



SAYYID QUTHB'S THOUGHT ON CHARACTERISTICS OF IDEAL LEADER IN AL QUR'AN

(A Study in Tafsîr fî Zhilâl al-Qur'ân)

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Abstract: Every country or region desires to be led by a qualified person. However, not all countries or regions are able to get it. In addition to limited human resources, the debate about the criteria of the ideal leader is still unfinished. This research emphasizes more on subjective assessment, namely the characteristics of ideal leaders according to Sayyid Quthb in *Tafsîr fî Zhilâl al-Qur'ân*. This research uses library research. The data collection method used is the documentation method, while the analysis method used is the *maudhû'i* method commonly known as thematic studies. The results of this study indicate that some of the characteristics of ideal leaders according to Sayyid Quthb are honest, trustworthy, fair, professional, and like to deliberate.

Keywords: Leader, Ideal, *Tafsîr*, Sayyid Quthb

Abstrak: Setiap negara atau wilayah ingin dipimpin oleh orang yang berkualitas. Namun, tidak semua negara atau wilayah bisa mendapatkannya. Selain keterbatasan sumber daya manusia, perdebatan mengenai kriteria pemimpin ideal masih belum selesai. Penelitian ini lebih menekankan pada penilaian subjektif, yaitu karakteristik pemimpin ideal menurut Sayyid Quthb dalam *Tafsîr fî Zhilâl al-Qur'ân*. Penelitian ini menggunakan library research. Metode pengumpulan data yang digunakan adalah metode dokumentasi, sedangkan metode analisis yang digunakan adalah metode *maudhû'i* yang biasa dikenal dengan kajian tematik. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa beberapa karakteristik pemimpin ideal menurut Sayyid Quthb adalah jujur, dapat dipercaya, adil, profesional, dan suka bermusyawarah.

Kata kunci: Pemimpin, Ideal, Tafsir, Sayyid Quthb

INTRODUCTION

A leader has a great influence on his community or nation. Policies taken by a leader can have an impact on a community. If led by a good leader, then the region or country can experience the benefits of the policies implemented. Conversely, if led by

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an authoritarian figure, then a region or country will find it difficult to achieve prosperity. Therefore, it is difficult to separate a leader's policies from the state of a region that led.³

A good leader will start his leadership by leading himself in a good way. This will have an impact on leadership in a wider area, such as family to country. There are two terms associated with leaders, namely formal and informal leaders. Informal leaders tend to lead in the area of self and family, while formal leaders tend to lead in a wider area and involve higher legal aspects, such as regents, governors, and presidents.

The success of a leader is often reflected in his ability to lead in small things. For example, a good president or governor is usually also able to lead his household well. Some studies indicate that the success of a leader is influenced by his ability to lead small things, such as the head of the household and similar things.⁴

Qualified leaders will usually be very influential in the society they lead. From a sociological perspective, leadership emerges and develops in society as a logical consequence of the development of society itself. Therefore, the main function of the emergence and development of leadership is to maintain, develop and transfer traditions from one generation to the next. In this context, qualified leaders are essential in advancing, transforming, and developing social and cultural systems in a community.⁵

RESEARCH METHOD

This research applies the literature review method. Data sources are obtained from books, documents, journals, and the like. This method is usually used by researchers to conduct research where the data collected is descriptive, which is then processed and analyzed so that it becomes a unified whole.

³ Rifyah Kakbah, *Politik dan Hukum Dalam al-Qur'an*, (Jakarta: Khairul Bayan, 2005), page. 69

⁴ Ibid page. 70

⁵ Berliana Kertakusumah, *Pemimpin Adiluhung Genealogi Kepemimpinan Kontemporer*, (Jakarta: Mizan Publika, 2006), page. 9

In addition, in producing conclusions, this study also applies historical studies to the object under study, especially the socio-historical conditions of Egyptian life and government during Sayyid Quthb's lifetime. It aims to find out some of the factors behind Sayyid Quthb's thinking in determining the criteria or characteristics of a leader.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of Leadership

Franklin Haiman in his book entitled *Leadership and Democratic Action* describes leadership as an attempt to influence someone to achieve certain goals. Some academics also view leadership as the art or process of persuading others to achieve goals. Thus, a leader acts as a source of inspiration and controls the behavior of others to achieve a goal.⁶

Abu Hamid Al Ghazali, an Islamic intellectual, stated that leadership is essentially an attempt to exert influence. This suggests that a leader must have the ability to exert significant influence in his society or community. If someone is not able to influence his people, then he cannot be called a leader. Therefore, a leader must have extensive knowledge about religion, have good morals, and have a positive personality. With these characteristics, a leader is considered to be able to easily influence his people.⁷

The main task of a leader is to provide benefits and goodness to the people in the organization they lead. They must be able to create opportunities and innovate to create new things. To achieve this goal, a leader needs initiative, creativity, and dynamic thinking. It should be noted that the role of a leader is different from that of a manager. While a manager must be responsive to changing times, a leader must be more proactive, visionary, and innovative.⁸

⁶ Franklin S. Haiman, *Leadership, and Democratic Action*, (Houghton Press: tt, 1951), page. 228.

⁷ Imam Al Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, Beirut: Dar Kutub al-Ilmiyah, t.t., page. 295.

⁸ M. Quraish Shihab, *Menabur Pesan Ilahi*, (Bandung: Mizan, 2006), page. 381

Scholars have conducted many studies on leadership. In these studies, there are many theories and intellectual thoughts related to leaders. In the last 40-70 years, 3000 titles of research reports were recorded and 350 of them were related to theories about leadership.⁹

The mention of leaders in the Qur'an usually uses several words or terms, such as *khalîfah*, *imâmah*, *ulî al-amr*, *auliya*, *malik*, and *sulthân*, each of which has a different definition depending on who gives the definition. For example, Ibn *Manzuri* in *Lisân al-Arabi* defines the word *imâm* as someone who is followed by a group of people, both in good and bad. The word *ulî al-amr*, linguistically can be interpreted as a person who has something to do, whether it is used in a good or bad way (authoritarian). However, these terms contain the same meaning, namely the leader.¹⁰

Sayyid Quthb's Profile

In a city called Asyut, Egypt, Sayyid Quthb whose full name is Brahim Husain Syadzili was born, on October 9, 1906. His family came from a respectable class and their parents had a high social status in the area. He was respected by the surrounding community and used as a role model in solving any existing problems.

Sayyid Quthb is very concerned about the surrounding conditions, both within the scope of Islam and outside Islam. In his work entitled *Ma'âlim fî al-Tharîq*, he states that humanity is currently on the verge of destruction, so it needs a leader who can be relied upon to overcome the crisis faced by the country.¹¹

Some say that Sayyid Quthb was a radical and anti-government thinker. Sayyid Quthb's thoughts influenced many activists in the Islamic world, including Hasan al Banna who was the founder of the *Ikhwân al Muslimîn* (Muslim Brotherhood). The Egyptian government at the time considered the *Ikhwân al Muslimîn* as a very dangerous organization and threatened the existence of the government. Despite this, Sayyid Quthb was a very prolific figure and many activists were inspired by his work.

⁹ Berliana Kertakusumah, *Pemimpin ...* page. 25

¹⁰ Ibid, page. 349

¹¹ Sayyid Quthb, *Petunjuk Jalan*, Terj. Ahmad Baidhawi, (Bandung: Pustaka Firdausi, 2001), page. 67

However, the majority of his works are political in nature and have a dimension towards awakening (resistance).¹²

According to some existing references, Sayyid Quthb lived his life in five stages, they are:

1. Sayyid Quthb lived in the traditions of Islam in his family.
2. Sayyid Quthb studied in Cairo. From here, his Islamic insights and beliefs developed
3. Sayyid Quthb was plagued by confusion and unrest regarding the nature of the religion he experienced.
4. Sayyid Quthb studied the Qur'an because of his admiration for the language and literature of the Qur'an which he considered very impressive.
5. Sayyid Quthb is influenced by the Qur'an which he thinks is so extraordinary that his faith is increasing.

Sayyid Quthb left the world in tragic circumstances. On August 20, 1966 (13 Jumadil Akhir 1386 H), the government sentenced him to hang. Although Sayyid Quthb did not marry, he never stopped preaching, working, and caring for the people. He always dared to face authoritarian rulers, even though his life ended in a very cruel way, namely hanging on the gallows.

Sayyid Quthb's Attitude Towards non-Muslim Leaders

Against this, Sayyid Quthb is based on Surah *Al Mâidah* verse 51, which is as follows:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَارَىٰ أَوْلِيَاءَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِنكُمْ فَإِنَّهُ مِنهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

"O you who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as your leaders because they help each other. If you take them as leaders, then you will be among them. Indeed, Allah will not guide those who do injustice."

¹² Didin Saefuddin, *Pemikiran Modern dan Post Modern Islam* (Jakarta: Grasindo, 2003), page. 111-112

⁷ Abdul Rahman, *Study Tentang Penafiran Sayyid Quthb Mengenai Ayat-ayat Ulul Albâb*, (Tesis Magister Ilmu Tafsir Institut PTIQ, Jakarta, 2010), page. 87

Sayyid Quthb gives advice not to choose Jews and Christians as leaders, because if this happens, then the believers will be considered part of the Jews and Christians and this can cause disease in the hearts of the believers. According to him, this prohibition has a strong reason. He argues that Jews should not be chosen as leaders because they are greedy and ambitious and they feel envy and hatred towards Muslims. Because of these feelings, they will always try to make Muslims feel humiliated and inferior. To achieve this goal, they will use various technologies and means at their disposal.¹³

According to Sayyid Quthb, if the Jews become leaders and rule the world, the world will get worse. This is due to the bad nature and disposition inherent in them. They have the nature of envy and stubbornness, as well as being very proud and proud of what they have. They even consider other groups beneath them, especially in terms of quality, and look down on other groups as apes or other animals. Therefore, according to Sayyid Quthb, it is not appropriate to give power to them. If they come to power, it will not give goodness and enjoyment to Muslims, rather they will try to destroy the Muslims from the face of the earth.¹⁴

Sayyid Quthb also argues that the prohibition against Jews as leaders also apply to Christians, because the term *ahl al-kitâb* refers to both groups. In addition, the prohibition also applies in terms of marriage with both groups, as explained in Surah al-Baqarah which prohibits Muslims from marrying polytheists until they convert to Islam.

According to Sayyid Quthb, if Muslims make infidels as leaders, then they will always try to hurt the Muslims and do everything possible to realize their plans, either through actions, words, or other means available. One of Sayyid Quthb's concerns is that if Muslims make infidels as leaders, then they will make every effort to keep Muslims away from their religion. This can be seen from all the rules and policies that they will implement because their goal is to make people who have believed a return to disbelief.

¹³ Sayyid Quthb, *Al Zhilâl*, page. 54

¹⁴ Sayyid Quthb, *Tafsîr fî Zhilâl al-Qur'ân*, page. 80

They always create difficulties for the Muslims, instill discomfort in them, cheat and try to deceive the Muslims every chance they get. They do all these things relentlessly and without regard for time. Their main goal is to make the Muslims disintegrate and have no influence on human life.¹⁵

Characteristics of an Ideal Leader According to Sayyid Quthb

According to Sayyid Qutb, a leader must have several characteristics in order for the country or region he leads to prosper under his leadership. These characteristics are as follows:

a. *Amanah (Surah An Nisâ: 58 dan Surah Al Ahzâb: 72)*

According to linguistic experts, the word "*amanah*" originates from "*amana*" which has the root word "*aman*" which means faith. If faith is defined as trust, then a person who is called trustworthy is someone who can be trusted so that others feel safe from all forms of fraud, betrayal, abuse, and so on. Al-Raghib al-Asfahani, in *al-Mufradat*, explains that trustworthiness is a state in which one's heart feels calm and unafraid. Etymologically, the word "*amanah*" comes from the word "*umun*" which refers to a camel or horse that is guaranteed safety so that it can be trusted to be used in traveling without worrying that the animal is tired or weak.¹⁶

Regarding the nature of trust, Allah has emphasized in the Qur'an that humans are always trustworthy in their lives. The nature of trustworthiness is highly emphasized in human life, especially with regard to leadership issues. The leader is obliged to convey his mandate to his people, as in His word:

"Verily, Allah has commanded you to give the trust to those who deserve it, and has commanded you to judge between men with justice; Verily, Allah is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing." (al-Nisâ: 56)

Sayyid Qutb explained that according to him, trust must be upheld and applied in human life. According to him, the mandate begins the greatest thing, namely the mandate relating to human nature. Although the earth and the sky are afraid to carry

¹⁵ Sayyid Quthb, *Tafsîr fî Zhilâl al-Qur'ân*, page. 79

¹⁶ Al-Raghib al-Asfahani, *Mu'jam Mufradât Alfâẓ al-Qur'ân*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikri, tth), page. 21-23

the mandate, humans are given the opportunity to carry it out. A leader has an obligation to be trustworthy to his people. Amanah can also be applied in various daily transactions and interactions without harming others.¹⁷

In addition, trustworthiness must also be applied in many aspects of life, such as the people's obedience to the leader and the leader's loyalty to his people, trustworthiness in raising children, maintaining the honor of the community, and all duties and responsibilities as a leader must be fulfilled. Allah commands people to fulfill these mandates, especially leaders who are responsible and protect the community.¹⁸

b. Physically and mentally healthy (*Surah al-Baqarah: 247*)

According to Sayyid Quthb, being a leader does not have to come from rich people or honorable descendants. The most important thing is to have the capability to lead, even if materially do not have abundant wealth. However, a leader must fulfill criteria such as having a strong physique and high knowledge, especially about leadership. A leader who only has a strong physique without adequate leadership knowledge, or vice versa, is rich but does not have a good physique, and does not deserve to be a leader because it can harm the people.

The Qur'an calls for good leaders with adequate qualifications.¹⁹ In addition, according to him, one of the characteristics of a good leader is to have a strong physique and extensive knowledge. If someone fulfills these criteria, then it will be a guarantee of success in leadership in the future. History proves that lack of wealth is not an obstacle to achieving success in leadership.

The Qur'an provides an example of this through the story of Saul, an ordinary farmer who did not have much wealth and descendants but was able to carry out the task of leadership well when leading his army against Jhalut, a dictatorial king in the past. Saul only had a strong body and extensive knowledge, but that was enough for him to be the best on the battlefield. With these assets, Saul was able to defeat Jhalut, who at that time was a very feared and respected king.²⁰

¹⁷ Quthb, *Tafsir al Zhihlal*, page. 127

¹⁸ Ibid, page. 129

¹⁹ Sayyid Quthb, *Tafsir fi Zhihlal al-Qur'an*, page. 129

²⁰ Ibid, page 131

According to Sayyid Quthb, in addition to the criteria mentioned earlier, patience and firmness are also very important for a leader to achieve success in leading. Quthb took an example from the story of Saul who managed to defeat Goliath who at that time had never been defeated by anyone. Saul managed to win the battle despite the fact that the number of his troops was much less than Goliath's troops. This could only happen because Saul had strong patience and firmness. For example, Saul dared to send back his troops who disobeyed him on the way to the battlefield. He argued that the disobedient troops would not make a significant impact in the battle.²¹

c. Professionality (*Surat Yusuf: 56*)

According to Sayyid Quthb's view, a leader must master the sciences of government. Without it, the leadership of a leader will not bring good luck and success in leading his people. Sayyid Quthb also argues that an elected leader should not show excessive joy or express excessive gratitude to the people who elected him. He gave an example with the story of the Prophet Yusuf, who when appointed treasurer of Egypt in his day, did not express excessive gratitude to the king of Egypt who had appointed him. In today's context, the position of the Prophet Joseph can be likened to the position of the Minister of Economic Affairs of the State.²²

A leader should not put himself forward for a position if there are hidden intentions such as wanting to enrich himself, gain high social status, or obtain worldly pleasures. However, it is permissible for a person to apply if he or she feels capable of carrying out the task provided that there is no one else who is more professional than him or her. This needs to be considered because if the position is given to an incompetent person, it can have a negative impact on society at large. Therefore, when applying to become an official, we must have in-depth knowledge of the field we will be involved in and not have hidden intentions such as wanting to enrich ourselves or gain high social status.

According to Sayyid Quthb, as a leader, he must have noble intentions to save the people from misery and hardship. As a leader, he should not go on a spree by

²¹ Ibid, page 132

²² Sayyid Quthb, *Tafsîr fî Zbilâl al-Qur'ân*, page 233

enjoying all the facilities provided by the state. Instead, a leader must realize that the task of a leader is very heavy, which is to fight for the interests of the people and free them from the hardships of life. Therefore, a leader must have expertise and professionalism in various fields of government.²³

Leaders should appoint their staff or assistants according to their abilities and expertise, not for political reasons or to return favors to those who support them. If a leader has limited knowledge of the country's problems, it will adversely affect the people. For example, the Prophet Muhammad once said in one of his traditions about the importance of a just and credible leader, namely::

إِذَا ضُيِّعَتِ الْأَمَانَةُ فَانْتَظِرِ السَّاعَةَ قَالَ كَيْفَ إِضَاعَتُهَا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ قَالَ إِذَا أُسْنِدَ الْأَمْرُ إِلَى غَيْرِ أَهْلِهِ فَانْتَظِرِ السَّاعَةَ

"A case will be destroyed if it is handled by someone who is not an expert.".²⁴

d. Musyawarah or Deliberation (*Surat Ali Imrân: 59* dan *As Syûra: 37*)

From a language perspective, the word " *musyawarah* " comes from the word " *shura* ", as expressed by al-Asfahani. In the dictionary " *Mu'jâm Mufradât Alfâz al-Qur'ân* ", *musyawarah* is defined as " *syirtu al-'sala* ", which means "I squeeze honey, I squeeze it and I take it out". This means that deliberation is an activity in which the participants speak and express their opinions, then choose the best and correct option after a process of careful consideration.²⁵

Fakhruddin al-Razi, in *Mafâtiḥ al-Ghaib*, explains that *musyawarah* comes from the word "I squeeze the honey and take it if one takes the honey and takes it out". He also states that the meaning of *musyawarah* is to bring livestock to a place of sale called " *misywar* ", so that good and bad are known. Meanwhile, according to Wahbah Zuhaili in *Tafsîr al-Munîr*, *musyawarah* is defined as the activity of exchanging ideas to find out the truth.²⁶

²³ Ibid, page 235

²⁴ Al-Bukhari, *Jâmi' al-Shahîb*, (Kairo: Dâr al-Syu'bah, 1987), page 129

²⁵ Al-Asfahani, *Al-Mu'jâm* (Beirut: Dâr al Fikri, 1992), page 45

²⁶ Wahbah al-Zuhaili, *Tafsîr al-Munîr*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikri, 1991), page 121-123

According to Sayyid Quthb, *musyawarah* is an important principle in government because a regulation cannot be enforced without deliberation. Regarding the form and mechanism of deliberation, it is a technical issue that can develop by applicable rules and can be adapted to the characteristics of a community. Sayyid Quthb also emphasized that Islam is a religion that educates its adherents to hold straight leadership and Muslims must show maturity by doing good upbringing and guidance, one of which is by deliberating.²⁷

A leader needs to convey the messages of Allah and the Prophet to his people and teach them how to deliberate properly. He should prioritize deliberation (*musyawarah*) and should not prioritize his personal ego. Deliberation has the urgency to gather thoughts and choose the best opinion put forward by the deliberating members. If an agreement is reached, it must be implemented with enthusiasm and full trust in Allah for the results of the deliberation decision.

e. Fairness or Adil (*Surat al-Nisâ: 58*)

Justice (Fairness) is an important trait that must be possessed by someone, especially in a leadership role. The mention of the word "*adil*" usually uses the terms *al-'adl* and *al-qisht*. In language, *al-'adl* has three letters namely 'ain, dal, and lam. According to linguists, there are two philosophical meanings contained in this word, namely straight and crooked, but in essence, justice is about equality or equality. Meanwhile, *al-qisht* also comes from 3 letters, namely qaf, sin, and tha. There are three philosophical elements contained in it, namely the element of justice, the nature of tendency, or crookedness.²⁸

Two other meanings arise from the above explanation, namely *al-nashîb* (balance) or *al-qisthas*. The term *al-qisht* can mean receiving a fair share. So the term *al-qasht* can be understood as taking someone else's share. Meanwhile, the term *al-iqsâth* can be understood as giving rights to the rightful. From the above understanding

²⁷ Sayyid Quthb, *Tafsîr fî Zhilâl al-Qur'ân*, page 322

²⁸ Ibn Faris Zakaria, *Mu`jam Maqâyis al-Lughah*, (Riyadh: Dâr al-Fikr, 1979), page 2

³² Al-Raghib al-Ashfahani, *al-Mufradât*, page 670

it can be concluded that the expression *al-iqsath* leads relative to the expression of justice (fairness).²⁹

Fairness does not only apply to Muslims but also all human beings. Everyone deserves justice regardless of race, culture, ethnicity, or religion. Justice should serve as a balance between human rights and freedom, provided that such freedom must bring benefits to humanity.

Sayyid Quthb interpreted justice should not be relative, but must be based on the concept of the Qur'an. As a religion that brings peace, Islam places the value of justice in an important position in human life. Justice in Islam must embrace all groups indiscriminately, not be influenced by lust, and not distinguish between the rich and the poor. According to Sayyid Quthb, the purpose of implementing justice is to create peace and avoid conflict between good and evil. For a leader, the most important thing is to strive to improve the state of society and bring benefits to them. Therefore, as a ruler, the guiding principle is to uphold justice based on religious and human values. If justice is implemented without this foundation, it will not last long and will not bring blessings.³⁰

CONCLUSIONS

From the above description, some important lessons can be learned from Sayyid Quthb's views. The conclusion is that Sayyid Quthb forbids a non-Muslim to be a leader, to keep the faith and the state of Muslims from the tricks of the disbelievers. He fears that if Muslims make non-Muslims their leaders, it will jeopardize their faith because they will try as much as possible to make Muslims return to disbelief.

In addition, Sayyid Quthb emphasized the importance of qualified leaders to lead a country. Some of the characteristics of the ideal leader who is expected to be able to bring the country or region into a highly civilized country are to carry out the

³³ Abdul Rahman, *Study Tentang Penafiran Sayyid Quthb Mengenai Ayat-ayat Ulul Albâb*, page 45

mandate, professionalism, justice, and the ability to overcome problems with deliberation and not rely on egoism alone.

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