

Building A Sustainable Nation From The Quranic Perspective

[Pembangunan Negara Lestari Menurut Perspektif al-Quran]

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ABSTRACT

Building a sustainable nation from the Quranic perspective is a form of Islamic model that is clearly stated in the Quran. The model is based on the conception of Islamic principle, that adopts Islamic shari'ah (order) preservation approach, and executes the nation's development based on the guidelines embodied in the Quran and Sunnah. Most countries that drive success in various fields neglect the importance of balance between the physical development and spiritual development. This situation will only allow the world to strive for a materialistic success without any holistic development. Therefore, this study elaborated on the characteristics of a Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr state, which was the axis of the past Islamic world empires. A qualitative research method was used in this study by collecting library data to analyse texts that would suggest the concepts of building a sustainable nation from the Quranic perspective. Therefore, this working paper would explicate the features of Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr as the basis of global Islamic nation building. This study revealed that the nation of Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr requires an Islamic administration that covers various aspects, including politics, Rabbānī (divine) holistic education system, fair economic system, and sustainable environment. By understanding the Balda Ṭayyiba principle and its features, the greatness of a nation's civilisation could be reinstated. Thus, the basis of a nation's well-being relies on its political stability, a holistic education system, a fair economic system, and a sustainable environment.

Kata Kunci:

Negara Lestari; Perspektif;
Model; Politik; Pendidikan;
Ekonomi

ABSTRAK

Pembangunan Negara Lestari menurut perspektif al-Quran merupakan satu bentuk model Islam yang jelas dinyatakan di dalam al-Quran. Model ini adalah berdasarkan konsep prinsip Islam yang menerapkan pendekatan pemeliharaan syariat Islam dalam melaksanakan pembangunan negara berdasarkan garis panduan yang terkandung di dalam al-Quran dan Sunnah. Kebanyakan negara yang memacu kejayaan dalam pelbagai bidang mengabaikan kepentingan pembangunan fizikal yang seimbang dengan pembangunan rohani. Keadaan ini akan membawa dunia menuju kejayaan material tanpa pembangunan yang menyeluruh. Justeru, kajian ini menghuraikan ciri-ciri negara Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr yang merupakan paksi empayar dunia Islam pada masa lalu. Metodologi kajian kualitatif telah digunakan dalam

kajian ini dengan mengumpulkan data perpustakaan untuk menganalisis teks demi menunjukkan konsep pembangunan Negara Lestari menurut perspektif al-Quran. Oleh itu, artikel ini menjelaskan ciri-ciri Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr sebagai asas pembinaan negara Islam yang global. Dengan memahami prinsip Balda Ṭayyiba dan ciri-cirinya, keagungan peradaban bangsa akan dikembalikan semula. Oleh sebab yang sedemikian, asas kesejahteraan negara bergantung kepada kestabilan politiknya, sistem pendidikan yang holistik, sistem ekonomi yang adil, dan persekitaran yang lestari.

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1. Introduction

Islam has been bestowed to humankind as a way of life (*al-Dīn*), which is a holistic life order that ensures happiness and excellence in worldly life and the hereafter. Islam has placed the state as one of the social systems that will sustain the universal development of human civilisation. This can be exemplified from the contributions by Malaysia's Islamic administration in various physical and spiritual aspects. This achievement can only be unlocked by ensuring the stability between the physical and spiritual aspects of the nation. Regarding the issue, Mohd Fauzi Hamat once stated that by neglecting this idea and leaning merely towards the material aspect as demonstrated by the West will result in the decline of the nation's spiritual behaviour (Abd Jalil, 2014). Therefore, it is obligatory for Muslims to build a sustainable nation which excels both physically and spiritually, also known as *Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr*, based on the perspective of the Quran.

To prove the validity and relevance of this study, the researchers have highlighted several key points from previous studies. Among the studies that have been reviewed are: *Kualitas Hidup Menurut Tafsir Nusantara: Baldatun Thayyibatun Wa Rabbun Ghafur Dalam Tafsir Marah Labid; Tafsir Al-Azhar; Tafsir An-Nur; Tafsir Departemen Agama; and Tafsir Al-Mishbah* by Andriansyah (2013). This article has analysed the phrase "*Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr*" with reference to the interpretations given by *Tafsir Nusantara*, and has also aimed to compare the interpretations given by some interpreters on the phrase, to be linked to the concept of quality of life by a research unit from the University of Toronto (Andriansyah, 2013). It did not focus on the topic of a sustainable nation, but rather, focused on the interpretation of *Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr* and its relation with the concept of quality of life. Another study, *Peran Nahdlatul Ulama Dalam Membina Nasionalisme Indonesia Sebagai Upaya Mewujudkan Baldatun Thayyibatun Wa Robbun Ghofur* by Lutfi (2014) aimed to examine and analyse the meaning of nationalism by NU *kiai* (Muslim scholars). The study portrayed the elements of *Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr* as good citizens and Muslims' having an exemplary leader and effective strategy in building a nation (Lutfi, 2014). Although the notion of a sustainable nation is a part of a good strategy, the researcher did not focus on elaborating the idea.

The next study is *Membina Model Indeks Kesejahteraan Hidup Penduduk Bagi Semenanjung Malaysia* by Shah, Fauzi, and Mohamad (2015). Their research focused on the role of the government in developing small districts in Malaysia, but did not address the concept of state sustainability (Shah, Fauzi, & Mohamad, 2015). In addition, the research by Suradi (2017), entitled *Pembangunan Manusia, Kemiskinan dan Kesejahteraan Sosial, Kajian Tentang Kebajikan Pembangunan Kesejahteraan Sosial di Nusa Tenggara Barat*, focused on poverty and the government's responsibility of developing the poor. Next, *Kesejahteraan Sosial dan Pembangunan Komuniti, Pendekatan dan Indikator* (Wahab, 2010) discussed on the management of socio-issues in three elements, namely individual, family, and community. Throughout these studies, no discussion has been addressed on the sustainability of national developments based on the principles and guidelines of the Quran. As mentioned in the Quran, one distinguished form of nation building is called *Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr*.

2. Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr in Islamic Perspective

Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr has been mentioned in the Quran in Surah Saba', verse 15:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ آيَةٌ جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ كُلُّوا مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ ۗ بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبُّ غَفُورٌ

Translation:

There was for [the tribe of] Saba' in their dwelling place a sign: two [fields of] gardens on the right and on the left. [They were told], "Eat from the provisions of your Lord and be grateful to Him. A good land [have you], and a forgiving Lord."

The verse, as part of Surah Saba', tells the parable of an ancient civilisation that was once a great power in the southern Arabian Peninsula. al-Sha'rāwī (1991) stated that Allah has used the word *maskan* in the sentence to indicate peace and serenity. This is followed by a verse that describes an unusual situation by the act of God. al-Ṣabūnī (1981) stated that in the surah Allah mentioned of the pleasures that He bestowed for the people of Saba', described as *Qatadah*, i.e. orchards with a multitude of shady luxuriant fruits, which also provide shade to the people, and anyone who passes by may pick luscious ripe fruits without hardship (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1987).

According to Qutub (1994), Saba' is the original name of a race that had populated the southern parts of Yemen. The word Saba' refers to the clan lineage of Saba' bin Yashjūb bin Yarūb bin Qaṭṭān. They had lived in an area of fertile land, where some of their descendants still live today. They had a glorious civilisation achievement owing to proficient management of heavy rainwater from the south and east coast areas. They built a water reservoir, clutched by two mountains; at the front of the valley between the two mountains, they built a dam that could be opened or closed. They had the capacity to retain a high volume of water inside the dam and possessed the technology to control the amount of water dispersal according to their needs.

With the existence of the reservoir, the people of Saba' had the largest source of water supply in the form of the most well-known Dam of Saba'. Spreads of orchard on every side of the states symbolised its fertile ground wealthy, prosperous, luxurious, and full of fine enjoyments. The orchards acted as an evidence to remind of the greatness of Allah, the Most Generous. The people of Saba' were asked to take delight of the sustenance bestowed by Allah by being grateful. Saba' was indeed a nation that had been given the gift of prosperity on earth and showered with all the blessings (Qutub, 1994). Thus, what prevented the people of Saba' from praising and thanking Allah? Why were they not grateful in worshipping Allah?

The term *Balda Ṭayyiba* is mentioned once in Surah Saba', verse 15. The surah is considered as one of the Meccan Surahs. The term *Balda Ṭayyiba* itself denotes the meaning of a good state, where no arid soil or pain exists. Interestingly, the next sentence mentions the words *Wa Rabb Ghafūr*, which describe that the state of Saba' had thirteen large villages and that Allah SWT had sent thirteen prophets, who were regrettably denied by the people. al-Sha'rāwī (1991) stated that the term *Balda Ṭayyiba*, when combined with *Wa Rabb Ghafūr*, seems to convey that a good state must correlate with holistic causes and should pursue prosperity only in the name of Allah SWT to achieve His blessings and mercy. This connotes that worldly greatness and civilisation must be parallel in cohesion with the highest form of worshipping Allah, The Almighty (al-Bakri, 2014).

Balda Ṭayyiba terminology is rooted from the Quran when Allah portrays the prosperity of the Saba' state. Literally, *Balda Ṭayyiba* indeed denotes the description of a good nation. In truth, a good nation can only result from good governance. Hence, the terminology may be interpreted as a nation with a good *governance* that produces a *civil society* in the modern political terms, based on the features of a nation that obtains Allah's mercy; because of this, it is given prosperity for its obedience to Allah's command, preventing its people from committing immorality (al-Bakri, 2014).

3. The Concept of *Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr* Nation

Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr signifies good land, and Allah the Most Merciful affirms that a nation administered with the fundamental religious concept of Islam will obtain Allah's mercy and blessings. The bases of the *Balda Ṭayyiba* nation's prosperity, among others, are dependent on political stability, *Rabbānī* (divine) holistic education system, a fair economic system, and a sustainable environment (Qutub, 1994).

3.1 Political Stability

In general, politics is an important aspect of human life. The word politics include a multitude of interpretations, descriptions, perceptions, and assumptions put forth in describing it, not to mention the complexity from theoretical and practical angles. Commonly, the Islamic political concept refers to the term *al-siyāsah al-shar'īyyah*, as endorsed by past scholars. This is due to the fact that *al-siyāsah al-shar'īyyah* converges toward methods and approaches by leaders in running a country's affair (Zain, 2005). The usage of *al-siyāsah al-*

shar'iyah terminology means that every political decision in a country's administration must be in accordance with the Islamic laws, since such a platform steers the political direction toward religious truth (al-Māwardī, 1996). Additionally, the Islamic political concept also refers to the collective principle and rule, methods, and steps that become the platform and guideline for leaders to govern the administration of a country based on Islamic laws (Shukeri, 1998).

Leaders, as well as the society, must uphold the idea of prospering the world with rules defined by Allah. People are demanded to adhere to leaders' commands, whereas leaders, on the other hand, must execute laws and legislations as determined by Allah. al-Qāsimī (1980) wrote in his book about Ibn Ḥazm's statement, affirming that Muslims are obliged to appoint leaders that possess the quality of practising fairness among them and are willing to execute Allah's rules, and to administer the society and nation based on the Islamic laws practised by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). According to al-Māwardī (1996), the chosen leaders to administer the country should be guided from the religion's viewpoint. The united Muslims must choose the best candidate as the leader, who must be the most religious and most capable in accepting fullest responsibility of executing Islamic orders.

al-Jawhari (1992) in *Tāj al-Salāḥīn* specified that the requirements of a leader must include criteria of trustworthiness, understanding people's needs, sharp thinking, and having clear mission and vision. Leaders must be protected in nature, i.e. capable of upholding the country's trust, preserving the people's belief, and fulfilling what have been pledged. Leaders must be sharp-minded, have deep understanding on leadership, and possess clear vision and tactful mission. The vision of leadership must be progressively led by the light of faith, as well as accountability for every decision. Accordingly, al-Ranīrī (2008) in *Bustān al-Salāḥīn* described that such crucial leadership characteristics must be acquired by all types of leaders, including kings, viziers, ministers, *qāḍī*, and others. Leaders must be true believers who are close to religion, embracing the teaching of Sufi movement (*tarīqah*), practising impartiality, generosity, and bravery, and contributing plenty of *ṣadaqah* (alms or donations). Leadership is not a grandeur or speciality, but a trustworthy responsibility. Leaders are accountable in managing administrative matters and upholding Islam in the global context. Leadership is liable in worldly life and the hereafter; thus, in the afterlife, leaders will be judged based on their leadership practices.

History recorded that Tālūt, due to his wisdom and physical strength, was chosen to be the leader of Bani Isra'īl (Israelites) to fight Jālūt (Goliath). Likewise, because of his strength and honour, the Prophet Moses was chosen to work for the Prophet Shua'īb. Similarly, because of his trustworthiness and high proficiency, the Prophet Joseph was trusted to guard the national treasures of Egypt. The Prophet David, who ruled Bani Isra'īl (Israelites) with holistic administrative practices, fulfilled his mornings and afternoons with *remembering Allah*. The Prophet Solomon, bestowed by Allah The Almighty with all His grace, was the model of the greatest and most pious governor. Being thorough in administrative matters, the Prophet Solomon took the highest care of his nation's welfare right down to every crawling insect, such as ants. A blessed leadership can be modelled from the leadership of the prophets and those who followed them by example. Leadership is not an exclusivity, but a trustworthy responsibility. Administration should not be separated from faith and morality, based on the leadership concept of *Balḍa Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr* (Ismail, 2016).

The combination of an impartial leadership, a justice-preserving society, and a flourished nation grateful to Allah, is the recipe for the well-being of the *ummah* (collective union of Muslims). A nation is a component that shelters the state, the society, and the family. A family (household) is the basic unit of a society, whereby the father becomes the head who leads. Harmony in the family shapes balance in the overall society. The good wife, comforting children, loving household, *halal* sources of sustenance, generous practices, decent neighbours, conducive surroundings, kind companions, and trustworthy leaders are all the ideal parameters to shape the nation of *Balḍa Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr*.

3.2 Rabbānī (Holistic) Education System

Education is a vital aspect of a Muslim's life. With education, humans are capable of gaining various kinds of knowledge and wisdom. The authenticity of the acquired knowledge is able to shape a Muslim's individual identity. Several definitions suggest the meaning of education. According to Dewey (1958), education represents '*...a process of leading and bringing up. When we have the outcome of the process in mind, we speak education as shaping, forming, moulding activity, that is, as shaping into the standard form of social activity*'. Generally, education involves a particular process of socialisation that refers to the interaction among different individual or specific social groups (Robiah, 1998). The aim of interaction is to develop individual advancement, followed by a societal or national progression, which involves lessons, training, guidance, and leadership elements (Kachar, 1989).

Forming a prosperous nation relies on a *rabbānī* (divine) holistic education system. A *rabbānī* holistic education can ideally, and unfailingly produce a generation of well-mannered and honourable people. Without good behaviours and manners, humans will lose their natural moralistic tendencies. To gain the most benefit from knowledge, *rabbānī* characteristics allow an individual to expand the routes of knowledge in compliance with the source of origin. Experts, Islamic scholars, and past scholars, have always practised the consideration of *rabbānī* in research works, to strengthen science and technology for the expansion of technical knowledge that can be managed by individuals with cultivated characters and good morals (Baba, 2006). According to al-Shaybānī (1979), the objectives of Islamic education are as follows:

- i. Body and mind are incomplete without complementing the need of the soul. This is indispensable knowledge that one must accept to realise the fact that the necessity of his life is not limited to material desire.
- ii. Moral education is the essence to holistic human development. Morality (*akhlāq*) is a natural state of self that creates subconscious behaviours without having to think and research (Quran, al-Shams 91: 7-10).
- iii. Formation of individuality contributes to becoming a perfect intellectual. Education is one of the medium to humanise and cultivate an individual. To expand human potentials and abilities, the right guidance and motivation are needed to develop the kind of individuals who are valuable to the religion, the people, and the nation.
- iv. Education prepares for worldly life and the hereafter. Allah creates knowledge as the strength for humans to reach their fullest potential in carrying out the responsibility as the caliphate on earth.
- v. One must surrender to the will of Allah. In the context of total submission to Allah, human beings are demanded to express themselves in the form of belief and piety by doing good deeds (Quran, al-Dhāriyāt 51: 56). Submitting oneself to Allah could be practised with a comprehensive education, which can prevent oneself from committing any wrongdoing.
- vi. Education will uphold the concept of *amar ma'rūf, nahy munkar* (enjoining the right, forbidding the wrong). The goal is to establish human civilisation based on true Islamic values. Forming a harmonious society becomes an agenda that needs to be highlighted to guard and foster protected rights in Islam (Quran, Āli 'Imrān 3: 104).

Indeed, the function of knowledge is for seeking the truth. The goal of *rabbānī* holistic education ends with the word divine in recognition of Allah's supremacy, by exercising worship with the sincerest heart, as well as by expressing acquired knowledge through good morals and manners. Knowledge has to be acquired with sincerity, which will lead a person to the light of happiness in one's daily life. Knowledge acquired in the mould of *rabbānī* is inherited from one generation to another, and information is taught, transcribed, and spread around the world. Muslim scholars and past scholars were bestowed with blessings and contentment through their spreading of knowledge. Even though they had passed away thousands of years ago, the wealth of their knowledge shared has always extended to this day. This can be seen in the writings of notable scholars, such as Imam Shāfi'ī, al-Ghazzālī, al-Nawawī, and other figures who had contributed to the body of knowledge with the highest sincerity in the concept of *rabbānī*. The new intellectual generations then inherit these scholarly traditions from past centuries until an Islamic education blueprint is shaped to build the nation of *Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr* (Ismail, 2016).

3.3 An Impartial Economic System

A prosperous nation is closely associated with a fair economic system. Economic affairs are an indispensable component to the Islamic structure of life. The execution of rules and laws within the Islamic economy is as significant as other Islamic practices. It is considered a devotion and will be rewarded if practised in accordance with the right commandments, requirements, and intended sincerity to Allah ('Abdul Manan, 1993).

Islam places several important basic requirements in the field of economy. Critical institutions in this area, among others, include the *zakāh*, a kind of levy that is obligatory to all Muslims and their assets which

fulfil the requirement. This levy is indeed the third obligation in the Islamic commandments or pillars. The function of the *zakāh* system is to guarantee that the distribution of income and wealth of the society is managed in a comprehensive manner. It is a system that maintains balance and social harmony between the rich (*muzakkī*) and the poor (*mustahiq*) ('Abdul Manan, 1993). Shahrudin, Abd Hamid, & Sungit (2017) suggest in their research 6 contribution principles as follows; *Isti'āb* (comprehensive), *Ikhtisāṣ* (stipulated), Right, *Murāqabah* (monitoring), *al-Kifāyah* (sufficient), and *Fauran* (immediate).

Islamic economy forbids *ribā'* (usury) because it is one criterion of being inhumane, and a form of oppression that could lead to the destruction of a government or nation. Food that is forbidden obtained from the source of usury or the like, will foul the soul, consequently creating immoral acts. The issues of character or morality in a society are interrelated with the issues of wealth derived from ill-gotten sources. Scientifically, even though food acquired through *halal* or *haram* sources cannot be justified by empirical method, Islam stressed that one's character involves both matters of the body and mind (Ismail, 2016).

To solve the problems of trust breach, fraud, power abuse, and such, the community must first seek a solution to *riba* (usury) and sustenance from *haram* sources provided to families. These indecent sources will end up becoming the blood and root of immoral souls. The soul of a family brought up by sustenance from *haram* sources has difficulties of seeing the light of truth. Hearts, supposedly purified by good deeds, are fouled by *haram* sources. Thus, as time goes by, a filthy and hardened heart prevents oneself to accept truth and such a person is inclined toward bad deeds. Subsequently, this will bring unhealthfulness to one's mind and body. In summary, based on the explanation above, the model of a fair economic system is indeed the basis to the development of a *Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr* nation (Ismail, 2016).

3.4 Sustainable Environment

Nature is a legacy that needs to be preserved by humankind for posterity. Preservation and conservation of the environment, therefore, are the highest priority for everyone. Environmental protection relates to human acts and deeds. People with moral values and ethics normally practise good deeds in line with the innate tendencies imprinted in every human being. From a historical perspective, it is proven that the balanced and harmonious approach introduced by Islam has directly influenced and impacted mankind and civilisation in various fields, such as technology, agriculture, medicine, arts, urban planning, and architecture. History has indeed demonstrated that Muslims in the previous eras, mainly around the 8th to 12th century, practised interaction with the environment (Siti, 2015).

The balance in sustaining environmental harmony and the prosperity of life is extremely vital and highlighted in Islam. According to an Islamic scholar, al-Attas (1977), human beings are the only worldly creation appointed by Allah to be given the trust and responsibility of managing the environment in a fair manner, by monitoring and administering nature according to Allah's will and grace. Humans play a crucial role when it comes to the protection and preservation of the environment. A clean environment creates better living conditions. Water, air, and comfortable surroundings that are far from noise pollution, need to be maintained. If this aspect is not managed efficiently, physical and mental health will deteriorate. The government must ensure that the development of a growing nation is not at the expense of peaceful and tranquil surroundings. Production yield from the forests, seas, and rivers, must be governed with ethics. Any physical disruption must consider environmental sustainability to ensure that the grace of a harmonious nature is preserved. A sustainable environment would ensure the observation, conservation, and preservation of the *Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr* nation's characteristics.

4. Conclusion

Evidently, Islam has set a comprehensive guideline in creating a good nation, as stated in the Quran and Sunnah as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as a role model. In reality, the nation of *Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr* requires an Islamic administration that covers various aspects, including politics, *rabbānī* holistic education system, fair economic system, and sustainable environment. By implementing a national administration system with the concept of universal well-being through the proposed values, a sustainable nation can be built, especially towards attaining the concept of *Balda Ṭayyiba Wa Rabb Ghafūr*. For that matter, policies in a country must meet the elements proposed in this study, so that a country can maintain a balance of worldly and spiritual demands. Therefore, further studies are recommended to explore how a country's policies may better develop its nation and its people.

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