sumber Widya.
- Zarkasyi, H. F., Shalahuddin, H., Armayanto, H., & Hamat, M. F. (2023). Impact of Postmodernism on the Thought of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (IMIs). *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 13(2), 29–47.