Reflection on the Significance and Contextuality of Traditional Muslim Methodology

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Abstract – *Generally, modern Muslims' writings are overshadowed with mainstream Western ideas even on such basic things as methodology, simultaneously ignoring established traditional Muslim methodology. This Muslim methodology is established in pre-modern time when the golden era of Muslim intellectualism is at its pinnacle, witnessing Muslim intellectuals coming into being with their works penetrating many fields. Of the pillars underpinning their methodology are its significance (dalālah) and contextuality (siyāq) interesting for an investigation in order to assert the relevancy of the methodology in the modern mainstream.* **Copyright © 2016 Penerbit Akademia Baru - All rights reserved.**

Keywords: modern Muslims' writings, traditional Muslim methodology, Western ideas, significance (*dalālah*) and contextuality (*siyāq*)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The main concern in this writing is whether pure traditional Muslim methodology where its parameter is not clumsily merged with modern parameter is still relevant or simply put whether it should be replaced with other mainstream modern methodology. This question is raised here because an intense Islamic perspective is essentially pinned on its inherited agreed knowledge tradition of *tawhid, shariah* and *akhlak,* and embedded in its distinctive virtues. This makes such studies as children's rights and voices in legal proceedings [1] and Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal's thought on attributes of Allah [2] which are put in general parameter questionable of their reliability and accuracy though to some extent they may be correct.

The reliability and accuracy of an intense Islamic writing is the main concern in Islam and it can be reached when the writing complies with Islamic methodology in terms of parameter and its composition (such as terminologies) as has been historically shown in the Muslim intellectual achievement which is expanded on its distinguished tradition of knowledge and virtues. Seeing that various modern thinking parameters have dominated the mainstream, marginalising Islamic methodology, some Muslim scholars' reviews on traditional Islamic methodology [3] are seen as an awkward attempt to break into the mainstream. This is because the reviewed traditional methodology is still considered to be secluded when it does not cross over to the territory of empirical, material view based modern methodology in order to be seen contextually relevant. This could block common researchers inexperienced but interested in the Islamic perspective from finding a methodology within Islamic parameter but still connected to modern research territory. Consequently, the researchers are confused about their intended highly Islamic perspective and their actual practice of borrowing and pasting strange

words or terminologies which are inaccurate to represent Islam, as was suggested in the work of a Muslim methodological critic [4] when dealing with intense Islamic thought.

Most essentially, conformity must be discernable in the matching between claimed methodology and its practised tool for example accurate terminologies to show that the methodology is operationalized. This hardly happens when the secluded Islamic methodology is awkwardly applied in modern context without observing its true parameter and composition. Thus, this article is to show that traditional Muslim methodology should be reviewed and explained in conformity with modern intellectual methodological needs without distancing virtue based Islamic methodology. In this regard, it intends to prove that the methodology moulded with Islamic characteristics is relevant provided its essential part, i.e. significance (*dalālah*) and contextuality (*siāq*) is correctly understood and accordingly observed [5].

2.0 TRADITIONAL MUSLIM METHODOLOGY

2.1 Methodological Considerations

The most important proof for the relevance of traditional Muslim methodology lies in the realm of the traditional Muslim works per se, i.e. the coherent factors spurring the acceptance of the works across the borders of their origin, the classical Arab World. Of the factors suitable to be mentioned here are as follows: firm Revealed knowledge source; common conviction in the Revealed knowledge; practical solutions in the Revealed knowledge; and language beauties in the Revealed knowledge. These factors then become the basis or important considerations for the Muslims' methodological parameter and composition.

2.1.1 Integral thought

Basically, the independent traditional Muslim civilisation relies on its internal factors as previously mentioned, Revealed knowledge, common conviction, practical solutions and language added values for the basis of its intellectual methodology consideration. As for Revealed knowledge, it has dual functions, one as briefly established knowledge stated and prescribed in the Qur'an and Hadith in the form of precise and substantive information, religious principles and so on. At the same time, it acts as the source for other non-Revealed knowledge, in terms of supplying with various types of information and simultaneously as the belief, *syariah* and morality guideline or as the code for intellectual activities.

Conviction is essential in the Muslims' life and it is inspired directly from *akidah* or creed as found in Revealed knowledge, and that *akidah* is not bound to the restricted understanding of the belief in Islamic teachings and all tenets of Islamic belief. Rather, it represents an entire system of belief that ensures what comes in is correct and fulfilling the requirements of Islam. What goes against these requirements is rejected or filtered for the safest or most suitable to the requirements, this also indicates that Revealed knowledge in the Qur'an, as the source of *akidah, syariah* and *akhlak* fundamentals is part of the Muslims' conviction.

Likewise, practical solutions lie in Revealed knowledge, and the practical solutions may be direct in it but they may also be hidden – but discernable – in the Qur'an and Hadith messages. This is practical as Islamic teachings basically come together with moral stories as can be found in the Qur'an. For instance, the stories of great Muslim figures can be contrasted with the stories of most aggressors, arrogant peoples and so on, both types of the stories are mentioned in the

Qur'an and Hadith. Besides, there are general and beneficial conceptions or suggestions, for instance, *uswah hasah* (leading role model) concept, Qur'anic *hikmah* (wisdom) and so on [6].

Finally, on the question of language added values, it is also found in Revealed knowledge. It is historically proven that the language of the Qur'an contributes to the invention of new dimensions of thoughtful and intellectual expressions and meanings when the worldview of the Arabs then is limited to desert experiences such as barrenness, nomad life, tribal rivalry and so on. The Qur'an has opened the Arab minds as it consolidates Arabic and transforms it into regional and interregional language [7].
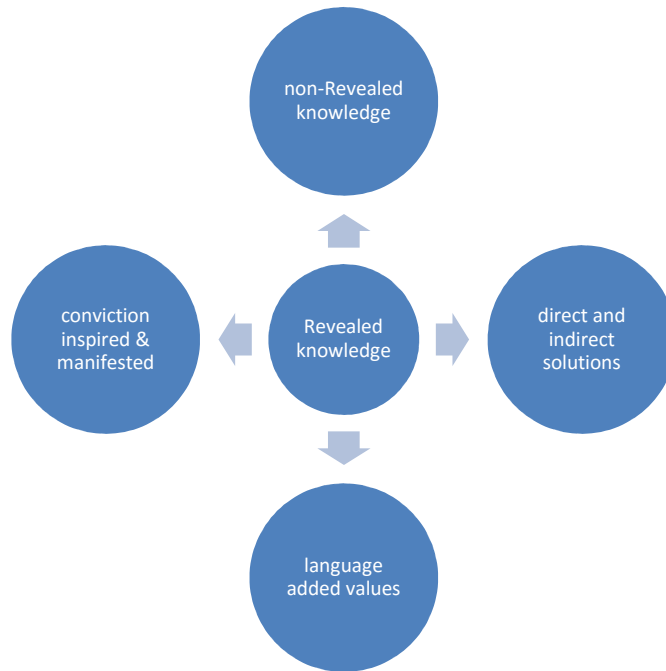
2.1.2 Reverence of tradition

The discussion of Revealed knowledge as an independent entity and also as the essential source for solid conviction; non-Revealed knowledge; direct and indirect solutions; and language added values points to another definitive thing, i.e. a harmonious Muslim thought and intellectualism in consistence with Islam. Also, this fact proves that there is a tradition of intellectualism being observed and revered throughout generations of traditional Muslim scholars.

Specifically concerning the reverence of the Muslim tradition, it is important to note that the tradition originates from Islam and it is defined with knowledge related to Revelation (*wahy*); and that it is central in classical Muslim considerations, and its centrality means there should be its clear boundary importantly to be observed. This is proven in the relationship between the Qur'an and Hadith, the former is ultimate reference while the latter is explanatory to the former. Thus, the following discussion is an expansion on the Qur'an and Hadith relationship, i.e. underlying levels of the authority of direct and indirect Islamic sources.

What is meant by direct Islamic sources here is the Qur'an and Hadith while indirect Islamic sources are related to the historical and exemplar manifestations observing the Qur'an and Hadith, and testifying them as the main sources of Islam as well as Islamic knowledge. What is so important of the early Muslim history is that it is the space for the presence and

functionality of the main Islamic sources. Simultaneously, its history acts as the historiographical standard of truth. Otherwise, what is so important about the exemplar is its models or characters representing the essence of Islamic teachings, messages or virtues.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The fact that traditional Islamic methodology is revered among traditional Muslim scholars attests to the solidity and relevancy of the methodology across periods of time. The durability of the methodology should be attributed to its underlying *significance* (*dalālah*) and *contextuality* (*siyāq*) qualities, withstanding and surpassing two big non-Islamic traditions, Hellenistic and Persian [8].
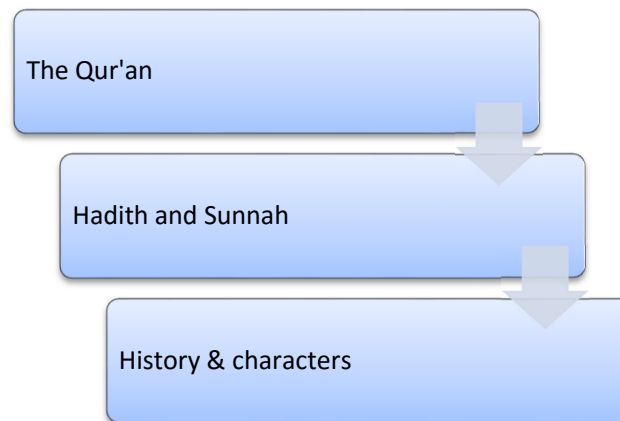
Significance is proven as part of the essence of the traditional methodology as the word *dalālah* is of the same root word *dall* (to show) with *dalīl* (evidence). This is testified through the integrity of Islamic knowledge, as can be seen in the core Islamic knowledge, as in the Qur'an and Hadith being transmitted or inherited without corruption, through generations of traditional scholars the Companions (*Sahabah*), The Followers (*Tabi`in*) and The Subsequent Followers (*Tab`i al-tabi`in*). The uncorrupted core Islamic knowledge is then explained within harmonious interpretation (*tafsir*) and elaborated in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) with conscious responsibility in observing the boundaries of Islamic creed, law and morality fundamentals.

As for the contextuality, basically it is about the context of the Qur'anic *dalīl* or evidence as *sabab al-nuzul* or the cause for Revelation, *i`jaz* or Inimitability [9] especially in terms of words selection and meanings, and also about the context of Hadith which is *sabab al-wurud* the cause for a Hadith being said. The most important thing about the contextuality of both Islamic sources is its implication because the presence of a Qur'anic or Hadith evidence is not totally independent, it is still tied to the thorough truth of the whole Qur'an or other related Hadiths. Specifically, about the Qur'an entirety, it is supported with the requirement of *sabab al-nuzul, i`jaz,* and other jurists and exegetes' arguments also drawn from the Qur'an. As for the Hadith, basically, it is related to the questions of Sahabah and also of the disbelievers, as well as certain observations on behalf of the Prophet SAW making a Hadith necessarily being said. In short a Hadith is not produced without any reasonable judgement or just for the personal excitement of the Prophet SAW.

To conclude, an ayat, Qur'anic verse, or Hadith, or generally known as evidence has its boundaries of truth and reasonability that can be taken as benefit, *huda*, or in the context of this

article, the code for academic methodology. Certainly, the boundaries are related to what has been discussed above.

Table 1: Levels of authority for significance and contextuality

Levels of authority for Significance	Description	Levels of authority for Contextuality	Description
The Qur'an significance	Fundamental	The Qur'an contextuality	Fundamental
The Hadith significance	fundamental, explanatory and tied to the Qur'an significance (in case of weakness in Hadith)	The Hadith contextuality	Fundamental, Explanatory & tied to the Qur'an contextuality
The Sunnah (tradition) Sigficance	Fundamental Complement to the Qur'an significance and the Hadith significance	The Sunnah (tradition) contextuality	Fundamental Complement to the Qur'an contextuality and Hadith contextuality

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is proven that both significance and contextuality are part of the essence of Traditional Muslim methodology which is crucial in the past as well as for the present consideration. To ignore the significance and contextuality is to ignore the whole methodology, thus unconsciously decreasing and even possibly denying the truth and reasonability of Islamic knowledge. Hence, the need of a proper methodology based on the significance and contextuality rooted in the past Muslim traditionalism which is correctly understood and rightly observed.

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