

The Concept of Nature in Malay Tradition: The Perspective of Islamic Cosmology and Local Wisdom

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Abstract

This study examines the concept of nature within Malay tradition through the lens of Islamic cosmology and local wisdom. The scope of the research focuses on how nature is understood, interpreted, and preserved in Malay culture, which is shaped by Islamic values and indigenous traditions. The objective of this study is to explore the integration between Islamic cosmological perspectives and local wisdom in shaping the Malay worldview toward nature. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, using literature review methods that draw upon sources related to Islamic cosmology, Malay traditions, as well as ethnographic and cultural documents. The findings reveal that nature in Malay tradition is not merely viewed as a physical entity, but as a sacred part of the spiritual and social order. Nature is regarded as God's creation, deserving of respect and care, as reflected in Islamic values such as *tauhid*, *amanah*, and *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, which are harmoniously integrated with local wisdom expressed through proverbs, natural symbolism, and ecological practices of the Malay community. In conclusion, there exists a synergy between Islamic cosmology and local wisdom that shapes the ecological awareness of the Malay people, offering a holistic and sustainable model of environmental ethics.

Keywords : *Islamic Cosmology, Malay Tradition, Local Wisdom.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji konsep alam dalam tradisi Melayu dengan menggunakan perspektif kosmologi Islam dan kearifan lokal. Fokus kajian terletak pada bagaimana alam dipahami, dimaknai, dan dijaga dalam budaya Melayu yang dipengaruhi oleh nilai-nilai Islam dan tradisi lokal. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami integrasi antara pandangan kosmologis Islam dan kearifan lokal dalam membentuk cara pandang masyarakat Melayu terhadap alam. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode studi pustaka terhadap literatur yang berkaitan dengan kosmologi Islam, tradisi Melayu, serta dokumen etnografi dan budaya lokal. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konsep alam dalam tradisi Melayu tidak hanya sebagai objek fisik, tetapi sebagai bagian dari tatanan spiritual dan sosial yang sakral. Alam dipandang sebagai ciptaan Tuhan yang harus dihormati dan dijaga, sebagaimana tertuang dalam nilai-nilai Islam seperti tauhid, amanah, dan rahmatan lil 'alamin, yang kemudian menyatu dengan kearifan lokal seperti pepatah adat, simbolisme alam, dan praktik ekologis masyarakat Melayu. Kesimpulannya, terdapat sinergi antara kosmologi Islam dan kearifan lokal dalam membentuk kesadaran ekologis masyarakat Melayu, yang dapat menjadi model etika lingkungan yang holistik dan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: *Kosmologi Islam, Tradisi Melayu, Kearifan Lokal.*

INTRODUCTION

In the corpus of Malay culture, nature is not only understood as a mere physical environment but also as a spiritual and symbolic entity that is closely connected to human life.¹ The concept of nature in the Malay intellectual tradition reflects a holistic and integral worldview. Within this framework, the relationship between the cosmos, human beings, and God is regarded as an inseparable unity. Nature is viewed not merely as a physical entity but also as a manifestation of the divine order, possessing spiritual and symbolic dimensions.²

This perspective was shaped through a process of acculturation between local culture and the teachings of Islam, which began to take root in the Malay world in the 13th century CE. The arrival of Islam brought profound transformations—not only in religious aspects but also in shaping the value structures and worldviews of society. Islam functioned not only as a belief system but also as the foundation of culture, reconstructing the community's understanding of nature, life, and human existence within it.

Islamic teachings introduced the cosmology of *tawhīd*, which places Allah as the absolute creator and ruler of the universe. This view regulates not only the transcendental relationship between human beings and God but also establishes an epistemological framework concerning the existence and order of nature. In the Malay world, Islamic cosmology was internalized through cultural media such as literary works (*hikayat* and *syair*), customary systems, and values preserved in social life. Works such as *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, *Taj al-Salatin*, and *Syair Sinar Alam* demonstrate a symbolic integration between Islamic concepts and local cultural elements. In these texts, nature is understood not merely as a physical entity but as a spiritual and ethical domain that reflects the divine order and teaches humankind the importance of balance, harmony, and the meaningfulness of life.

Research on how Islamic cosmology is understood and articulated in Malay tradition remains relatively limited. Previous studies have tended to focus on literary aspects or cultural systems in general, without explicitly exploring their cosmological dimensions. For example, Khairiyah and Abdillah (2023) highlighted the dynamics of Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia³, while Rohmana (2015) examined Sufi tendencies in Malay literature, yet neither directly addressed the cosmological aspect.⁴ Adam (2021) studied the belief systems of Malay society but did not examine in depth the integration between Islamic values and the conception of nature.⁵

¹ Said Ali Syahroni dan Ferri Irawan, "Suluk dan Transformasi Diri: Pendekatan Spiritual dalam Kehidupan Budaya Melayu Baru," *Jurnal Tapak Melayu* 1, no. 02 (2024): 2, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.56783/tm.v1i02.243>.

² Anugerah Zakya Rafsanjani, "Relasi manusia dan alam (tinjauan ekoteologi dalam tradisi sesuci diri di Candi Jolotundo Desa Seloliman Kecamatan Trawas Kabupaten Mojokerto)" (UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2019).

³ Nanda Khairiyah dan Ali Abdillah, "Peradaban Islam Nusantara Mewarnai Corak Keislaman di Asia Tenggara," *Alhamra Jurnal Studi Islam* 4, no. 2 (2023): 157–69, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30595/ajsi.v4i2.18572>.

⁴ Jajang A Rohmana, "Sastra Sufistik Melayu dan Sunda di Nusantara: Mempertemukan Hamzah Fansuri dan Haji Hasan Mustafa," *Jurnal Ibda'* 13, no. 1 (2015): 1–27, <http://ejournal.iainpurwokerto.ac.id/index.php/ibda/article/view/486>.

⁵ Nur Faaizah Md Adam, "Sistem Kepercayaan Orang Asli Kensiu di Kampung Lubuk Legong, Kedah," *Jurnal Peradaban Melayu* 16, no. 2 (2021): 54–62, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37134/peradaban.vol16.2.6.2021>.

Unlike earlier studies, this research specifically examines the synthesis between Islamic teachings and local wisdom in shaping the cosmological view of nature within the intellectual and cultural tradition of the Malays. This focus is expected to broaden the understanding of the role of Islamic cosmology in the configuration of Malay thought and culture in a more substantive way.

This gap opens space for further investigation into how nature is understood in Malay tradition not only as part of myth and local culture but also as the result of the encounter between Islamic civilization and Nusantara wisdom. This study is significant in enriching the discourse on how Islam interacts culturally with local communities and forms a distinctive cosmology.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to examine the concept of nature in Malay tradition through the lens of Islamic cosmology and local wisdom. The main focus of this research is to trace the symbolism of nature in Malay cultural and literary works and to explore the theological and philosophical values of Islam that shape this perspective. Thus, this article is expected to contribute to the study of Islamic civilization, particularly in understanding the dynamics of cultural integration of Islam in the Malay world.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research method to explore and describe the Malay community's understanding of the concept of nature from the perspective of Islamic cosmology integrated with local wisdom.⁶ This approach was chosen as it allows the researcher to examine in depth the rich symbolism and cosmological narratives contained in Malay literary and cultural texts. The primary data sources include classical Malay manuscripts such as *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, *Taj al-Salatin*, and *Syair Sinar Alam*, which are considered to represent the worldview of the Malay community in the post-Islamization period. In addition, the study also refers to Islamic texts such as the Qur'an, tafsir works, as well as writings of classical and contemporary Muslim thinkers discussing Islamic cosmology as the conceptual basis.

The secondary data sources consist of scholarly literature in the form of books, journals, and articles relevant to Islamic cosmology, Malay culture, and the integration of Islamic values within the local context of the Malay Archipelago. The analysis technique employed is content analysis⁷, namely examining the textual content in depth to identify, classify, and interpret the symbolic meanings of nature representations found in traditional Malay texts.

This study is grounded in the theory of Islamic cosmology, which views nature as a manifestation of God's will and wisdom, as elaborated by thinkers such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr. According to Nasr, nature reflects a metaphysical order that contains spiritual and ethical meanings, not merely physical reality. In this context, Islamic cosmology theory is used as a framework to interpret how natural symbols in Malay texts

⁶ Lexy J Moleong, Adhi Kusumastuti, dan Ahmad Mustamil Khoiron, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Semarang: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2019).

⁷ Sumarno, "Content Analysis, Language Learning and Literature Research," *Jurnal Elsa* 18, no. 2 (2020): 38, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.47637/elsa.v18i2.299>.

reflect the principles of *tawhīd*, cosmic order, and the transcendental relationship between human beings and God.

The correlation between this theory and the research lies in the effort to uncover how universal Islamic values are articulated in local cultural narratives, particularly through the representation of nature. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how the Malay community internalized Islamic teachings through symbolic expressions in literary and cultural texts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nature as the Sign of God: The Foundation of Tawhīdic Cosmology in Classical Malay Manuscripts

A philological analysis of classical Malay literary works such as *Taj al-Salatin* (1603) by Bukhari al-Jauhari⁸ and *Syair Sinar Gemala Mestika Alam* by Raja Ali Haji⁹ provides a rich entry point to trace how Muslims in the Nusantara constructed Islamic cosmology within the framework of local ecological experience. These manuscripts not only convey moral and spiritual teachings but also represent an intellectual process of spiritualizing the environment through distinctive and contextual symbolic language.

In *Taj al-Salatin*, particularly in Chapter III, Bukhari al-Jauhari conveys moral messages through a pedagogical style imbued with cosmic symbolism. The passage reads: "Know, O Sultan, the moon that shines in the darkness of the night is the mirror of Divine mercy, reminding the servant of His boundless love."¹⁰ This clearly reflects a pedagogical approach grounded in the cosmology of *tawhīd*. The moon is not merely a celestial body illuminating the night but is interpreted as a representation of God's compassion that enlightens the darkness of the human soul. This statement demonstrates the internalization of the concept of *āyāt kauniyyah*—the signs of God's power in His creation—as emphasized in the Qur'anic verse (Q.S. al-Jāthiyah [45]: 3):

إِنَّ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

"Indeed, in the heavens and the earth are signs for those who believe."¹¹

This verse indicates that the creation of the heavens, the earth, and all that is within them serves as a spiritual lesson for humankind. In the Malay context, this learning process was mediated through the concrete experience of the local environment.

Bukhari al-Jauhari's interpretation resonates with the thought of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah in *Miftāḥ Dār al-Sa'ādah*, where he states that the world is a spiritual school, and every element of nature is a "teacher" revealing the attributes and majesty of God.¹² The reception of this view by Malay scholars such as Bukhari demonstrates the

⁸ Bastian Zulyeno, "Kisah-Kisah Dalam Kitab Taj al-Salatin Dan Siyasatname: Kajian Komparatif," *Tamaddun: Jurnal Kebudayaan dan Sastra Islam* 20, no. 1 (2020): 52–67, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.19109/tamaddun.v20i1.5743>.

⁹ Abdul Malik, "Karya Raja Ali Haji sebagai sumber pendidikan karakter," in *Seminar Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, vol. 2, 2020, 1–14, <https://conference.unsri.ac.id/index.php/sembadra/article/view/1589>.

¹⁰ Shah Rul Anuar Nordin dan Nik Kamal Wan Mohamed, "Impak Dakwah Kitab Taj al-Salatin kepada Masyarakat Melayu di Aceh," in *Seminar Antarabangsa Dakwah & Etik*, 2014, 1–18, <https://www.ukm.my/rsde/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/11-perkim-warga-asing.pdf>.

¹¹ Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahannya (Edisi Penyempurnaan)* (Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an Balitbang Diklat Kemenag RI, 2019).

¹² Makmudi Makmudi et al., "Urgensi pendidikan akhlak dalam Pandangan Imam Ibnu Qayyim al-Jauziyyah," *Ta'dibuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (2019): 17–37, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32832/tadibuna.v8i1.1349>.

epistemological bridge between Middle Eastern scholars and local Malay intellectuals. Thus, the cosmology articulated in *Taj al-Salatin* is not a mere textual imitation but a creative assimilation of revelation and local reality.

Furthermore, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas argues that works such as *Taj al-Salatin* represent a phase of “resacralization” of the cosmos within the Malay tradition.¹³ Prior to Islamization, cosmological perspectives in the Nusantara were heavily influenced by animism and dynamism, which perceived nature as inhabited by spirits that had to be subdued or avoided. With the advent of Islam, however, a paradigm shift occurred—from a magical cosmos to a tawhīdic cosmos, in which nature was no longer autonomous or inherently sacred, but sanctified because of its status as God’s creation. This transformation parallels the narrative of the Terengganu Stone Inscription (1303 CE), which explicitly juxtaposes customary law, natural law, and divine law, indicating an early integration of transcendental law into the local worldview.¹⁴

Meanwhile, in *Syair Sinar Gemala Mestika Alam* by Raja Ali Haji, cosmological construction is evident in the use of maritime ecosystem symbols as vehicles for conveying theological messages. In verses 22–25, he writes: “*The waves strike the reef without ceasing // Fish leap into the fishermen’s nets // Such is the power of the Lord of the Heavens // A reminder to the disbelievers.*”¹⁵ These lines illustrate how the relentless crashing of waves against the reef, along with the dependence of fishermen on divine providence, serve as metaphors for God’s power—majestic yet full of lessons. From a Sufi perspective, the movements of nature are not merely natural phenomena but also *tadhkirah* (reminders) for the heedless.

As Braginsky has noted, the maritime metaphors in Raja Ali Haji’s work demonstrate a local adaptation of al-Ghazālī’s cosmology¹⁶ in *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, which emphasizes that the world is a mirror of God’s attributes.¹⁷ Within this framework, the sea reflects God’s grandeur and generosity, while storms and waves serve as metaphors for His *jalāl* (majesty). This adaptation shows that Malay society did not simply adopt Middle Eastern thought but transformed it in accordance with their ecological setting and cultural experience.

What is even more striking, as Azyumardi Azra has observed, is that approximately 73% of references to nature in classical Malay manuscripts from the 15th to 18th centuries employ local idioms such as forests, seas, rivers, and mountains—quite different from Middle Eastern texts, which more often use desert, oasis, and barren landscapes.¹⁸ This fact underscores that Islamic cosmology in the Malay world underwent a process of “symbolic localization,” wherein Islamic concepts were reformulated

¹³ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Penerbit UTM Press, 2014), 87.

¹⁴ Abdul Razak Salleh, “Batu Bersurat Terengganu: Perspektif Matematik,” *Menemui Matematik (Discovering Mathematics)* 32, no. 1 (2010): 1–15, [https://einspem.upm.edu.my/dismath/paper/2010/MMv.32\(1\)2010_1_15.pdf](https://einspem.upm.edu.my/dismath/paper/2010/MMv.32(1)2010_1_15.pdf).

¹⁵ Malik, “Karya Raja Ali Haji sebagai sumber pendidikan karakter.”

¹⁶ Vladimir I Braginsky, *The heritage of traditional Malay literature: a historical survey of genres, writings and literary views*, vol. 214 (Brill, 2022), 213.

¹⁷ Ahmad Abdurrazizq Al-Bakri, *Ringkasan Ihya’Ulumuddin (Karya Imam Ghazali)* (Jakarta: Sahara Publishare, 2015).

¹⁸ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern ‘Ulam? in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 132.

through local ecological and cultural experiences. This reflects a form of Islamization deeply rooted in the realities of geography and sociology rather than detached from them.

Therefore, manuscripts such as *Taj al-Salatin* and *Syair Sinar Gemala Mestika Alam* should be positioned as intellectual and spiritual documents that represent how Muslims in the Nusantara embraced Islam not merely as a religion of rituals, but as a living cosmology that shaped their worldview of nature, humanity, and God as an integral unity.

Cosmological Dialectics: Integration and Transformation

A reading of classical Malay texts such as *Syair Sinar Gemala Mestika Alam* and *Taj al-Salatin* reveals not only the transfer of Islamic cosmological ideas but also the creative dialectic between pre-Islamic local traditions and the doctrine of *tawhīd*. This process unfolds in two main directions: integration (convergence) of cultural elements that are compatible with Islamic values, and transformation or even purification (divergence) of elements deemed inconsistent with *tawhīd*. This dynamic marks an important phase in the history of Islamization in the Nusantara, one that took place in a simultaneous and complex manner.

1. Convergence: The Islamization of Ecological Wisdom

One of the most evident forms of convergence can be seen in the way *Syair Sinar Gemala Mestika Alam* adopts local wisdom, such as the belief in the *semangat padi*—the notion that rice possesses a soul or spiritual power—which, in the agrarian tradition of the Malay world, symbolizes fertility and prosperity. In the process of Islamization, this symbol was not entirely erased but rather recontextualized as part of the narrative of *tawhīd*.

“*Padi menguning bukan datuk nenek // itu rezeki dari Rabbul 'Alamin*”¹⁹

This verse marks a profound epistemological shift. In the pre-Islamic tradition, the rice harvest was often accompanied by rituals of reverence to ancestral spirits or deities of fertility. In *Syair Sinar Alam*, however, the meaning of fertility is redirected into an expression of gratitude to Allah as the sole Provider of sustenance. This process aligns with the concept of *ta'wīl* (spiritual interpretation), which involves shifting a literal or mythological meaning toward a theological one.

As noted by Rosi, this constitutes a form of cultural exegesis—a hermeneutical strategy that accommodates local meanings within the epistemological framework of Islam.²⁰ In this case, the pre-Islamic entity of *semangat padi* is not immediately erased but transformed into a symbol of *rizq* (sustenance) and *ni'mah* (blessing), two central concepts in Islamic cosmology that affirm all forms of abundance as originating from the will of Allah SWT.

This transformation also reflects a respect for the ecological foundations of Malay society, which depended on agriculture and natural resources for survival. By framing agricultural produce as a manifestation of the divine attribute *al-Razzāq* (The Provider), the author of this syair not only Islamized the narrative but also inscribed *tawhīd*-centered values into the socio-ecological structure of the community.

¹⁹ Malik, “Karya Raja Ali Haji sebagai sumber pendidikan karakter.”

²⁰ Bahrur Rosi, “Internalisasi Konsep Ummatan Wasathan Dengan Pendekatan Dakwah Kultural,” *Ulumuna: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 5, no. 1 (2019): 93–109, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.36420/ju.v5i1.3641>.

2. Divergence: The Purification of Shirk Elements

If convergence signifies a form of symbolic integration, then divergence represents a theological purification—an effort to cleanse Islamic teachings from remnants of polytheism (*shirk*) that persisted within local cultural practices. In this context, *Taj al-Salatin* adopts a firmer stance as a normative text, aiming to educate rulers to uphold the principle of *tawḥīd* strictly in both daily life and governance.

One of the most explicit examples can be found in Chapter II: “Do not worship the sun and the moon, // for they are creatures subject to His command.”²¹

This statement conveys a clear theological message: celestial bodies are not entities worthy of worship but rather created beings entirely subjected to Allah’s will. The passage directly alludes to Qur’ān 7:54 (Sūrat al-A‘rāf).

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُغْشِي اللَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ يَطْلُبُهُ حَثِيثًا وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ وَالنُّجُومُ مُسَخَّرَاتٌ بِأَمْرِ رَبِّهِ أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

“Indeed, your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then established Himself above the Throne. He covers the night with the day, chasing it rapidly, and (He created) the sun, the moon, and the stars—each subjected to His command”.²²

In the history of Islamization in the Malay–Indonesian Archipelago, this process of purification was aligned with the movement of orthodox Sufi scholars such as Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, who was known for rejecting various forms of syncretism deemed to deviate from the doctrine of *tawḥīd*.²³ In *Bustan al-Salatin*, al-Rānīrī denounced local belief systems that involved the veneration of nature or ancestral spirits, replacing them with the doctrine of monotheism grounded in the Qur’an and Hadith. This perspective later spread among the elites of the Sultanates of Aceh and Johor, which became centers for the dissemination of orthodox Islam in the 17th century.²⁴

According to Azra, this process of divergence must be understood as an effort to establish Islamic orthodoxy within societies that had long been accustomed to animistic and Hindu-Buddhist traditions.²⁵ The purification of *tawḥīd* was not merely theological but also political, as it provided the foundation for legitimizing the ruler’s authority as *Zillullāh fī al-‘Arḍ* (the shadow of God on earth)—a political concept in Islam that required absolute adherence to monotheism as the spiritual basis of sovereignty.

The Epistemology of Nature: Sources of Knowledge and Ethics

In the corpus of classical Malay Islamic intellectual tradition, nature is not merely a backdrop or passive object but rather a source of knowledge (*ma‘rifah*) that offers lessons for humankind. In *Taj al-Salatin* by Bukhari al-Jauhari, we encounter an integrative form of epistemology that combines revelation (*naqli*), reason (*‘aqli*), and

²¹ Zulyeno, “Kisah-Kisah Dalam Kitab Taj al-Salatin Dan Siyasatname: Kajian Komparatif.”

²² Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Qur’an dan Terjemahannya (Edisi Penyempurnaan)*.

²³ Syaifan Nur, “Dialektika Filsafat Islam Sufistik Wujudiah Di Indonesia,” *Refleksi Jurnal Filsafat dan Pemikiran Islam* 17, no. 1 (2017): 43–60, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/ref.v17i1.1871>.

²⁴ Jajat Burhanudin, “Islamic Turn in Malay Historiography: Bustān al-Salāṭīn of 17th Century Aceh,” *Studia Islamika* 28, no. 3 (2021): 579–605, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v28i3.21259>.

²⁵ Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern ‘Ulam? in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*.

inner experience (*‘irfānī*). One key expression of this construction can be found in Chapter IV:

*"Like the bee that consumes what is pure and produces honey that is beneficial // so too is the ruler of noble character."*²⁶

This analogy is not only ethical but also epistemological. The bee here serves as a metaphor for human beings (particularly rulers) who live productively, selectively, and beneficially. The use of the bee as a symbol clearly refers to Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Naḥl [16]:68–69, which states that the bee receives divine inspiration from Allah and produces honey as a remedy for humankind. In this context, *Taj al-Salatin* does not merely quote the verse but interprets it contextually within the framework of state ethics and moral education.

This analysis is grounded in the theory of Islamic cosmology articulated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who views nature as a manifestation of the principle of *tawḥīd* and as a reflection of divine order. According to Nasr (1981), nature is not merely a physical object to be observed empirically but also a symbolic and spiritual reality imbued with metaphysical meaning. In this perspective, every element of nature is a *sign* (*āyah*) of God, pointing to His wisdom and order, and inviting human beings to know and draw closer to Him. Islamic cosmology, as understood by Nasr, is holistic—integrating revelation (*naqli*), reason (*‘aqli*), and spiritual intuition (*‘irfānī*) as pathways toward understanding reality.

This framework is essential for understanding how classical Malay texts such as *Taj al-Salatin* construct a discourse on nature not only within narrative or moral dimensions but also within theological and cosmological contexts. The representation of nature in this text demonstrates a synthesis between local symbolism and Islamic teachings, which regard nature as a medium for knowing God and for ordering life.

From this analysis, it can be concluded that *Taj al-Salatin* constructs an epistemology of *tawḥīd* through three principal pathways:

1. *Naqli*: Revelation as the Foundation of Knowledge

The explicit mention of the bee reflects the central role of revelation (the Qur’an) as the primary source of knowledge in Islamic thought. The verse concerning the bee does not merely demonstrate God’s power in creating a complex creature, but also implies that every being has a specific function, order, and wisdom instilled by the Creator. By grounding his narrative in this verse, Bukhari al-Jauhari emphasizes that human beings—particularly rulers—are expected to emulate God’s creation by fulfilling their role proportionally and providing benefit to society. This moral message underscores that social and political ethics in the Malay-Islamic intellectual tradition are inseparable from their theological foundation, since revelation serves as the ultimate basis for the construction of both morality and governance.

2. *Aqli*: Observation of Natural Phenomena

Beyond revelation, *Taj al-Salatin* also encourages readers to employ reason in observing and understanding the natural world. The analogy of the bee exemplifies the reflective use of natural phenomena as a source of insight. The bee is not admired solely for producing honey, but also for its disciplined,

²⁶ Zulyeno, “Kisah-Kisah Dalam Kitab Taj al-Salatin Dan Siyasatname: Kajian Komparatif.”

organized behavior and its non-destructive manner of visiting flowers. These characteristics are transformed into moral and social principles: being selective in taking (without greed), productive in giving (without miserliness), and harmonious in interaction (without causing harm). Such lessons emerge from a process of observation and rational reflection upon God's creation, as emphasized in numerous Qur'anic verses, including QS. *Āl 'Imrān* [3]:190–191, which enjoin *tafakkur* (contemplation) on the creation of the heavens and the earth.

Osman Bakar (1998) describes this as the “integrative epistemology of Islam,” in which reason does not replace revelation but serves to interpret it within empirical and social contexts.²⁷ Reason is thus granted a legitimate role so long as it remains within the boundaries of revelation. Accordingly, the observation of the bee is not a value-neutral scientific activity, but rather part of a spiritual process of recognizing the greatness of God.

3. *Irfānī*: Symbolic Contemplation of Nature's Meaning

The third dimension of epistemology in *Taj al-Salatin* is *irfānī*, a Sufi-oriented approach that emphasizes inner and symbolic meaning. In this context, the bee is not merely a biological creature or a moral allegory, but an existential symbol of the ideal human being: one who submits to revelation, processes sustenance in purity, and generates benefit for others. Contemplation of the bee thus becomes a pathway toward the consciousness of *tawhīd*, wherein all things are perceived as originating from and ultimately returning to God.

This contemplative model resonates with the thought of Ibn 'Arabī and al-Ghazālī, who stressed that the essence of knowledge is not simply *knowing*, but experiencing and sensing the Divine presence within creation. Indeed, within Sufi epistemology, *ma'rifah* of God cannot be attained solely through revelation and reason; it requires profound inner experience of the natural phenomena that “speak” to a purified soul.

As Osman Bakar asserts in *Classification of Knowledge in Islam* (1998), Islamic epistemology is hierarchical and graded: from *ilm al-yaqīn* (knowledge of certainty), ascending to *'ayn al-yaqīn* (direct witnessing), and culminating in *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (ultimate certainty).²⁸ Within the framework of *Taj al-Salatin*, the meditation upon the bee reflects this transition—from ordinary knowledge toward a deeper, more spiritually infused understanding.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the concept of nature in the Malay tradition is not merely a perception of the physical environment, but also carries profound spiritual and symbolic dimensions, shaped by the acculturation between local wisdom and the Islamic cosmology of *tawhīd*. Through classical Malay literary works such as *Taj al-Salatin* and *Syair Sinar Alam*, it becomes evident that Malay society integrated Islamic values with

²⁷ Osman Bakar, *Classification of knowledge in Islam: A study in Islamic philosophies of science* (Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 1998).

²⁸ Bakar.

their ecological experience and local culture in constructing a holistic and religious worldview.

Islamic cosmology, which places God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, was translated into Nusantara's natural symbols—such as the moon, the sea, and rice—that serve as spiritual and moral vehicles for humanity. This process was not a mere textual adoption of Islamic teachings, but rather a creative assimilation that produced what may be termed “symbolic localization,” namely the reinterpretation of Islamic doctrines in accordance with the geographical and cultural context of Malay society.

Furthermore, this study reveals a cosmological dialectic within the Malay tradition, in which a convergence occurred between pre-Islamic ecological wisdom and the values of Islamic *tawhīd* through a process of symbolic and theological transformation. This marks the dynamics of Islamization in the Malay world as a simultaneous and complex phenomenon, giving rise to a distinctive cosmology that continues to live within Malay culture.

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