

## Ethical Da'wah and Leadership: Raja Ali Haji's Philosophical Perspectives on Moral Governance

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### Abstract

*This article examines Raja Ali Haji's thoughts on Islamic leadership based on da'wah ethics by highlighting his works, such as Gurindam Dua Belas, Thamarāt al-Muhimmah, and Tuhfat al-Nafis. Through a historical approach and textual analysis, this article explores how values such as reason, knowledge, politeness, exemplary, and deliberation are basic principles in building an ethical, communicative, and spiritual leadership model. The article finds that the ethics of da'wah, according to Raja Ali Haji is not only individual and normative but also has a strong socio-political dimension, which is in line with the theory of political da'wah and the concept of civil Islam in the contemporary context. Raja Ali Haji's thinking can be used as a normative and pedagogical framework in the formation of Muslim leaders who are responsive to the times, fair in policy, and communicative in dealing with the plurality of society. The article also highlights the challenges in realizing civilized da'wah in the era of social media and populist politics and recommends integrating da'wah ethical values into education and public leadership practices in Indonesia.*

### Keywords

Raja Ali Haji, etika dakwah, kepemimpinan Islam, dakwah politik, civil Islam

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Raja Ali Haji is one of the great thinkers in the Malay intellectual tradition who played a central role in reconstructing Malay civilization through a synthesis between Islamic values and leadership ethics. Operating during the 19th century Riau-Lingga Sultanate, he is known not only as a scholar, historian, and writer, but also as an architect of thought that is deeply rooted in Islamic moral principles in a socio-political context (Faisal, 2019; Nurliana et al., 2022; Hassan, 2015). His ideas emphasize the importance of morality, justice, and responsibility in exercising power, making his thoughts relevant not only in Islamic studies, but also in the establishment of ethical governance (Harris, 2011; Hashim



Musa & Rozita Che Rodi, 2017; Danusa, 2021; Mohd Yusof & Zakaria, 2021; Rehayati, 2018). Through cross-genre works such as *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, he helped lay the foundation of Nusantara historiography, bridging historical, cultural and political narratives within contextual and visionary Islamic values (Hassan, 2017).

The socio-political and religious constellation in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate at that time showed a tug-of-war between the noble elite, colonial influence, and the role of ulama in determining the direction of the Kingdom's policies (Rehayati & Farihah, 2017). It is in this context that Raja Ali Haji's works, such as *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, *Gurindam Dua Belas*, and *Thamarāt al-Muhimmah*, exist not just as intellectual products but as ethical interventions against the moral crisis of leadership and the social damage it caused. He explicitly criticized unjust rulers while offering a model of ideal leadership that combines reason, knowledge, and adab as the main foundation.

Raja Ali Haji's thoughts in *Tuhfat al-Nafis* not only place him as a historian, but also as a moral critic of power practices that deviate from Islamic principles. In his work, he did not merely record historical events, but also inserted sharp criticism of the behavior of rulers and nobles who neglected moral values (Kasa & Hamzah, 2021; Mohd Yusof & Zakaria, 2021). He asserts that the moral qualities of a leader determine the stability of the state and the welfare of the people. He shows how just or unjust policies directly impact the legitimacy of power and social harmony (Mohd Yusof & Zakaria, 2021). This idea resonates strongly with the thinking of al-Ghazali in *al-Tibr al-Masbuk fi Nasihat al-Muluk* or Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqaddimah*. Like al-Ghazali, Raja Ali Haji emphasized that power without ethics would lead to *fasad* (corruption), and that the responsibility of a leader is to subordinate one's will to the guidance of religion and reason (T. Muhammad, 2016; OKUMUŞ, 2021). However, what set Raja Ali Haji apart was his ability to translate these principles into the context of Malay culture-through poetry, *gurindam*, and the use of polite language-making them more down-to-earth and communicative.

The ethics of da'wah in the context of this paper refer to moral principles and persuasive communication that are an integral part of leadership activities. These principles include: (1) politeness in language, (2) exemplary behavior, (3) the use of knowledge as the basis for decisions, and (4) moral responsibility toward society (Amin, 2017; Kumala, 2021; Rachmawati, 2017). This ethic is manifested in the works of Raja Ali Haji, who not only advised explicitly but also criticized subtly and elegantly through ethical language and full of wisdom, as stated in *Gurindam Dua Belas* and *Thamarāt al-Muhimmah*.

For example, in criticizing unjust rulers, he wrote:

"If you rule softly and gently,  
to the proper place of the goods,  
many people also like to follow,  
what will is not involved."

With this style of language, Raja Ali Haji not only conveys the message of da'wah, but also instills leadership values that are communicative and based on Islamic wisdom.

The ethics of da'wah is important in leadership because it emphasizes the human side, morals, and moral responsibility in holding power (Rachmawati, 2017). Leaders who internalize da'wah ethics not only rule with authority, but also nurture with compassion, wise in speech, and fair in policy. Such leadership can maintain political stability and build strong legitimacy and people's trust sustainably.

As a politician, scholar, and literary figure, Raja Ali Haji not only conveyed his ideas through actions and leadership, but also through written works that were accessible to various levels of society. His linguistic excellence further strengthened his role as a pioneer in developing the Malay language (S. A. Muhammad, 2019; Nurliana, 2019). He has a high awareness that language is not just a means of communication, but also an important medium in shaping the mindset and identity of a nation. Therefore, in his writings, he always tried to use straightforward, beautiful, and easy-to-understand language to reach the wider community. With this approach, Raja Ali Haji became not only a chronicler and speaker of wisdom, but also a designer for the future of Malay culture, which is still a reference in the study of literature, history, and language policy in the Malay world.

Several studies have examined Raja Ali Haji's thoughts from various aspects, especially in the fields of history (A. Haji et al., 2017; Hashim Musa & Rozita Che Rodi, 2017; Compilation Team, 2004), literature (Al Farisi, 2020; Hadiwijaya et al., 2019; Hidayah & Rusdi, 2022; Sania & Rusdi, 2022), and politics (Alimuddin Hassan & Zulkifli, 2018; Lazim, 2020; S. Pulungan, 2015). Studies on *Gurindam Dua Belas* generally focus on the dimension of morality in Malay culture, where the work is seen as an ethical guideline that instills values of wisdom, responsibility, and harmonious social life. *Thamarāt al Muhimmah*, on the other hand, has been studied more in the context of political policy and Islamic law, given that it discusses the order of government, the role of the leader, and the relationship between the ruler and the people within the framework of Islamic law. Even so, studies that specifically explore how Raja Ali Haji's thoughts in the context of da'wah ethics and leadership are still relatively minimal, although both aspects have strong relevance in his works.

This paper seeks to fill the gap by raising how the principles of da'wah in Raja Ali Haji's thought can shape leadership patterns that are ethical, communicative, and based on Islamic values. As a scholar, thinker, and writer, Raja Ali Haji not only played a role in recording historical events, but also in formulating the concept of leadership based on justice, honesty, and moral responsibility. His da'wah ethics are evident in how he conveys his thoughts - through literary works, historiography, or political advice - with a persuasive approach based on knowledge and prioritizing politeness. Therefore, examining his thoughts from the perspective of da'wah and leadership will enrich the understanding

of his intellectual legacy and provide insights relevant to the context of leadership and communication in the modern era.

Da'wah is not only limited to religious lectures but also includes how a leader interacts with his people. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the principles of da'wah in Raja Ali Haji's thought form an ethical and communicative leadership pattern.

## 2. METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach with the content analysis method to examine texts by Raja Ali Haji, which were chosen for their ability to explore the ethical, proselytizing, and leadership values contained in his literary works, history, and advice (Willig, 2014). The analysis focused on three main works: *Gurindam Dua Belas*, *Thamarāt al-Muhimmah*, and *Tuhfat al-Nafis*. They are the foundation for building an Islamic leadership model based on da'wah ethics. The analysis was conducted by manually recording relevant phrases, stanzas or narratives, using coding notes. This procedure ensures consistency and transparency in interpretation. The main data sources are Raja Ali Haji's manuscripts as well as secondary documents in the form of historical records of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate and scholarly studies from Malay-Islamic historians and thinkers.

Data validity and reliability were maintained by source triangulation, comparing Raja Ali Haji's works with contemporaneous historical references and the thoughts of Islamic figures such as al Ghazali, al-Mawardi, and Jamaluddin al-Afghani. Interpretation was tested through limited peer review with two academics in Islamic studies and Malay culture. All analytical processes were recorded in an analytical logbook to maintain objectivity. This research acknowledges methodological limitations, such as the focus on three main works and limited access to the complete archives of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate. The hermeneutic approach is contextual and interpretative, so the analysis results may differ if other theories or perspectives are used (Moleong, 2017). With this methodology, the research aims to provide an in-depth reading of Raja Ali Haji's thoughts and connect the Islamic-Malay intellectual heritage with the needs of ethical, communicative, and proselytizing leadership models.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. *Ethical Principles of Da'wah in Leadership: Strengthening the Intellect*

Politics in leadership or organization can be understood as a series of actions taken by individuals or groups in an organization to strengthen their position and influence in setting goals, criteria, and decision making (Siswanto, 2007). Politics in organizations is not always negative, but is part of the internal dynamics that reflect how power is distributed and used to achieve certain interests. In this

context, organizational politics can act as a strategic instrument to build cohesion, manage conflict, and ensure that the interests of certain groups or individuals remain accommodated in the policies produced (Wahyudiyanto, 2021).

However, organizations' politics can create tension or dysfunction if it is more oriented towards personal interests or certain groups than the organization's collective goals. In the context of leadership, politics is often related to a leader's ability to build alliances, manage resources, and navigate the social and cultural dynamics of the organization (R. Raihan, 2014). Leaders who understand the reality of politics in organizations will be better able to make wise decisions, reduce potential conflicts, and create an environment conducive to sustainable organizational growth. Therefore, politics in organizations must be managed with ethics and responsibility to remain in line with the vision and mission of the organization without compromising the values of integrity and justice.

These notions of organizational politics with negative tendencies generally refer to practices that ignore ethical and moral aspects of power dynamics. This is often seen as unhealthy competition among organizational elites, especially in the leadership succession process, which can cause internal turmoil and hamper organizational stability. In addition, abusing power for personal or specific group interests is a form of destructive political practice, where decisions and policies are based more on narrow interests than the organization's collective interests. Such practices harm the organization structurally and functionally and can erode members' trust in the existing leadership (Hidayat & Suwanto, 2020).

Furthermore, the competition for influence among organizational elites can also lead to disunity, especially when the organization is in a critical stage to affirm its identity and reformulate the direction of its struggle. When differences in views are no longer managed with a healthy deliberation mechanism, but instead used as a tool to build opposing factions, the organization risks stagnation or disintegration. Therefore, every leader and member of the organization needs to understand that politics in organizations is not just a tool to achieve power but also a means to create harmony, sustainability, and achievement of common goals while upholding the principles of ethics and professionalism (J. S. Pulungan, 2017).

Raja Ali Haji's thinking departs from the realization that leadership is not just a tool of power, but a divine mandate full of moral responsibility. This ethic is inseparable from the historical context of the 19th century, in which the Riau-Lingga Sultanate faced the pressure of colonialism, the internalization of the colonial legal system, and the wave of modernization that eroded local socio cultural structures (Rehayati & Farihah, 2017). In this situation, Raja Ali Haji not only offered a critical discourse on the noble elite trapped in political compromise, but also built a conceptual foundation for leadership based on Islamic values.

In Thamarāt al-Muhimmah (R. A. Haji, 1304b), Raja Ali Haji states that:

*Justice can be realized if the king istiqamah in carrying out the teachings of Islam, has good morals, cares about the progress of the kingdom and always refers to the Qur'an and Hadith in making decisions related to the law.... (p. 10-13)*

*Leaders should preserve the spirit by guarding the heart by not following lust and upholding justice by punishing and treating someone properly according to Allah's commands in the Qur'an, Hadith, and scholarly consensus (pp. 65-79).*

*Leaders should be able to control bad traits such as arrogance, anger, envy, spite, greed, betrayal, hindering and other bad traits that are prohibited in Islam. These despicable traits diminish a leader's dignity and good name (muruah) (p. 78 - 80).*

Then Raja Ali haji also described the despicable nature and unjust behavior of a leader, in his poem (R. A. Haji, 1986):

*On the law, do not be grumpy  
no murky words and collars  
also specialize in talking about blood  
Do not be unjust to one's neighbor.*

*If you rule softly and gently  
To the proper place of goods  
Many people also like to follow  
What will not get stuck*

*If ruling with a whip  
with definite words  
Let people hate the heart  
No love of filial piety*

*Son, keep away from this behavior  
Because of the hatred of the Rahmani God  
If brought here and there  
Not one diwani's practice*

Based on some of the introductions from Raja Ali Haji's thoughts, there are several principles of da'wah ethics applied in his leadership: First, Leadership as a Mandate Based on Intellect and Knowledge. In Raja Ali Haji's thought, the main foundation for a leader is not the position of inheritance or descent, but the reason and knowledge that guide him. This is explicitly stated in Thamarāt al Muhimmah, where he states that "the ignorant person has no remedy but to study and demand knowledge" (1304b). This statement is an invitation to learn and a sharp satire of leaders who occupy positions without sufficient intellectual competence. In his view, the ignorance of a ruler is not just a personal weakness but a structural threat to justice and the benefit of the people.

Furthermore, Raja Ali Haji likened ignorance in power to a chronic disease that undermines the legitimacy of government. In his advice to YDM Raja Ali bin Ja'far, he wrote in a subtle but clear tone, that: "He who is great in rank and ignorant of the laws, great things will perish, if they are not commanded by those who know and understand." (R. A. Haji, 1304b).

This quote shows Raja Ali Haji's firm stance against power exercised without knowledge. He not only emphasized the importance of fiqh and legal knowledge, but also warned that power that is not guarded by common sense will become unjust. Therefore, he emphasized that leaders should always seek advice from ulama and scholars, and not rely on lust or lust for power.

This idea has a strong resonance with al-Ghazali's thoughts in *al-Tibr al-Masbuk fi Nasihat al-Muluk* (T. Muhammad, 2016), which states that ideal leaders are those who combine power (*sultān*) with knowledge and morals for the benefit of the people. For al-Ghazali, knowledge is the lamp for power, and without knowledge, leaders will only be tools of destruction (*mufsid*) who justify injustice in the name of authority (Al-Ghazali, 1955). Raja Ali Haji, although not quoting al-Ghazali directly, seems to represent a similar spirit in the context of the Malay world, with a more cultural and communicative writing style. When compared to reformist thinkers such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani (Ainiah, 2022) (Rangga Hafizh Pambudi, 2019) and Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, Raja Ali Haji's uniqueness lies in his educative and poetic approach to da'wah. While Afghani chose a confrontational political approach to colonialism, and Ahmad Khatib took the normative fiqh route, Raja Ali Haji preferred to foster elite consciousness gradually and subtly through poetry, hikayat, and letters of advice. He combined intellectual messages with linguistic aesthetics, making his preaching a call to arms and an art of touching hearts and minds.

This approach shows that for Raja Ali Haji, power is not just a matter of administrative technicalities, but more than that: it is a means to realize the benefits that can only be achieved through the integration of reason, knowledge, and adab. Thus, leadership, in his perspective, is the highest form of da'wah, which must be done by example and spiritual awareness, not just structural authority. Moreover, messages such as "*do not reproach a clever person, for fear that he may harm you*" (R. A. Haji, 1304b) reinforce the idea that knowledge not only ennobles a person personally but also safeguards a leader from moral and political derailment. Thus, without reason and knowledge, power loses its way; and conversely, leadership based on knowledge becomes the brightest da'wah path in guiding the people and safeguarding civilization.

The importance of the role of reason in strengthening this "power", refers to Allah's command symbolically, when Allah swt. offers "reason" as a mandate is man who accepts it. The whole universe refuses to accept it for fear of not being able to bear the burden of its consequences (Q.s. al Ahzāb [33]: 72). In turn, it was this intellect that was accepted as a trust that became the main prerequisite in knowing "*the whole asma'-asma*" that Allah had taught Adam, so that he and his descendants were worthy of receiving the mandate to be khalifah on earth (*khalifah fī al-ard*). For example, Allah gave Adam (man) the ability to recognize the world around him. It was based on this ability that God chose man as his khalifah on earth; and not the angels even though they are always praising God and

sanctifying him (Q.s. al-Fatīr [25]: 44). In this way, the Qur'an recognizes the superiority of humans and gives them the freedom to control and regulate nature (Q.s. al-Baqarah [2]: 30-34). However, even so, behind this human freedom must be accompanied by sociological and theological responsibility. With the potential of reason, the role and duty of humans as caliphs can understand and manage - besides Allah has indeed, to borrow Nurcholish Madjid's term, "subdued" or "made something lower" (*"taskhīr"*) for humans - the heavens and the earth (universe) with all objects and natural phenomena (Madjid, 2001).

The intellect with knowledge and wisdom that is "bequeathed" to humanity originates from the prophetic "niches" (*mishkāt al-nubuwwah*), as a well-known Arabic expression, quoted from Seyyed Hossein Nasr (DenBoer, 2013; Peters & Nasr, 1969), states: "*yanba'u al-ḥikmah min mishkāt al-nubuwwah*" (the sources of wisdom come from prophetic niches). The wisdom that comes from the prophetic niches itself necessarily comes from the "*Mishkāt nur 'alā Nūr al-Ilāhiyyah*" ("Niches of Divinity's 'Light upon Light'"). The logical implication of this is that, for example, "a civilization does not appear in a nation," according to Malik Bennabi (1905-1973), "*but in the form of revelation that descends from the sky.*" Wisdom and knowledge were handed down by God beginning with Prophet Adam and continuing with subsequent prophets, such as Prophet Noah (*peace be upon him*), Prophet Abraham (*peace be upon him*), Prophet Moses, Prophet David, and Prophet Solomon, and ending with Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*). Thus, the "*khatam al-nabiyīn*" (the Seal of the Prophets) stated that "*wisdom is the lost property of the faithful, so whoever finds it should pick it up*". Later, reason and wisdom were passed on to the scholars as the heirs of the prophets (*al-'ulamā warathat al-ambiyā'*) in order to continue the role of the prophetic mission (*risālah al-nubuwwah*) to provide teaching and enlightenment to humanity in life in the world.

Those whom Allah endows with wisdom and knowledge not only receive several gifts but also have glory, virtue, and a high degree in the sight of Allah. In Raja Ali Haji's view, people of reason are very noble because they have the "*clothes of prophets and aulia*". Therefore, if the mind bestowed by Allah is utilized properly and followed by the truth and goodness, said Raja Ali Haji, it will be able to lead humans to pleasure in this world and happiness in the hereafter. Raja Ali Haji poetically describes the significance of reason in his work, *Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa*

*Reasonable people are very noble  
ambi'a and aulia clothing  
Whoever follows him  
that is the sign of a happy person*

Then, if the gift of reason that humans have is used properly and correctly, especially the ruler, according to Raja Ali Haji, there will be signs:

*... the sign of reason is that it understands immediately when it hears something, and the fruit of reason improves on its endeavors and arguments. Moreover, the sign of a man of understanding is that he humbles*



*himself and does not like to be praised, and does not like to exaggerate himself, and the sign of a man of understanding is that he does not like to exaggerate and does not like to ask questions. He seeks advice from all scholars on the affairs of the hereafter and the world. Moreover, he is not ashamed to call himself a fool." (R. A. Haji, 1986)*

He also mentions several other characteristics of a reasonable person, namely being humble, his speech is soft and polite and his behavior is very praiseworthy. In addition, the signs of a reasonable person are like to help anyone, especially relatives and relatives, and their hearts are not hard and harsh (violent). Other characteristics of a reasonable person, Raja Ali Haji continued, include being obedient to religious law, not greedy for material goods and always relying on Allah (tawakkul). In the end, a reasonable person thinks about and realizes the consequences of his actions in life both in the current worldly transience and in the eternal ukhrawi later. Another sign of a reasonable person is to love and always demand knowledge. In verse form Raja Ali Haji said

*So again, hear thou  
the sign of reason gives you knowledge.  
Likes to study without getting tired  
, looking for satisfaction, do not get lost.*

In Gurindam Dua Belas, in the fifth chapter, Raja Ali Haji mentions the characteristics of knowledgeable people:

*If you want to know a knowledgeable person  
Never stop asking and learning.  
If you want to know a reasonable person  
In the world of taking stock.*

For this reason, Raja Ali Haji, advised everyone, especially rulers and royal officials always to prioritize the pursuit of knowledge over other matters of life. Hence, he asserted that the most important "goods" (read: treasure/wealth) owned by humans is the mind, and the "price" (read: degree and honor) of humans is determined by the level of knowledge. Therefore, Raja Ali Haji recommended prioritizing the pursuit of knowledge over other activities. Even so, the level of knowledge will only be seen (its usefulness) if it is taught and realized in society. For this reason, work based on science, said Raja Ali Haji, will undoubtedly bring the expected results. Especially for rulers, science is very useful to distinguish between haq and batil, good and bad, halal and haram. When the community, for example, submits a complaint, the ruler can weigh right and wrong, good and bad, and in the end, the ruler can give a legal decision as fair and wise as possible to the community.

*Second*, Communication Politeness and Da'wah bil Hikmah. Politeness in communication is at the core of Raja Ali Haji's da'wah approach, as well as a reflection of the vision of leadership he built - leadership that can embrace, not conquer. This principle is strongly articulated in the Kitab Pengetahuan

Bahasa. In this book, Raja Ali Haji emphasizes that a reasonable leader must have a soft speech, full of wisdom, and avoid harsh and hurtful speech. As he stated in an earlier poem (R. A. Haji, 1986);

*If you rule softly and gently  
To the proper place of goods  
Many people also like to follow  
What will not get stuck*

*If ruling with a whip  
with definite words  
Let people hate the heart  
No love of filial piety*

For Raja Ali Haji, politeness in communication is not just a form of courtesy, but a reflection of one's intelligence and maturity in living social life. A wise leader must be able to build productive dialog, reduce conflict, and advise without hurting the feelings of others. This view aligns with the principle of da'wah bil hikmah in Islam, an invitation to goodness carried out with wisdom and gentle speech. In the socio-political context, polite communication is important in creating harmonious relationships between leaders and people. Leaders who communicate in a persuasive and adab manner tend to more easily gain public trust, on the contrary, arrogant or provocative communication styles will only trigger tensions and divisions.

*If you want to know the people of the nation,  
look to the ethics of language.*

This poem is moral advice and the foundation of socio-political ethics in the Malay-Islamic tradition. Raja Ali Haji wanted to emphasize that the character of a person, including a leader, is most evident in the way he communicates. In the work, he condemns rude, arrogant, or hurtful speaking styles, because bad speech, according to him, mirrors the ugliness of the heart and the immaturity of the mind. Likewise, in *Thamarāt al-Muhimmah*, he reminds us that delivering advice should be done with subtlety, gentleness, and respect for the person being advised. He writes: "*As for the sweet and gentle speech, it is not degrading; rather, it elevates the virtue and honors the speaker.*" (R. A. Haji, 1986).

This shows that for Raja Ali Haji, the power of a leader does not lie in the loudness of the voice or the firmness of the command. However, in the gentleness and flexibility of communication, one can calm, convince, and move others voluntarily. Polite communication is the most effective da'wah method because it simultaneously touches the emotional and intellectual dimensions. This style of communication is very close to the principle of da'wah bil hikmah in Islam, as taught in the Qur'an: "*Invite (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good lessons...*" (QS. An-Nahl: 125).

Raja Ali Haji translated this verse into the context of Malay culture very contextually. He did not only preach normatively but combined it with language aesthetics and literary nuances, making it more

touching. The social and political criticism, he conveyed through gurindam and letters of advice was never delivered in an angry, berating, or blasphemous tone, but with an elegant, educative, and empathetic rhetorical style. For example, in warning nobles and elites who did not understand their duties, he wrote: "*How many great men have lost their dignity because of the badness of their tongues and the rudeness of their mouths, so that their speech is no longer useful to the people.*" (R. A. Haji, 1986). This sentence not only contains advice, but also a moral critique of verbally uncivilized leadership styles. He equates a failure of communication with a loss of moral authority, which makes the leader lose the people's trust.

In the contemporary context-especially in the era of social media and fast-paced, emotional political communication-Raja Ali Haji's thoughts are particularly relevant. We live in an age where hate speech, polarization, and rhetoric that denigrates opponents are common practices in the public sphere. Such a communication style, according to Raja Ali Haji's logic, is a failed form of da'wah because it does not invite but divides.

Therefore, the values of Raja Ali Haji-style da'wah communication - which prioritizes polite language, careful choice of diction, and constructive goals - should be revived. He reminds us that communication is not only a means of conveying messages, but also a reflection of the character of leadership. In a pluralistic and language-sensitive society, leaders who can speak with wisdom are more easily accepted, respected and followed.

*Third, Exemplary as a Method of Political Da'wah.* In the Islamic tradition, exemplary (uswah hasanah) is the most powerful and sustainable means of da'wah. This is reflected in the Prophet Muhammad's method of preaching, which is not only talking, but also being a living example of the values he taught. This principle was brought to life by Raja Ali Haji in his work as a scholar, intellectual, and statesman in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate. Raja Ali Haji not only taught the importance of morals and justice in leadership, but also practiced them in his relationship with the ruler, especially when advising YDM VIII Raja Ali bin Ja'far. In *Muqaddimah fi al-Intizām*, he directly criticized the ruler, but still within the framework of adab and compassion. He writes: "*Whether your majesty uses it or not, it is customary for your majesty to remind you of it...*" (R. A. Haji, 1304a).

This sentence shows the moral strength of an intellectual who can stand ethically aligned with the ruler without losing respect. This form of political preaching emphasizes exemplary value: conveying the truth without imposing, warning without demeaning, and directing without punishing. Raja Ali Haji understood that advising the ruler was a high-risk act in a feudal structure. However, it is precisely in this space that political proselytizing gains its meaning-not as confrontation, but as moral guidance that strengthens the accountability of power. Exemplary in this context becomes a

transformative means of da'wah, especially because it is carried out with ethical consistency and personal integrity.

When compared to contemporary Islamic thinkers such as Taha Jabir al-Alwani (Ghazali, 2018; Majid, 2017) or Nurcholish Madjid (Madjid., 1999; Madjid, 2008), Raja Ali Haji displays a similar character in making morals and exemplary leadership the basis of social change. Al-Alwani emphasizes the importance of ethical leadership in the modern Muslim public sphere, namely leadership based on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and the values of mercy. Nurcholish Madjid, in his idea of "*Islam as public ethics*," also places morality at the core of political transformation.

This model of da'wah through example is important to reflect in the current context, especially in the crisis of political representation and public figures who have lost trust. Amid populism, polarization, and performative culture on social media, exemplarity is a rare but much-needed commodity. Many leaders are administratively proficient but fail to deliver value; they are eloquent on stage but fragile in moral consistency.

Raja Ali Haji's thinking offers a corrective to this tendency: that leadership must begin with oneself, with morals that are proven in action, not just rhetoric. In a modern democratic system that places the people as the ultimate judge, example becomes the main source of moral legitimacy - a form of political preaching that is not noisy, but rooted and influential. Thus, Raja Ali Haji provides a lesson that in the reality of leadership, the power of words must be supported by the honesty of deeds. This is the true meaning of *uswah hasanah* as a method of political proselytization: an integration of vision, practice, and loyalty to timeless values of universal goodness.

*Fourth, Deliberation and Consultation with Ulama as Collective Pillars of Leadership Ethics.* In Raja Ali Haji's thinking, deliberation (*shura*) is not just a formal procedure in government, but the spiritual and ethical foundation of just and civilized leadership. He emphasized that a leader should not make decisions unilaterally based on lust, but should open space for advice, correction, and guidance from scholars and people of knowledge. For Raja Ali Haji, reason and knowledge are insufficient when disconnected from the collective network of wisdom. This is emphasized in *Thamarāt al-Muhimmah*, where he satirizes the nobles who "*do not listen to the word of the pious*" and "*make friends with those who are ignorant and only know how to justify their actions*" (R. A. Haji, 1304a). This criticism was aimed at the rulers who ignored the voice of the ulama, and instead were closer to sycophants and false advisors who reinforced the egoism of power. In other words, Raja Ali Haji realized the danger of power that lacked moral control from the intellectual milieu.

In the Islamic tradition, the principle of *shura* has been affirmed in the Qur'an: "*...and their affairs (are) decided by deliberation among themselves.*" (QS. Ash-Shura: 38). This verse not only gives legitimacy to participatory mechanisms, but also emphasizes that the best decisions are born from collective

deliberation, not a single authority. Raja Ali Haji translated this spirit into the context of the Riau-Lingga sultanate, by encouraging the involvement of ulama in state affairs. In *Thamarāt al-Muhimmah*, he wrote: "A king or ruler should listen to the right words, even if they come from a small person, if they contain good advice." (R. A. Haji, 1304a). This statement illustrates the egalitarian principle of hearing the voice of truth, which should not be influenced by social or political status. *Musyawarah* in Raja Ali Haji's perspective, is substantive: it is a space to purify power from arbitrariness by placing knowledge and morals as guiding policy directions.

When compared with al-Mawardi's thoughts in *al-Ahkām al-Sultāniyyah*, it appears that Raja Ali Haji had a similar spirit in placing the ulama as the moral guardians of the ruler. Al-Mawardi mentioned that the main duty of the leader is to execute God's law, which is only possible if he always consults with the experts. In the Malay context, Raja Ali Haji took a softer and more communicative approach, but still emphasized the urgency of the principle. In contemporary thought, the idea of shura has become part of the narrative of Islamic democracy. Figures such as Khaled Abou El Fadl (Amir, 2020; Ansori, 2023) emphasize that deliberation is not just a consultative device, but a spiritual mechanism to bring public policies closer to the values of justice and mercy. In Indonesia, this principle can be found in the deliberation-mufakat system, which is the foundation of deliberative ethics in various community institutions.

However, in modern practices of power, shura is often reduced to a mere formality. Consultative forums are established without participatory substance, and the voices of ulama and scholars are only considered complements, not direction-setters. In this regard, Raja Ali Haji's thoughts remind us that true deliberation is an ethical event, not just a bureaucratic procedure. Therefore, the principles of deliberation and consultation in Raja Ali Haji's thought are very relevant to be actualized. He taught that wise rulers realize their limitations, and humbly open space for dialogue, correction, and advice from people of knowledge. In the context of today's public leadership, this could mean involving academics, Islamic organizations, civil society, and traditional leaders as part of an inclusive and dignified policy-making process.

### **3.2. Implications of Da'wah Ethics in Leadership**

Raja Ali Haji's thoughts on the ethics of da'wah are not only relevant to the spiritual-individual space, but also contain a very strong socio-political dimension. Da'wah in Raja Ali Haji's framework is not limited to verbal activities that call to goodness normatively, but rather as *intellectual and moral* work that influences the order of power, shapes public character, and directs the course of policies by the principles of justice, common sense, and benefit (Faisal, 2019; Hassan, 2015; Malik, 2015). Conceptually, this da'wah approach directly intersects with the idea of political da'wah - a model of da'wah that does

not merely invite individuals, but participates in shaping social structures and systems of power that are just and ethical. In this perspective, the leader is not only the object of da'wah but the main actor of da'wah itself because he has the authority to implement Islamic values into policy, bureaucracy, and public services. Raja Ali Haji gave an example that ulama can conduct political da'wah not by seizing power, but by *influencing the direction of power* through knowledge, advice, and constant moral example (Harris, 2011; Malik et al., 2020; Sucipta & S, 2019).

Furthermore, the principles of Raja Ali Haji's preaching ethics are very close to the idea of civil Islam as proposed by Hefner (2011), which refers to a form of Islamic expression that supports democracy, pluralism, public deliberation, and civilized governance. In civil Islam, the role of Islam in the public sphere is not as an instrument of hegemonic power, but as a source of public ethics and collective morals that shape responsible citizens, communicative leaders, and tolerant societies. Raja Ali Haji's da'wah ethic is the true face of Malay civil Islam: da'wah that is gentle yet firm, ethical yet critical, and grounded in socio-political reality. He realized that influence over power could be built without structural control. With consistent morals, knowledge, and exemplary behavior, an ulama can become a key actor in civilization, not just a spectator or observer (Fatihah, 2019).

The application of the principles of Raja Ali Haji's da'wah ethics in the current context can be found in various initiatives and Islamic movements in post-reform Indonesia that carry the spirit of *civil Islam - that is*, Islam that plays an active role in the public sphere democratically, ethically, and full of social responsibility. Two major organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, for example, have become the main pillars of the Islamic civil society movement that does not only focus on the ritual aspects of religion but also on building public awareness through a rational, moderate, and solutive da'wah approach. In this frame, Da'wah is not just calling for the observance of worship but also touches on socio-political issues such as justice, equality, education, and humanity (Hilmy, 2013).

NU, with its concept of *Islam Nusantara*, and Muhammadiyah, with the idea of Islam Berkemajuan, both consistently develop da'wah based on dialogue, respect for local culture, and communication ethics in line with the principle of *da'wah bil hikmah*. The style of da'wah voiced by these two organizations is very much in line with Raja Ali Haji's da'wah ethics, especially in terms of emphasis on knowledge, deliberation, and a polite and enlightening communication style (Almu'tasim, 2019). Progressive Islamic leaders such as Buya Syafii Maarif, Prof. Haedar Nashir, and KH Yahya Cholil Staqf are also living representations of the civilized da'wah values inherited by Raja Ali Haji. All three are known for their consistency in making Islam a moral foundation in leading and building the nation, not as a tool for identity politics. In many speeches, writings, and organizational policies, they emphasized the importance of common sense, adab in differences, and the social responsibility of

Muslims towards the plurality of the nation. They show that a true Muslim leader can be an example in word and deed, while opening up space for deliberation for all parties.

Another relevant application is the development of various Islamic leadership education models based on da'wah's ethical values. Programs such as Sekolah Kader Ulama (SKU), Sekolah Demokrasi, or Pesantren Transformasi clearly show how Islamic knowledge can be married with public communication skills, policy literacy, and socio-political manners. These programs form young Muslim cadres who are not only proficient in sharia knowledge. However, they are also ready to become leaders of the ummah who are responsive to the challenges of the times, and make da'wah a way to build civilization, not just an exclusive religious activity.

However, contemporary reality shows great challenges in bringing these principles to life. On the one hand, religious rhetoric is often hijacked for electoral purposes, so that the da'wah message loses its ethical spirit and is reduced to a divisive political mobilization tool (Riyadi & Sa'id, 2021). Da'wah, which should invite and strengthen brotherhood, is used to disbelieve, label, and harden social barriers. On the other hand, today's social media culture also encourages an instant, reactive, and provocative style of da'wah. Popularity is often prioritized over depth of content, so the principles of *hikmah*, *maw'izhah hasanah*, and *jidat bi allati hiya ahsan*-which are at the core of classical Islamic da'wah methods are neglected in favor of virality. This is certainly contrary to the spirit of Raja Ali Haji who built da'wah through politeness, intellectual influence, and moral strength, not through agitation or polarization. Furthermore, many Islamic educational institutions and religious institutions still lack space for leadership training based on ethical and solutive political da'wah values. The da'wah curriculum is often only oriented towards the lecture method, not on strengthening integrity, the ability to read social contexts, and the skills to build civilizational narratives in the public sphere (Pratiwi et al., 2021).

In this situation, Raja Ali Haji's thoughts appear as an important reference and correction to the way of preaching and leading in modern times. He taught that power must be filled with advice, that da'wah must be carried out by example, and that communication in the public sphere must always be maintained with adab, reason and moral responsibility.

Meanwhile, in the context of modern politics and organizations, Raja Ali Haji's thoughts remain relevant. Trust-based leadership requires leaders to have high moral and intellectual capacity and the ability to make decisions that favor the people's interests (Malik & Shanty, 2017; Rehayati & Fariyah, 2017). Such leadership will not only create social stability, but will also strengthen the legitimacy of leadership itself. Therefore, leaders at various levels, whether in government, organizations, or communities, need to make the values taught by Raja Ali Haji as guidelines in carrying out their duties and responsibilities (Hanipah & Mardhatillah, 2023). An ideal leader not only gives directions and orders, but also must be a real example for his people in their actions and attitudes. Raja Ali Haji in

Gurindam Dua Belas emphasizes that the character of a leader will be a reflection of the society he leads. This means a society's good or bad depends on its leaders' character and morality. If a leader shows honesty, simplicity, and responsibility, these values will be more easily embedded in people's lives (Warni, 2022). Conversely, if a leader acts unjustly, corruptly, or arbitrarily, such behavior can be contagious and weaken the social structure and public trust in leadership.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Raja Ali Haji pointed out that good leadership must be based on the principles of da'wah, namely politeness in communication, exemplary, knowledge, and justice. The concept of da'wah ethics in leadership is very relevant to the challenges of modern leadership, where leaders must communicate well, guide their people wisely, and run the government fairly. By understanding and applying the ethics of da'wah in leadership, a leader successfully carries out his duties and positively impacts society in building a civilized and dignified civilization. Raja Ali Haji's thought presents a model of Islamic leadership based on a holistic da'wah ethic - combining reason, knowledge, adab, politeness, example, and deliberation. Through his works, he not only offers moral criticism of corrupt power, but also formulates a leadership paradigm that is spiritually and ethically profound. In his perspective, leadership is not an instrument of domination but a responsible form of da'wah - one that invites, not coerces; that advises with wisdom, not judgment; and that leads by example, not by intimidation.

The ethics of da'wah in Raja Ali Haji's thought does not stop at personal religious space. However, it extends to the socio-political realm that leads to strengthening civil society and fair governance. His thinking is very relevant to contemporary political da'wah approaches and the concept of civil Islam, where Islam is not a tool of power, but a source of value for ethical and humane public transformation. These values can be the foundation for the education of ummah cadres, leadership training, and evaluation of public policies. However, contemporary reality shows that the challenges are not light: religious populism, hate speech on social media, and the lack of space for value-based leadership training. In this context, Raja Ali Haji's intellectual legacy comes as a counter-narrative that re-grounds the importance of morals, wisdom, and adab in the space of da'wah and leadership..

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