

# **Islam And Music: Special Reference To The Concept Of Moderation And The Enjoyment Of Music**

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## **Abstract**

The art of music is not alien to Islam. Many Muslim scholars have written about it and some were even musicians. There are many views among both Muslims and non-Muslims concerning the status of music in Islam. Some affirm Islam's approval of music, while others may see Islam's negation of it. This interest is due to the emergence of various genre of music in the cultures and societies of the modern world today. The discussion in this paper is an attempt to explain the current situation of this polemic. As we see it, Islam views the art of music as universal and not exclusive to any particular race, culture or nation. To say that a particular genre of music is Islamic or otherwise would depend upon the criteria as expounded by Muslim scholars. This means that anyone can be seriously involved in music so long as it does not contravene the teachings of Islam. This paper will also attempt to explain the place of moderation in the enjoyment of music within the parameters set by Islam with the view of fulfilling human aesthetic needs.

## **Keywords:**

Islam, Music, Moderation, Enjoyment, Aesthetic Needs

## Introduction

Basically, Muslims are not prohibited from playing music or getting seriously involved in the arena of music. In Islam, music is not merely for entertainment but also for other purposes such as to foster a closer relationship with the Creator, to impart messages for the benefit of humanity, to promote self-confidence, patriotism, and better family relationships, as well as to cultivate awareness of current issues.

However, with the emergence of new forms of music, especially those promoted by particular cultures, Muslims have become confused over the type of music as arts that is acceptable as Islamic. Added to this confusion is the lack of knowledge of what is Islamic and what is the status of music in Islam. With this as the premise, we think that the discussion on the art of music in Islam is something serious, especially in order to resolve the issues behind the misconception of music in Islam.

## The Art of Music in Islam

The word music *per se* cannot be found in the Quran or the Hadith (Prophetic Tradition); however, Allah does mention the art of voice when relating the miracles of Prophet Daud<sup>1</sup> and Prophet Sulaiman<sup>2</sup>. In the text of Hadith a few words can be related to music such as *al-Ma'azif*, *al-Ghina* and *al-Mughniyyah*<sup>3</sup>.

The term 'music' is believed to have originated from the Greek; it was borrowed by the Muslims around the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries of the Muslim calendar (Hijrah). Since the term 'music' comes from Greek Civilization, musicologists and ethnomusicologists accepted the definition of music as the art of mixing sounds that come from musical instruments and human voices to produce various manifestations that

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<sup>1</sup> See the story of Prophet David in the Quran 4:163, 17:55, 24:10, 5:78, 6:84, 21:78, 25:15

<sup>2</sup> See the story of Prophet Solomon in the Quran 2:102, 4:123, 6:84, 21:78, 27:15

<sup>3</sup> Ishak Sulaiman (2000) 'Perkembangan baru dalam seni muzik di Malaysiadan pengaruhnya terhadap hukum' (Paper presented at Seminar Hukum Islam Semasa III) p. 2.

can satisfy the emotions, aesthetics, and to achieve the objectives of belief structures and systems<sup>4</sup>.

Three characteristics can be derived from the definition:

1. Sounds from instruments and voices
2. Satisfaction of emotions and aesthetics
3. Achievement of the objectives of belief structures and systems

The three characteristics can be found in the practices of worship and rituals in Islam such as the recitation of the Quran, the azan, takbir and talbiyah in haj, zikr (invocation of God's names), and salawat (invocation after the Prophet's name). In the recitation of the Quran there are such rules (tajwid) as Izhar, Adgham and Iqlab, that coincide with the rules relating to melody and tempo in music. The recitation of the Quran can be said to be an art of music as well<sup>5</sup>. In the actual sense, music is not foreign in the life and religious practices of the Muslims<sup>6</sup>.

Allah is the Essence of Beauty and He loves Beauty. The Prophet (pbuh) says that Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty<sup>7</sup>. Music is part of human nature and it is a form of beauty. To enjoy peace and tranquility is part of the natural human condition, and music is one of the sources of peace and tranquility. Islam never hinders Muslims from enjoying music, but particular rules must be observed. The Prophet gave permission to his Companions to enjoy and be happy as stated in his Hadith:

Related by Aishah r.a. saying, 'I was visited by Abu Bakr at my house. At the time, two maids were singing the poems celebrating the Day of Bu'ath relating the war between the Jews of Aus and Khazraj. They were not singers.' Abu Bakr intervened, 'Is it proper to have the

<sup>4</sup> Lois Lamy al-Faruqi (1993) 'Shariah tentang muzik dan ahli muzik' in Ismail R. Al-Faruqi *Fikiran dan Budaya Islam*. Masood Rashi (trans.). Kuala Lumpur: DBP p. 31

<sup>5</sup> See more detailed discussion in Syeikh Ahmad Hassan al-Baquri (1997) 'Seni tajwid adalah suatu muzik al-Quran' Prof. Madya Wan Yahya Wan Ahmad (Trans.) *al-Manar* Jun 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Ishak Sulaiman (2000) *op.cit.* pp 4-5. See also Amini Amir Abdullah (1997) 'Konsep seni dalam Islam' dalam Hj Ahmad Fauzi hj Murad et al. *Tamadun Islam*. Selangor: Universiti Putra Malaysia, pp 148-149.

<sup>7</sup> Abu Zakariyyah bin Sharaf al-Nawawi (1999) *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Iman, Bab Tahrim al-Kibr wa Bayanih, hadith no 147. Vol 1-3, 5<sup>th</sup>. Ed.. Dimmasq: Dar al-Khair, p. 268

song of evil in the house of the Prophet on this festive day?' The Prophet answered, 'Oh Abu Bakr, Indeed every people have their own day of celebration and we are celebrating the day'<sup>8</sup>.

These words of the Prophet are the first indication that the rules in Islam also cover the art of music, which is part of the cultural life of the people. Music entertains them and gives them happiness, especially when celebrating a special day. The saying also indicates that Islam accepts the normal practice (*urf*) of the Ansar, i.e. to amuse themselves with music. To the Jews it indicates that Islam is tolerant of their practices<sup>9</sup>. In general, the Prophet means to say that Islam does accept the normal practice of any people as long as it does not go against its teaching and this is the flexibility and versatility of the *Sharia* (Law) of Islam<sup>10</sup>.

Going back into the history of Islam, we find that there were scholars who made their names in music, such as al-Kindi (809-873), Khalil Ibn Ahmad (718-786)<sup>11</sup>, al-Farabi (870-950)<sup>12</sup>, Safi al-Din 'Abd al-Mu'min (1216-1294)<sup>13</sup>, Shams al-Din Muhammad bin Safi al-Din<sup>14</sup>, Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani<sup>15</sup>, al-Sarakasy, Mansur bin Thalhah bin Tahir, Thabit bin

<sup>8</sup> Abu Zakariyyah bin Sharaf al-Nawawi (1999) *op. cit.*, Kita Solah al-Idain, bab al-Rukhsah fi al-li 'ab al-ladhi la Ma'asiah fih ayyam al-Id, Hadith no. 892 vol 4-6, pp 487-488. See also Ahmad bin ali bin Hajar al'Asqalani (1998) *Fath al-Bari bi Sharh Sahih Bukhari*, Kitab al-Jihad wa al-Siyar, Bab al-Daraq, Hadith no. 2906 vol 6. Cairo: Dar al-Hadith p. 116. See also Abu Abd Allah Muhammad bin Yazid al-Qazwayni (tt) *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Kitab al-Nikah, bab al-Ghina qa al-Duff, Hadith no 1898 vol 1 p. 612

<sup>9</sup> Prof. Dr Yusof al-Qardhawi (2002), *Seni dan Hiburan Dalam Islam*, Muhammad Baihaqi (Trans.). Kuala Lumpur: al-Hidayah Publishers., pp. 29-30.

<sup>10</sup> Abdul Ghani Samsudin and Engku Ibrahim Ismail (2001), *Seni Dalam Islam*, Selangor: Intel Multimedia and Publication., pp. 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> Khalil Ibn Ahmad was regarded as the first person who produced a dictionary of music which was later translated into English entitled *The Book of Notes*. His second book was *The Book of Rhythm*. Both were once used as reference texts in the Spanish universities.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Farabi made his name in the masterpieces *Grand Book on Music (Kitab al-Musiqi al-Kabir)*, *Styles in Music* and *On the Classification of Rythm*

<sup>13</sup> Famous for his theories of music. See C.E. Bosworth et al. (1995) *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. VII. Netherland: Leiden E.J. Brill, p. 805

<sup>14</sup> His well known book *The Jewels of Arrangement in the Knowledge of the Melodies*

<sup>15</sup> Famous for his book *Al-Ghani* translated as *The Grand Book of Songs* in 21 volumes



Qurra, Muhammad bin Zakariya al-Razi, Yunus al-Khatib and Qusta bin Luqa.

Al-Farabi was not only knowledgeable in the science and art of music, but he could also compose and play musical instruments very well<sup>16</sup>. He could influence his audience with his music<sup>17</sup>. Ibn Khallikan relates the extraordinary ability of al-Farabi in the presence of Sayf al-Daulah al-Hamda, the ruler, and other intellectuals. The story goes as follows:

One day, a meeting of intellectuals from various disciplines was held at the palace of the Sayf al-Daulah, the ruler. The Sayf al-Daulah himself chaired the meeting. After some discussion, the Sayf al-Daulah asked al-Farabi - who was in Turkish attire - whether he would like to have some food and drink. Al-Farabi answered, 'No'. 'What about music?' the ruler continued. 'Yes,' answered al-Farabi. So Sayf al-Daulah called his musical group and asked them to play. Al-Farabi sat quietly and seemed not to be attracted by the music at all and, in fact, he made some comments about it. Sayf al-Daulah asked, 'Do you know something about music?' 'Yes' he answered. Then Sayf al-Daulah asked him to play some music. Al-Farabi opened his bag and took out his 'ud (lute) and played it. Those present were engrossed in his music and amazed at his skill in playing the instrument. Al-Farabi manipulated their emotions by changing the tempo of the music to make them happy, sad and even putting them to sleep<sup>18</sup>.

From the above incident, we can say that music is not something strange in Islam and, in fact, it is part of the cultural life of the Muslims. The involvement of the Muslim intellectuals in it shows that music is something that should be acceptable. Music in the Islamic perspective is something universal, and should not necessarily be localized to a particular group of people, nation or culture. A culture can have or maintain its own music, but it should be within the framework of the Islamic principles to be considered Islamic art.

<sup>16</sup> Mohammed Yusoff Hussain *et al.* (1993), *Isu-Isu Dalam Usuluddin dan Falsafah*. Selangor: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, p. 195.

<sup>17</sup> Estidotmy. Utusan Malaysia, *Al-Farabi Guru Falsafah Tersohor*, Ruangan Sainis Islam, 28 Ogos 2002, Edisi Ketujuh, h. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Khallikan (1977), *Wafayat al-A'yan wa Anba' Abna' al-Zaman*, Edited by Ihsan 'Abbas, Vol. 5, Beirut: Dar Sadir, pp. 155-156.

### The Definition of *Wassatiyyah* (Moderation) in Islam

The Muslims are the *Ummah*, (people) who practice moderation. The Quran mentions 'Thus have We made of you an *umma*, justly balanced that ye might be witnesses over the nation'.<sup>19</sup> *Wassatiyyah*, or moderation or equally balanced, is an essential feature of a person's every move. Being moderate means to be in the middle position, and being balanced means to have a firm mind uninfluenced by either extremes, such as being too strict (*ifrat*) or too loose (*tafrit*)<sup>20</sup>.

According to Yusof al-Qaradawi<sup>21</sup>, *wassatiyyah* is a special characteristic of Islam. It means to be in the middle position or to be balanced, not influenced by the opposing sides. Being balanced means to be neither too extreme nor too lenient. By practising *wassatiyyah*, a person will be safe from *ifrat* and *tafrit*<sup>22</sup>, the two extremes that should be avoided by Muslims<sup>23</sup>. From the above discussion, we gather that *wassatiyyah* refers to a just and balanced attitude. It is a positive attitude that places the person practising it within the safe limits permitted by Islam.

#### *Wassatiyyah* in Music

Islam is a natural religion, and every aspect of its teachings is in line with the natural needs of man. The need for entertainment is natural to man, and music is part of the entertainment. Therefore the music that is permitted in Islam to satisfy the natural needs of man must be moderate or *Wassatiyyah*.

To say that music is forbidden in Islam is extreme, and to say that any form of music is permissible in Islam is another extreme. In the first instance, Muslim society is pictured as serious, worshiping all the

<sup>19</sup> Surah al-Baqarah 2: 143

<sup>20</sup> Wan Hussein Azmi (1987), "Kesederhanaan Dalam Islam Dalam Konteks Malaysia", (Paper presented at the Seminar Antarabangsa Mengenai Perpaduan Ummah, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Mukhtar, Pusat Islam Malaysia), p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Yusof al-Qaradawi (1981), *al-khasais al-'ammah li al-Islam*, 2 Print. Kaerah: Maktabah Wahbah, p. 114. See also Yusof al-Qaradawi (1996), *Madkhal li Ma 'rifat al-Islam*, Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, p. 163

<sup>22</sup> *Op cit.* p 117

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad al-Razi Fakhr al-Din (1995), *Tafsir al-Fakhr al-Razi*, Vol. 2, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, p. 108.

time (in the limited sense), and entertainment - including music and songs - is not in their vocabulary. Laughter is rarely heard and happiness is not an ingredient of their life<sup>24</sup>.

Those who adopt the second extreme, that any music is permissible in Islam, may be overwhelmingly engrossed in music and entertainment, so much so that the religious rules of *wajib* (obligatory), *sunat* (optional), *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (forbidden) are disregarded, or without significance in their lives.

The question that arises is to what extent music is permissible in Islam. The answer lies in the concept of *wassatiyyah* as mentioned above. To elaborate, *wassatiyyah* in music, we have to survey the opinions of authoritative Muslim scholars. Hopefully, we will be able to gain some insight or probably some guidance in appreciating music for the Islamic way.

### **Al-Imam al-Ghazali (450-505H)**

Al-Imam al-Ghazali introduced a set of guidelines for the Muslims to establish the legitimacy of music, musicians and instruments used in terms of Islamic law (*hukm*). They are *zaman* (time), *makan* (place), and *ikhwan* (activity). By *zaman*, al-Ghazali refers to whether the music interferes with the performance of the *jihad* and *ibadah*. If the music produces a negative effect, then it is considered *haram* (forbidden); if otherwise it is *harus* (permissible). In terms of *makan* or place, al-Ghazali refers to the situation, environment and the manner in which the music is performed. This should be done in accordance with Islamic values and, if it is so, then the music is permissible. If the musical activities (*ikhwan*) do not contribute to crime and immorality, they are acceptable<sup>25</sup>. Listening to songs can also be *harus* (permissible).

<sup>24</sup> Yusof al-Qaradawi (1996), *al-Islam wa al-Fann*, Amman: Dar al-Furqan, h. 11. Lihat juga Dr. Yusof Al-Qardhawi (2002), *Seni Dan Hiburan Dalam Islam*, Muhammad Baihaqi (terj.). Kuala Lumpur: Al-Hidayah Publishers, p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali (1998) *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, Juz. 3, Qahirah: Maktabah Misr, p. 376. See also Abdullah Yusof (2000), "Industri Hiburan Dalam Islam: Analisis Dari Sudut Persejarahan Awal Dan Penilaian Hukum", *Jurnal Syariah*, jil. 8., Bil 1, Januari 2000, pp. 35-36. See also Abdullah Yusof (1999), "Kegiatan Seni Hiburan Dalam Islam Serta Hukumnya, dalam *Kumpulan Esei: Seni & Hiburan Dalam Perspektif Islam*, c. 1. Kuala Lumpur: Kor Agama Angkatan Tentera (Kagat) in collaboration with Jabatan Pengajian Media UM, p. 41.



*sunnat* (encouraged), *wajib* (obligatory), *makruh* (detestable) and *haram* (forbidden)<sup>26</sup>. A song can be forbidden because of the singer, musical instruments, lyrics, the perception of the singer and the audience of the song<sup>27</sup>.

#### **Singer**

The appearance of a female singer in front of the audience /show and her tempting voice is forbidden if such an act can cause calumny or slander (*fitnah*). Forbiddance rests on the causation of calumny or slander, not on the appearance or the voice.

#### **Musical instrument**

A musical instrument is considered *haram* if it is or can be associated with vice or alcoholism.

#### **Lyrics**

The lyrics of a song are considered *haram* if they contain the essence of abuse, or they vilify the Prophets, especially Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. It is also *haram* if the lyrics praise the beauty of a woman or someone.

#### **The Audience's Perception**

A song will be considered *haram* if it stimulates sensuous untoward desires, and also if it can be the cause of, or delay someone from doing good deeds.

#### **Sheikh Mahmud Shaltut**

In his book *Al-Fatawa*, Sheikh Mahmud issues a number of his opinions (*fatwa*) concerning music and entertainment<sup>28</sup>:

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- <sup>26</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali (1998), *op.cit.*, p. 381
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352-354. See also Prof Madya Dato' Dr Abdullah Muhammad Zin (1999), "Seni Suara (Bunyi-bunyian, Muzik, Nyanyian): Manifestasi Dendangan Syaitan?", (Paper presented at the national seminar on 'Islam dan Rekreasi', Dewan Besar IKIM, 23-24 September 1999), pp. 7-8.
- <sup>28</sup> Sheikh Mahmud Shaltut (1959), *Al-Fatawa: Dirasat li al-Mushkilat al-Muslim al-Mu'asir fi Hayatih al-Yawmiyyah wa-al-'Ammah*. Qahirah: Dar al-Qalam, pp. 375-380. See also Abdul Syukor Haji Husin (1986), *Nyanyian dan Muzik Menurut Pandangan Islam*. Selangor: Fakulti Pengajian Islam, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, p. 33. Abdul Ghani Samsudin and Engku Ibrahim Ismail (2001) *op.cit.*, pp. 45-46. Pehin Datu Seri Maharaja Dato Paduka Seri Setia Hj Awang Abdul Aziz bin Juned (2001), *Fatwa Mufti Kerajaan, Islam Dan Muzik*, ed. 2. Brunei: Jabatan Mufti, p. 18. *Berita Harian*, Abu Bakar Yang, 'Perkara Yang Mengharuskan Seni Suara Dalam Islam', Bahagian Agama, 10 Julai 2003, p. 6.



1. The *hukum* of listening and playing music is the same as that of tasting delicious food, experiencing a nice smell, appreciating beautiful scenery and experiencing the success of achieving precious noble knowledge. All of these are the manifestations of satisfaction that is given to man by God, calming and relieving, refreshing man physically and spiritually with new energy with which to face the new burdens and challenges ahead.
2. The Quran, as the supreme source of rules and regulations to ensure the completeness of life, exhorts man to practise moderation. In music, those who dislike it should not be extreme in discouraging it, and those like it should not be extreme in practising it.
3. Highly respected Fiqh Scholars (*Fuqaha'*) of the past allowed music in wars, pilgrimage (*hajj*), marriages, the Eids (Hari Raya) and the festive days of Islam. According to Hanafite scholars, music is forbidden when in the same session there are intoxicating drinks, passionate women singers, and the obvious presence of sinful elements, sexuality and idolatry. The forbiddance of music here is based on situational and conditional factors, and also on the presence of other elements, but not on the music itself.
4. Listening to instruments which produce beautiful music is not forbidden based on the instruments themselves, just like listening to human and animal voices; rather, it becomes forbidden if it is played for something forbidden, having forbidden purposes or diverting people from good deeds. Sheikh Mahmud warns of the verses forbidding something that is not clearly forbidden by Allah. He produced Surah al-A'raf (7), verse 32, as the basis of his argument:

قُلْ مَنْ حَرَّمَ زِينَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي أَخْرَجَ لِعِبَادِهِ وَالطَّيِّبَاتِ مِنَ الرِّزْقِ قُلْ هِيَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فِي الْحَيَاةِ  
الدُّنْيَا خَالِصَةً يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ كَذَلِكَ نُلَقِّنُ الْبَيِّنَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ (32)

Say: Who hath forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of God, which He hath produced for his servants, and the thing clean and pure, (which He hath provided) for sustenance? Say: They are in the life of this world, for those who believe, (and) purely for them on the Day of Judgment. Thus do We explain the signs in detail for those who understand.

### Dr. Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi

Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi has analyzed and elaborated the issues pertaining to the art of music based on textual (*naqli*) evidence and intellectual (*aqli*) merits, as well as on the opinion of other Muslim scholars. Al-Qaradawi has produced a number of publications which partly deal with the issues: *Al-Islam wa al-Fann*, *Malamih al-Mujtama' al-Muslim al-Ladhi Nanshuduh*, *Aal-Halal wa al-Haram fi al-Islam* and *Min Huda al-Islam Fatawa Mu'asirah*. Al-Qaradawi is of the opinion that, basically, music is permissible in Islam. However the *hukum* can change to forbidden (*haram*), encouraged (*sunat*), etc. depending on these conditions:

1. Not all lyrics are permissible. They must be within the ambit of Islamic values and ethics. The lyrics such as of Abu Nuwas are not permissible: *Let me vilify, Indeed my vilification? Is a request, It is a cure, For my pain*. Songs that praise tyrants and despots are against the Islamic teaching. Islam is against tyrants and despots and those who support or are in sympathy with them.
2. Another consideration is the manner in which the song is presented. For instance, if the melody and the actions of the singer incite certain undesirable desires, encourage free love, or intoxicate the audience's mind, the audience may get carried away, which may lead them to all sorts of vices or even criminal acts.
3. The show should not be accompanied by any other agenda which contravenes Islamic values and ethics - such as the consumption of alcoholic drinks or the uncontrolled mixing of male and female audience.

### Dr. Ahmad Sharbasi

According to Sharbasi, Islam does not forbid man to hear and appreciate songs and music if the lyrics are good and encourage the practice of religious teachings, good behaviour, cleanliness and the love of nation<sup>29</sup>. The song that is permissible discourages one from committing vices,

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<sup>29</sup> Dr Ahmad Sharbasi (t.t) *Yasalunak fi al-Din wa al-Hayah*, jld. 4. Beirut: Dar al-Jayl. p. 386.

not promoting forbidden desires and the show is free from drinks and uncontrolled relations<sup>30</sup>

The songs that are to be appreciated are the ones that encourage good behaviour and deeds<sup>31</sup>. The above opinions of the scholars indicate the moderation (*wassatiyyah*) of music in Islam. Islam does not take the extreme position over satisfying man's natural desire for entertainment, for Islam is a natural religion. Islamic music also tries to avoid extremeness in its performance in order not to spoil man's behaviour.

Scholars have also prescribed the framework within which Islamic music should be practiced and appreciated. Music in Islam is universal, and the same rules apply to all, irrespective of societies, nations or climate. Islam does not belong to any particular community or nation, and tolerance among all people should be upheld.

### **Conclusion**

Basically, the art of music is not foreign in Islam and there have been many Muslim scholars who were seriously involved in it. The concept of *wassatiyyah*, or moderation in music is to satisfy man's natural need for entertainment, besides being the evidence that Islam as a realistic religion has never curtailed man's natural needs and emotions.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387. *Ibid.*, jld. 1, p. 626. See also Abdul Syukor Haji Husin (1986), *op.cit.*, p. 33-34.

<sup>31</sup> Dr Ahmad Sharbasi (t.t), *op.cit.*, jld. 1, p. 626.



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