Wacana
Kontemporari
Islam

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Introduction

Islamophobia which started to surface after the tragedy of 9/11 leads to discrimination among minority Muslim in the West. A study by Sheriden (2006) has shown levels of implicit or indirect discrimination rose by 82.6% and experiences of overt discrimination by 76.3%. It demonstrates that major world events may affect not only stereotypes of minority groups but also prejudice toward minorities. In countering the phenomena, Muslims had put numerous efforts in handling the hatred and misjudgment that were befalling them and inter-faith dialogue being one of it. Ayoub (2011) suggests that Muslims need a new paradigm for inter-faith dialogue that would go beyond mere tolerance; one that would call for understanding and acceptance. More often than not inter-religious tolerance is tolerance of indifference, whereby the ‘other’ – religious, cultural or racial community – is tolerated so long as they keep a safe religious and cultural distance from the dominant or the majority society.

Therefore, comparative religious study is definitely an essential aspect of inter-faith dialogue as it forms the fundamental inputs of knowledge for the dialogues. According to Pummer (1979), the main focus of comparative religion is to clarify misconceptions among religious groups in the light of the believers’ faiths without judgment
from other believer and debate on claiming a believer’s religion as the transcendental truth. Another purpose of studying comparative religion is also to disclose relevant features of each world religion and discover the relationship between one religion to another and perhaps instill appreciation of own religion in putting one’s religion on the same table with others (Srivastava, 1974). According to Jevons (1985), the importance of studying comparative religion is to identify the resemblances and differences that are intertwined in different religions. In addition, Geden (1994) highlights that the science of comparative religions is vital as it affect the aspect of spiritual origin and destiny of each individual human being.

In discussing on comparative religion, one could not ignore deliberating the essential aspect of comparative theology. Therefore, comparative religious study is definitely a vital aspect of inter-faith dialogue as it forms the fundamental inputs of knowledge. Nicolson (2005) in his article argues on the comparative theology of Clooney (2010) which is said to be too apologetic. He introduces a correlational model of comparative theology with a radically altered apologetic form. Comparing doctrinal ideologies will eventually lead to doctrinal formation and defense and at the same time being objective besides being apologetic per se. Kamaruzaman (2010) denies naturalistic in objectivity as it does not forbid a researcher to be committed to his own religion. The need to outline this science of knowledge must be correctly done in order to attain the best result of embedding the right understanding among believers.

As of al-Biruni, his approach towards other religions was through unprejudiced manner while at the same time being adamant with his belief. Therefore, this paper demonstrates his distinctive model of comparative religious study. Al-Biruni had done an immense work in highlighting the ethics in his times above the limitations that he faced as the Hindus’ antagonism towards Islam was fired up due to the colonization by Sultan Mahmud. Hence, the scholarship of al-Biruni may inspire the Muslim-non-Muslim kinship in a way to
face the challenge of understanding and accepting others in a just and unbiased position.

A Glimpse on Al-Biruni’s Life and His Book *Kitab al-Hind*

This study is a qualitative research in nature based on textual analysis of *India (Kitab al-Hind)*. Analysis on theological issues has been done to extract comparative methods that were used by al-Biruni. Deductive method is then applied to identify ethics and scholarship of al-Biruni throughout the contents of his book. Historical analysis was also applied to recognize the background life of al-Biruni and his milieu in order to illuminate his excellent scholarship based on his academic setting.

Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Biruni was known as al-Biruni although he refers himself as Abu Rayhan. He was born in a Tajik family in Khwarizm. According to Said & Khan (1992), there are two opinions on the reason of referring him as al-Biruni. First, he was born in a town of Khwarizm name Birun. Second, Birun in Persian means outsider. He was being an outsider in Khwarizm as he was not born there but in a town name Kath. Al-Biruni was one of the prominent Muslim scholars benefitted from the patronage scholarship under the palace of al-Ma’mun during the Abbasid caliphate. His scholarship in comparative religion started when he began writing *Kitab al-Athar al-Baqiyah an al-Qurun al-Khaliyah* in the year of 998CE and completed it within a year at his age of 27 (Khan, 1982). At that time, he was living in Jurjan under the patronage of Sultan Shams al-Ma’ali bin Qabus after he failed to continue getting patronage from al-Ma’mun due to some political reasons. After ten years there, he decided to return to Khwarizm under the invitation of Abu Hasan Ali who loved to be surrounded by scholars and Avicenna was one of them to be called upon. Then Mahmud Ghaznawi came and invaded Khwarizm as a revenge of his brother-in-law’s death and took al-Biruni as his political prisoner, not wanting to execute him as he was a valuable
References


