

UNIVERSALITY TOWARDS A NEW THEORY OF ISLAMIC LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

In the middle of the 20th century, Islamic writers and intellectuals in the Middle East and particularly in Egypt were actively engaged in the call for Islamic literature. Several Arabic books, including major works of Sayyed Qutub, Muhammad Qutub, and Naguib Kilani, were written on the subject and immediately rendered into Malaysian and Indonesian languages. Among all these writings, Muhammad Qutub's book "*Manhaj El-Fan El-Islami*" has had tremendous impact on modern Malay writers such as, Ahmad Kamal Abdullah, Shahnun Ahmad, Muhammad kamal Hassan, Ismail Ibrahim, Muhammad Bukhari Lubis, and others who produced several theories of Islamic literature. In this paper, a new theory of Islamic literature is proposed which is based on the concept of *Al-'Alamiah* (Universality). In the first part of the paper, existing theories are reviewed whereas in the final part, a number of issues are discussed such as the concept of Islamic literature, its message, and seven basic features that distinguish Islamic literature from other world literatures.

Keywords: 'Alamiah, Adab, Islami, Muslim and Islamic.

INTRODUCTION

Decadence in the Muslim world in the 19th and 20th century, occupation, westernization, secularism, heresy, skepticism, existentialism, communism, art theory for art's sake etc. required that Muslim intellectuals and writers call for a return to the principles of Islam in order to encounter all these dangers and overcome many political, economic, social and artistic problems. These circumstances also made many Muslim thinkers and writers to become occupied- since the mid of the 19th century- with the call for Islamic literature. Some of them endeavored to define a new theory that could be used to support the call for Islamic literature and which could also be utilized to critique this literature.

THEORY OF ISLAMIC LITERATURE

A number of theories of Islamic literature exist in the Muslim world, but this paper will merely refer to four theories which I consider to be the most important theories proposed by modern Muslim thinkers and writers. They are: *Theory of Worship* by Shahnun Ahmad (1977), *Literature Engagée* by Muhammad Kamal Hassan (1977), *Theory of Tauhid* by Ismail Ibrahim (1988), and the *Takmilah Theory* by Shafie Abu Bakar (1995). These Theorists are academics, working as professors at Malaysian universities and, with the exception of Shahnun Ahmad, they all have a strong religious academic background. Apart from Muhammad Kamal Hassan, they are also creative writers: Shahnun Ahmad is a celebrated novelist, Ismail Ibrahim is a skillful story writer, and Shafie Abu Bakar is a well-known poet.

a-The *Theory of Worship* by Shahnun Ahmad emerged as a reaction to Western theories that either called for art for art's sake or for art for society's sake and, hence, connect literature to

mere worldly matters. Shahnun Ahmad connects literature with religion and perceives it as a gift from Allah (s.w.t). He states that the writer should thank Allah (s.w.t) for this gift by perceiving literature as a form of worship in order to draw nearer to Allah (s.w.t). Literature should help people understand the truth and lift up their morality whilst seeking Allah's mercy. In order to achieve this, literature should be based on the principle of *Tauhid*, and the writer should clearly portray the role of man as a vice-gerent of Allah (s.w.t) on earth. Moreover, the writer should be equipped with vast religious knowledge, employ artistic techniques and have mastered the rules of exquisite literary writing.

Shahnun Ahmad believes in the freedom of the writer illustrated in literature in freedom from religious bondages. At the same time the writer must neither not deviate from the truth nor from the message from Allah (s.w.t). In other words, literature for him is not about the fantasies or whims of the writer without clear objectives. Possessing and utilizing a talent for writing should not result in the writer's neglect of the Islamic framework. Unlike Western writers who cling to their own imagination which may lead to the truth, Islamic writers should direct their imagination towards the truth.

Shahnun Ahmad believes that Islamic literature should be clear and not ambiguous, and that Islamic writers should follow in the steps of Prophet Muhammad (Peace is upon him). This should be done by addressing people according to their level of mental capacities, and by realizing that each utterance must be suitable for a certain situation. Although he thinks that writers should pay attention to both form and content of literature, he calls for writers to pay more attention to the actual words used.⁽¹⁾

b-Muhammad Kamal Hassan focuses on the concept of *Iltzam* (engagement), and adopts the definition of *Literature Eengagee* in which writers are committed to religion and its view of reality on one hand, and their duty as vice-gerent of Allah (s.w.t) on earth on the other. He suggests that Islamic writers should push people towards progress and the development of the state based on universal Islamic principles.

Like Shahnun Ahmad, Kamal Hassan connects literature to religion, and perceives it as a way leading to obeying Allah (s.w.t). Thus, in order that literature remains beautiful to Allah, it should not contradict religious decrees. After all, beauty cannot be achieved when the worshipper is disobedient to his Creator and denies Him. Kamal Hassan connects literature to the *Khilafah* of man on earth, connects beauty to obedience, and to the values that please Allah (s.w.t) and *Takwa*. He believes that Islamic literature does not aim at entertainment, enjoyment or improving secondary matters in life, but fundamentally aims at making life an honorable place worthy of the true place and task of human beings.⁽²⁾

c-Ismail Ibrahim defines Islamic literature as writing which is based on *Tauhid* (monotheism). Writers who profess the unity of God should reflect this through abiding by the canonical laws of Islam so that their literature is based on a true Islamic foundation, and not the writers' own fantasies and desires. In this way their literary works will serve the religion of Allah (s.w.t). In addition to *Tauhid* and *Wa'i* (realization) there is a third element important in the formation of Islamic literature, which is *Ikhlas* (sincerity). Thus, Islamic literature should include religious and social, as well as aspects of artistic beauty. In other words, literature must show faith in Allah (s.w.t), His oneness and Islam. At the same time it should deal with realistic social issues, and be related to people's morals and human values. In other words, literature should include both *Akida* (conviction) and *Akhlak* (morality).

Ismail Ibrahim states that Islamic literature should help readers to bring out the positive things of justice, equality, and truth. He holds that truth and beauty are two essential matters in Islamic literature. Islamic writers do not write literature for the sake of fame or fortune, hence artistic expressions should contain everything that is pure and good, since it is through these values that we show our appreciation for Allah (s.w.t) for the blessings He bestowed upon us. Besides, man's artistic expressions should focus on moral values and higher spiritual issues.

To Ismail Ibrahim, the aim of literature is to elevate mankind to the status of *Takwa* and *Iman* (faith). According to Ismail Ibrahim literature has a significant message in society since literature which is merely based on imagination and emotion and not on *Takwa* and *Iman* cannot be trusted since it aims at the satisfaction of one's appetite for worldly and sexual wishes. This ultimately will lead to the destruction of individuals, cause many social problems, and produce anxiety, fear and disorder.

To Ismail Ibrahim literature is synonymous to beauty. It is based on the beauty of truth and justice which are close to the believer's heart, mind, and belief springing from a true principle.⁽³⁾

Shafie Abu Bakar sees Islamic literature as a product of Muslim writers, flowing out of a deep understanding of the Islamic view on life and *Tauhid* belief, and it uses the most beautiful expressions in most beautiful forms. Furthermore, Shafie believes that Islamic literature should contain human, spiritual, universal, and artistic elements.

Shafie names his theory "*Takmilah*," and connects it to *Al-Kamal* (perfection) and *Al-Jamal* (beauty). Literature should found and exhibit these tenets and be directed towards "*Al-Takmilah*."

To Shafie, the aim of literature is to glorify the Creator, and to elevate man to the level of perfection, by instilling compassion for humanity and love of Islam. Writer should guide their readers wisely towards enhancement of positive values and in doing so complete human characters in the way the teachings of Islam call for.

Shafie advocates that the themes of Islamic literature be connected to Islamic values, as these are more fitting to his *Takmilah* theory.

Shafie says that Islamic writers should have an Islamic educational background, that they should fully understand the basic principles of Islam, and that they should know *Akida*, *Shariah* and *Akhlak*. In addition, writers should be knowledgeable about Islam and literature, as without this understanding they cannot produce Islamic literary works that can lead to perfection.

Shafie's theory is much concerned with lofty values, emphasizes truth and beauty and holds that the mixture of these two elements will lead to a climax of '*Al-Takmilah*' or Islamic literature.

Shafie views that the aim of Islamic literature lays in providing society with proper education based on Islamic values and its true teachings. Moreover, he perceives that through literature, writers can provide themselves and society with values and morals that can elevate all of them to a level of perfection.

Shafie also states that Islamic writers should put the Quran as a model before their eyes in order to pick some of its fruits, to follow in its steps and drink from its spring. Writers should also take heed of the sayings of the prophet (peace be upon him), the stories of the prophet's companions and his followers, and the works of past Islamic writers.⁽⁴⁾

The above mentioned theories are the most famous modern theories of Islamic literature. These theories are generally based on ideas of *'Ibadah*, *'Ubudiah* and *Tauhid* which are not limited to Islam alone as they are also found in other religions. They also depend on religious ideas and not on literary ones. Some theories limit the freedom of writers, and some include social and realistic theories that underscore the well-being of the state and not of the Islamic *Ummah* or entire mankind. In addition, some theories emphasize more the role of the writer rather than the role of literature, others consider the content and not the artistic aspects, the theme and not the manner, or the approach or the style.

It can be observed, too, that all these theories connect literature to nationalism. Furthermore, the concept of Islamic literature as defined by these theorists is limited in both themes and content, even though they should have considered, as will be mentioned later, the method of Islamic literature, its message, and the concept of beauty in Islam.

It follows that there is a need for a new theory of Islamic literature which is more closely related to literature, and is more reflective of Islam, its spirit, and its exalted message. Therefore, this paper proposes a new theory based on the concept of *Al-'Alamiah* (Universality), a religious as well as literary term. This paper discusses a number of points closely related to this theory such as the concept of Islamic literature, its content, its message, and the features that distinguish it from other world literatures.

Theory of Al-'Almiah (Universality)

On a close inspection of the Holy Quran, one will notice that the word "*'Almiah*" occurs frequently in a number of its chapters, such as in *Al-Fatihah* "*Alhamdulillah Rabli'allmin*", and in many other chapters such as *Al-Baqarah*, *Al-an'am*, *Unis*, *Yusof*, *Al-Anbia'*, *Al-Shu'arah* and *Al-Zukhruf*. The word occurs in various meanings including mankind, world, humanity, universality, existence, and universe. The word "*'Almiah*" is connected first of all to the Creator, then to the last of his messengers and his glorious book. Allah (s.w.t) is *Rabil 'Alamin* (Lord of the Worlds), Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is *Rasul Rabil 'Alamin* (messenger of the Lord of the Worlds), and the Quran is descended from the Lord of the Worlds, as a "*Zikrun Wa Rahmahtun Lil 'Alamin*" (reminder and mercy for the mankind). And thus the truth of Islam is revealed as a universal religion for all mankind.

The Holy Quran does not only narrate stories about the prophet of Islam and Muslims, but it speaks about them and about others such as believers, people of other religions, un-believers, and about many peoples and nations, and addresses both Muslims and non-Muslims. It directs itself to all people.

Islam is the religion of humanity. It elevates the state of man, makes him the center of existence, and the agent of Allah (s.w.t). Allah (s.w.t) created the world for the sake of people, taught them all the languages and made them dominant over the earth, bestowing blessings and treasures on them and putting humans in charge of the whole world.⁽⁵⁾

Islam emphasizes the fact that all mankind are made of one soul, they all are created of dust, they all are brothers and sisters belonging to one father and one mother, they are equal like the teeth of a comb, and there is no difference between Arabs and non-Arabs, black and white, rich and poor. Islam opposes all calls which are raised in the name of nationalism, patriotism, racism, and territorialism which divide people according to their origins, blood, colour, race and other false and artificial distinctions.

Universality of literature does not only mean that such literature may depart from the language in which it was written to another language, but it also means a literature which is directed to the whole of mankind.⁽⁶⁾ Universality of literature moves away from national boundaries and a local scope; it relates to all people and all places. Its themes are true for all times and all situations and suit all tastes and cultures, and relate to the essence of people as human beings.

Literature becomes universal when all literatures correspond to each other and they are unified in their literary genres, artistic origins and human objectives, so that there will be no boundaries except those of language and how a particular region or environment may inspire a particular writer.⁽⁷⁾

The concept of “*Al-‘Almiah*” of literature is related to the writer, the reader, the theme, the language and the message. Next the concept of *Al-‘Almiah* is discussed by focusing on the concept of Islamic literature, the features of this literature and its message.

a- Islamic literature should be based on the understanding of Islam, which springs from the Holy Quran and the *Hadith*, and relates to essential issues such as divinity, Prophet-hood, messengers, angels, holy books, the hereafter, resurrection, day of judgment, fate, defined decrees, and people’s role in life and their relationship with humanity, the Creator and the entire world.

Other issues related to the understanding of Islam pertain to the belief that all men belong to one origin: (“And verily this Brotherhood of yours is a single Brotherhood.”) (Al-Mu’minun,52), and thus that all people belong to one father and one mother: (“You all belong to Adam, and Adam was created of dust. “), and that they are all equal in the eyes of Allah (s.w.t).

Other issues related to the understanding of Islam include the belief that we live in the world and the world lives within us, that the world lives in other worlds that we cannot see, that there is no separation between us and other things in this world, that every man carries all people within him, that freedom means that you widen the scope of your imagination to the extent that you see yourself in everything and everyone, that the world has no existence except within us, that there is no existence for us except in this world, and that we and the world form a unity that cannot be split.

According to Islam man is the centre of life, where life is an indivisible unity, each man carries all people within him, and wherever he goes, he finds himself in everything he sees, everything exists within him, he is not restricted by one place or one time, and he is pleased to see that the seeds he sows grow in the hearts of many people and bears fruit.

Furthermore, in Islam man has invisible bonds tying him to many people, places and creatures existing both in his consciousness and unconsciousness, including all plants,

insects, birds, fish, and animals which live for others as well as for themselves. Hence life is created for the individual to support the whole, and life in its essence is always a company, a group, a unity and not a majority.

Islamic literature not only gets its spiritual inspiration from the Holy Quran and Hadith, but it also derives its aesthetic and artistic notions such as an adherence to truth, goodness, and beauty from other sources as well.

When evaluating Islamic literature, it is not necessary that all the works of a particular writer correspond to the Islamic perception. Not even the works of great Islamic poets and writers such as Hassan Bin Thabit, Busairi, Ibnul Farid, Rumi, Sa'adi, Hafiz, Jami, 'Attar, Kabir, Iqbal, Ghalib, Najuib Kilani, Bakathir, Shauqi, Abdel Hamid Judah Al-Sahar, Hamka, Shanon Ahmad and Shukri Zain do this. This very idea was highlighted by Muhammad Qutub, Muhammad Kamal Hasaan and Muhammad Bukhari Lubis.

Some scholars are of the opinion that the themes of Islamic literature should be confined to topics related to Islam. This presumption is incorrect as Islamic literature is not restricted to Islamic themes or the local environment of the writer. The Quran itself includes various themes such as the people of the cave, 'Ad, Thمود, and others. What defines Islamic literature is not the topic but the way the writer presents it. Islamic themes like Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) may become un-Islamic such as in "*Satanic Verses*" written by Salman Rushdie, a Muslim writer, while a non-Islamic topic like the tale "*The Rabbit and the Lion*" in the book written by Bāīdabā the Indian writer of *Kilaila Wa Dimna*⁽⁸⁾ turns into an Islamic theme in the tale "*The Lion and the Wild Beasts*" in Jalaludin Rumi's *Mathwni*⁽⁹⁾. Any writing that depends on content alone cannot be considered literature in the true sense of the word. Similarly, a work which is based on form alone is worthless. Also, writing with content but which lacks form is no different from a text on jurisprudence, monotheism, or theology. Such writing is a scientific writing but it is not literature.

Islamic literature accommodates universal and human themes such as love, death, jealousy, generosity, avarice, courage, sacrifice, friendship, motherhood, virtue, vice, honesty, heroism, justice, unfairness, etc. It also expands to include human characters such as Hamza, Ayyub and Hatim of Tai'.

Islamic literature is not confined to one language, as any language can be used by any Islamic writer, but the knowledge of Arabic language is compulsory for each Islamic writer just as it is compulsory for all Muslims who will read it in their daily prayers and worship, since it is the language of Divine revelation, Hadith and is an essential part of Islamic heritage. In this sacred Quranic language, excellent masterpieces were created, which have inspired many international writers. Hence, Islamic writers should read these works so that they may become inspired and introduce some of these ideas into Islamic literature. This is the reason that Iqbal says:

You must introduce healthy
And constructive thoughts
To the literature
Which is impossible without retreat
To Arabia!
You must give your heart
To the Salma of Arabia,

That the morn of Hejaz may appear
From the night of Kurdistan.
(Secrets of Ego, p127)

As said before, a writer can write in any language, as his literature, provided it is universal Islamic literature, will be transferred to the languages of the whole world just as the works of Rumi, Sa'adi, Hafiz, Jami, 'Attar and Iqbal have been translated into international languages. Muslims should pay more attention to the teaching and learning of Arabic on one hand, and, at the same time, pay more attention to translation on the other, which is in accordance with the Quranic verses:

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other.” (Al-Hujurat, 13).

Thus literature can be transferred from its local language to a universal language. Islamic writers should not confine themselves to one language but should learn various languages, read in various languages, at least read literary translations in their own language as well as read in a foreign language. Preferably Islamic writers write in a language that makes their literature available to a great number of readers, as Iqbal did when he wrote his major poems in Persian, one of the Lingua Franca of Muslim Asia, and wished that he could write in Arabic. Thus it would be commendable that non-Arab writers write in Arabic, the language of the Quran, or at least that they can read it.

As for the writers of Islamic literature, most theorists have laid down the condition that they should be Muslim. This might be a result of these theorists' understanding of the Quranic verses in surah *Al Sh' araa* whose translation reads:

“And the Poets, - it is those straying in Evil, who follow them: Seest thou not that they wander distracted in every valley? – And that they say what they practise not?- Except those who believe, work righteousness, engaged much in the remembrance of Allah, and defend themselves after they are unjustly attacked. And soon will the unjust know what vicissitudes their affairs will take.”(‘Surah *Al-Shu 'ra*’, 224-227).

These verses actually refer to unbelievers who attacked Islam and the holy Prophet while Muslim poets, like Hasaan Bin Thabit who defended the prophet and the new religion, were excluded. The theorists mentioned above generalized the statement, applied it to all poets, and, consequently, laid down the condition that a writer should be a believer, and a doer of good deeds who mentions the name of Allah (s.w.t) and repels injustice. The theorists' stance is also the result of the critical circumstances which Muslims face at present. Moreover, it is a result of their conception of literature as an expression of the personality of the writer and the writer's own perception of man, life and universe. Even though, as Wordsworth claimed, literature is not an expression of the writer's personality and it is not an escape from it either, as Eliot thought. Literature, in my opinion, is an exploration of the truth of man and universe, in order to assist him and others to understand life, and his role in it so that he will live in the way Allah (s.w.t) has determined for him, and so that he will achieve the objective for which Allah (s.w.t) created him.

The above mentioned theorists also mixed up the terms “*Islami*” (Islamic) and “Muslim”. The first term is ideological and relates to the individual writer, hence it is a term with a personal

connotation. The second term is general and comprehensive. It means submission and surrender to Allah (s.w.t), the Lord of the Worlds, as it appears in the Quranic verses:

“Behold! his Lord said to him: Submit (thy will to Me): He said: “I submit (my will) to the Lord and Cherisher of the Universe.”(Al-Baqarah, 131).

If we wish the term “*Al-‘Alamiah*” to form the theoretical base for a theory of Islamic literature, it is not sufficient to say that literature should flow from Islamic writers only, and merely address Muslims. Rather we should open the doors to non-Muslims to be part of it, follow it, apply it in their literary works, and direct to both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. .

This paper proposes that we focus on literature and not on the writers and their particular creeds. When we do so, Islamic literature will include works of great international writers from different religions such as Goethe’s anthology “ *The West-Eastern Divan* ”, as we can see in the following lines;

The East is God, the West is God’s! Northern and southern rest in the peace of His hands.

*

He, who alone is just, wills what is right for every man. Of his hundred names let this one be high-extolled . Amen.

*

My wandering leads me into confusion, but you can straighten me out. When I act and when I write, may you be the guide of my ways.

(Goethe, Selected Verse, p233)

Such literature can also include works of poets like Tagore as we can see in this verse:

This is my prayer to thee, my lord- strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor bend my knees before insolent might.

Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles.

And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love.

(Gitanjali, p.25)

The culture of any Islamic writer should be a universal culture. In addition to his knowledge of Arabic and the Islamic heritage as it is mainly represented in the Holy Quran, the Traditions of the holy Prophet and Arabic and Islamic literature, such a writer should also be well versed in international literary theories, and should generally be acquainted with the literary works of ancient and modern great international writers. Moreover, the artistic aspects of an Islamic writer’s writing should be of international standard. Islamic writers should follow in the steps of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) in the sense that they can spread his message, quoting from the Holy Quran and Hadith. Islamic writers should become one with the whole of mankind and lift themselves up beyond and above ethnic ties and boundaries and should remain focused on the Quranic verses:

“And verily this Brotherhood of yours is a single Brotherhood.” (Al-Mu’minun, 52).

Islamic writers must hold themselves accountable for each word that slips from their tongues or flows from their pens, because words are more than just letters and syllabi uttered or

written, and more than tools to create something commonly called “*Adab*” (literature), the reading of which lets one escape temporarily from existential challenges of life. Hence, for Islamic writers words are a creative power that can create some worlds and eliminate others. Thus, writers have the responsibility to assess the appropriateness of the words used, know whether they are righteous or not, true or untrue. Writers should also consider as much as they can where the words uttered or entrusted to paper will lead lest they become poison instead of a balm, a stumbling block instead of a ladder. Words are the seeds Islamic writers sow in themselves and in the souls of those who have a similar longing. Words are the path that writers lay out for themselves and others heading towards to the writer’s goal.⁽¹⁰⁾

b-As for the features of Islamic literature, some of these features are in accordance with some non-Islamic literatures and some are unique. The first feature that distinguishes Islamic literature from other literatures is that it flows from a deep understanding of the Islamic perception of man, life and the universe. This feature is unique and sets it apart from other literatures.

The second feature is the truth from which Islamic writers receive inspiration, such as from verses 224-227 in Surah Shu’araa, which were quoted earlier in this paper. Other inspiration comes from the many proverbs and sayings of the Prophet (Peace be upon him).

The third feature of Islamic literature is the responsibility writers bear towards Allah (s.w.t) so that their writing is the result of a deep sense of responsibility for their writing based on their understanding of the Quranic verses

“Nun. By the Pen and by the (Record) which (men) write.” (Al-Qalam, 1).

The fourth feature is *Al’Amal Salih* (Good deed). Literary works created by an Islamic writer should aim at the welfare of people and should be for the good of mankind. Such literary works in themselves are good deeds for which their writer is rewarded in accordance to the Quranic verses:

“A goodly Word like a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the heavens”,(Surah Ibrahim,24),

And the saying of the Prophet (Peace be upon him):

“Things that benefit a person after his death are pious children who pray for their parents, his knowledge, which is still useful to others, and his charity, which continues to benefit the needy.”⁽¹¹⁾

The fifth feature is that literature is for the benefit of people, as stipulated by the Quranic verse:

“Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: they are the ones to attain felicity”
(Surah Aal ‘Imran, 104).

The sixth feature is that literature should be for the sake of Allah, and should not have a material goal such as seeking fame or fortune. The ultimate message should be to seek the pleasure of Allah in accordance with the Quranic verses:

“Proclaim! (or Read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created “(Surah Al-‘Alq, 1), and the verse: “Say: “Truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds.” (Surah Al-‘An’am, 162).

The seventh feature is that literature should be universal in nature, that it should contain human issues concerning people everywhere and at all times; that it should be of universal aesthetic standard; and that the writer should direct it to all mankind.

c-The message of Islamic literature does not centre on enjoyment, entertainment or amusement, nor does it focus merely on aesthetic aspects as some critic’s advocate who call for the incorporation of Western literary theories such as the theory of art for art’s sake. The ultimate message of Islamic literature is not about education or moral upliftment as claimed by some Islamic theories such as *‘Ibadah Theory*, and the theory of *Takmilah*, but it is the exploration of the essence of man, life, and existence. The main objective of Islamic literature is to help people in their lives as designed by the will of Allah (s.w.t) in order for them to achieve their life’s destiny. The ultimate and lasting goal of Islamic literature is to understand the universal system and its objectives.⁽¹²⁾ Art, no matter how superior it might be in the eyes of its creator and in the eyes of the people, has no real importance unless the writer and the people translate it into a power that liberates them from the bonds of a limited world and takes them into the freedom of an unlimited life. Literature, no matter how beautiful it may be, is meaningless if it does not help us to explore the meaning of life since the meaning of life is more lasting than heaven and earth.⁽¹³⁾ Part of the message of Islamic literature is to unite the hearts of all people and to fill these hearts with love, peace, serenity and bliss. Then these hearts will become one with the world, and the world will become one with them. Thus the whole will fuse with beauty which will remain forever and will not perish.⁽¹⁴⁾ In other words, Islamic literature carries the message of Islam itself and is directed towards humanity, its main objective being the interest of all mankind.

Al-‘Almiah in Islamic Literature

Great ancient Islamic writers like ‘Attar, Hafiz, Sa‘adi and Rumi devoted their attention to the concept of *‘Almiah* and beautifully illustrated it in their works as we can see in the following verses of Rumi:

The sufi opens his hands to the universe
And gives away each instant, free.
Unlike someone who begs on the street for money to survive,
A dervish begs to give you his life.

(The Rumi Collection, p182)

We find the concept of *‘Almiah* in some works of great modern writers such as Muhammad Iqbal, a distinguished poet and philosopher. For example, in *Asrar-i-Khudi* he says:

We, who are free from the bonds,
Of “country,” are like the Sight
Which is one, in spite of being
The light of two Eyes!

We belong to Hejaz
And China and Persia,

Because originally we are Dew
Of *one* smiling Dawn!

(Secrets of Ego, p84)

And in *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*, he says:

If your choice is “Love,”
Then you’ll have to give up
“Lineage,” - rather you shall have
No attachment even to Arabia
And Iran!

(Rumuz-i-Bekhudi, p210)

Iqbal’s concept of *Al-‘Almiah* also appears in some of his poems, for instance in “*Asrar-i-Khudi*” and in “*Ar-Mughan-Hijaz*” we also find it in “*Zarb-i-Kalim*” in which his voice on *Al-‘Almiah* is louder and clearer as it addresses all mankind:

I don’t belong to Fars or Hind,

To *Iraq* or *Hedjaz* don’t trace my breed:
The *Self* to me this much has taught
Spurn both the worlds and pay no heed.

(The Rod of Moses, p44)

In his anthology, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*, Iqbal represents this idea of *Al-‘Almiah* even clearer and also more frequently, that is, in more verses:

Of course, the *nature* of a Muslim
Is rich with Compassion,
And his Hand and Tongue
Are a great Blessings
For Mankind!

(Rumuz-i- Bekhudi, p130)

So, if you have a Song,
Don’t sing it *alone*, -
Rather, sing it at the Branch
Of a tree in our own Garden!

(Rumuz-i-Bekhudi, p130-131)

You call yourself as a “Turk”!
Or as An “Afghan”!
Alas! You stick to these customs
As you did in the past!

Now get rid of various names,
And be content with your
Original and genuine name:
“Muslim”,
Accept the Jar,
And give up the *cups*!

(Rumuz-i-Bekhudi, p195-196)

You are a Muslim!
Therefore, don't ask anything
Of anybody, save Allah,
And do good
To entire Mankind!
(Rumuz-i- Bekhudi, p198)

Hence, we are not
Necessarily attached to *Rome*
Or *Arabia*,
And we are not religiously
Bound to any "Lineage"!
(Rumuz-I Bekhudi, p208-209)

Yet unfortunately, this splendid and noble universal tune did not spread in all of Iqbal's poetry as he was preoccupied with his momentous message towards Indian, Pakistani, and Arab, Afghan and Persian peoples. In other words, he devoted his life and poetry to the peoples of the East in general and Islamic *Ummah* in particular. Islamic writer should be concerned with the issues of his Islamic *Ummah*, of course. But he shouldn't confine himself to Muslims and ignore other nations and tribes of mankind. He should take guidance in Islam, to follow in the steps of its messenger. He should direct his literature to all peoples, Muslims, and non-Muslims altogether. Thus he becomes a universal human writer, and his literature becomes a universal literature to the true sense of the word.

CONCLUSION

The theory of *Al-'Almiah* calls for inspiration from the Holy Quran which is a mercy and reminder for all humanity, and which was revealed to the illiterate Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) from *Rab Al'aalamin* (Lord of the Worlds). The Holy Quran reflects the essence of Islam as a natural disposition created by Allah in human beings, and a universal message directed to all creatures. The theory of *Al-'Almiah* holds that Islamic literature springs not only from the Islamic concept of man, life, and the universe, but also from the notion of literature as illustrated in the Holy Quran, *Sunnah*, and in Islamic aesthetics.

This theory does not only present a new concept of Islamic literature but it also portrays writing as a sacred profession expressing a lofty message based on truth and beauty. Such writing aims at the welfare of humanity, and therefore its writer is rewarded both in this life and in the hereafter. The theory also perceives literature as a gift from Allah (s.w.t) for which the writer should thank Allah (s.w.t) by employing it to serve mankind. The theory emphasizes that the main function of literature is to explore the essence of man, life, existence and the universe. The ultimate message of Islamic literature is to help man to live in the way Allah has destined him for in order to fulfill this destiny. *Al-'Almiah* theory holds that the message of Islamic literature is the same as the message of Islam, that is, both are universal, sacred and comprehensive.

Unlike other theories of Islamic literature, the *Al-'Almiah* theory widens the scope of Islamic literature itself; it makes room for the writings of non-Muslim writers which flow from good Islamic conceptions and ideas, which broaden also the horizon and mind of Islamic writers expecting them to think in a comprehensive human way and to write for all people in all places and all times. The theory does not limit the writer message to the people of the West

nor to the people of the East, hence they will not warn the East against the West, and will not rally the West against the East. Rather writers should unite them and address both as one nation, because piping the tune of conflict makes the East hate the West and makes that the West a deaf ear to the wisdoms of the East and its literatures.

This theory elevates the standards of writers and widens their artistic abilities which will enable them to stand as equals among other international writers.

In summary, this theory leads to the spread of Islamic literature, it increases the number of its readers, elevates the status of Islamic literature and changes the current role of Islamic writers from being influenced by other literatures and imitating these to a new role where Islamic writers become so influential that writers of other literatures will look up to them and emulate their work. In this way Islamic literature can spread the message of Islam, its values and ideas all over the world.

Endnotes:

- (1) See Rahmah BT Ahmad and Adly Yaacob, *Al- Islam Wal Al- Adab Al- Malayui* (Kuala Lumpur : IIUM Press,2008),pp.176-178,199-200,333-359.
- (2) Ibid., pp.154-156,178-182,204-217-380.
- (3) Ibid., pp.170-172,183-184,390-391.
- (4) Ibid., pp.173,192-196,200-201,251-293.
- (5) Abul Hassan Al-Nadawi, *Rawai' Iqbal* (Damascus, Darul Fikr, 1960), p.78.
- (6) Muhammad Ghunaimi Hilal, *Al- Adab Al- Muqaran* (Beirut: Dar Al' Awdah, 1982),p.104.
- (7) Ibid.,p.288.
- (8) Abdullah Ibnul Muqafa', *Kilailah Wa Dimnah* (Cairo: Dar Miser Lil Tiba'ah,1977),pp.83-85.
- (9) Mustafa Ghalib, *Jalaluddin Al-Rumi* (Cairo:'azi-Din Press ,1981),pp50-75.
- (10) Mikhail Na'imah, *Sab'un* (Beirut: Darul 'Ilm Lil Malaiin, 1979), p.677.
- (11) Marican Y. Mansoor, *Sayings of the Prophet* (Kuala Lumpur:Orio Consultancy, n.d.),p.11.
- (12) Mikhail Na'imah,Op. Cit.,p.666.
- (13) Mikhail Na'imah,ibid.,p.718.
- (14) Michael Na'imah,ibid.,p705.

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