

Revitalizing Classical Islamic Kalam against Postmodern Ideologies: An Epistemological Analysis of Umm al-Barahin

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ABSTRACT

Umm al-Barahin authored by Imam al-Sanusi is a highly influential theological text of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaa'ah and serves as a principal foundation in the tradition of Islamic creed ('aqidah) studies in the Malay World. The book employs a systematic and accessible framework of Twenty Attributes of God (Sifat al-'Ishrin). In this postmodern era, the Muslim community faces waves of dangerous ideologies such as atheism, agnosticism and theological confusion propagated by extremist groups (Mu'attilah), literalists (Mujassimah) and (Musyabbihah), who corporealise sifat khabariyyah of Allah SWT. This qualitative study employs a critical analysis methodology of Umm al-Barahin text which focusing on the epistemological aspects of kalam, the application of logic (al-qiyas) and the classification of rational judgements (ahkam al-'aql). The findings demonstrate the framework of Twenty Attributes of God presented in this book provides robust theological arguments for addressing these postmodern challenges. Specifically, the conclusive affirmation of the attribute of existence (wujud) effectively refutes the doubts raised by atheists and agnostics, while the affirmation of the attribute of pre-eternity (qidam) invalidates the argument of "Naturalism" concept, which claims that universe is self-exist. Furthermore, the method of theological discourse grounded in the muhkamat (unequivocal texts) successfully safeguards Muslims from the deviations of tashbih, tajsim and ta'til. In conclusion, this study establishes that Umm al-Barahin is not merely a historical theological text but remains steadfast, relevant and significant bastion for safeguarding the creed of Muslim community against the evolving dynamics of modern ideologies.

Keywords: Umm al-Barahin, Twenty Attributes of God, Atheisme, Ahl Sunnah wa al-Jamaa'ah, Contemporary challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The prominent theologian Imam al-Sanusi, whose full name is Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Yusuf bin 'Umar bin Shuaib al-Sanusi al-Hasani was a great scholar renowned for his contributions to high-quality scholarly works. Born in Tlemcen, Algeria around 838 AH/839 AH (1435–1436 CE). He reportedly passed away on 18 Jamadil Akhir 895 AH corresponding to 10th May 1490 CE. In addition to his profound expertise in Usul al-Din (Islamic Theology), the figure who was recognized as a *mujaddid* by Moroccan scholars in the early 9th century AH also mastered other disciplines including mathematics and astronomy. His educational background began in Tlemcen under the guidance of his father and a lineage of local scholars before he relocated to Algeria to seek knowledge from illustrious scholars such as Abdul Rahman al-Tha'alibi. His excellence was subsequently inherited by a chain of competent disciples including Ibn Saad, Abu Qasim al-Zawawi, and Ibn al-Abbas al-Saghir (al-Bajuri, 1277 AH).

Al-Bajuri (1227 AH) also reported that various works authored by al-Sanusi became authoritative source in North Africa. Among his writings are:

- a) al- ‘Aqidah al-Kubra,
- b) Umm al-Barahin (‘Aqidah ahl al-Tauhid al-Sughra),
- c) ‘Umdah ahl al-Tawfiq wa al-Tasdid (Kaherah, 1317),
- d) al-‘Aqidah al-Wusta (al-Sanusiyyah al-Wusta),
- e) Sughra al-Sughra,
- f) Mukhtasar fi’ilm al-Mantiq,
- g) Sharh Asma’ Allah al-Husna,
- h) al-Mujarrabat,
- i) al-Tibb al-Nabawi (Leiden, 1375),
- j) Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari

The distinction of *Umm al-Barahin* lies in its position as a primary creedal text within the theology of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaa’ah particularly through an approach that is systematically structured and grounded in a balance between textual evidence (*naqli*) and rational (‘*aqli*) proofs. Abbas (2017) explains that the creed (*i’tiqad*) of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaa’ah regarding divinity is to believe with absolute certainty that Allah SWT exists and possesses numerous attributes. To Him belong the attributes of beauty (*Jamal*), majesty (*Jalal*) and perfection (*Kamal*). Nevertheless, the specific attributes that are obligatory for every accountable Muslim (*mukallaf*) to know are:

- a) 20 obligatory attributes (that must necessarily belong) to Allah SWT.
- b) 20 impossible attributes (that cannot possibly belong) to Allah SWT.
- c) 1 permissible attribute (that may or may not belong) to Allah SWT.

The approach employed by al-Sanusi to elucidate the issue of these attributes aimed to make it accessible for Muslims to understand. This approach is famously known as the Twenty Attributes (Sifat al-‘Ishrin). Among the reasons outlined by Rosder (2001) as to why al-Sanusi limited the discussion of Twenty Divine Attributes of God are as follows:

- a) By 9th century AH, a synthesis had occurred between the literature of creedal studies (‘*Ilm al-Aqidah*) and philosophy (‘*Ilm al-Falsafah*) thereby confusing readers of creedal texts. The layperson could no longer differentiate between philosophy and religious sciences particularly on matters of creed (‘*Aqidah*).
- b) During that century, there were individuals influenced by philosophy who perceived the discipline as possessing profound, esoteric essences that could not be understood merely through their exoteric (*zahir*) meanings. Al-Sanusi argued that philosophy could distract Muslims from comprehending their own religion as it was understood by the righteous predecessors (*al-Salaf al-Salih*).

Based on these premises, al-Sanusi formulated an approach to serve as a guide for Muslims so that they would not be unduly influenced by philosophy in matters concerning the divine attributes.

The vast majority of scholars in the field of ‘*Aqidah* and the global Muslim populace are adherents of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah*. This shared adherence established a robust connection between Arab scholars and scholars of the Malay World in the context of intellectual transmission. This bond was strengthened because renowned scholars of the Malay World traveled to and received their education in Arab lands, particularly in Mecca, before dedicating themselves to the teaching of knowledge. Due to this alignment in creedal adherence, the text *Umm al-Barahin* became highly celebrated and simultaneously served as a vital cornerstone in the tradition of creedal studies (‘*Ilm al-Aqidah*) in the Malay World (Rahim et al., 2012).

In this region, the influence of the text was immense, prompting local scholars to translate, commentate on (*sharh*), and adapt it, which led to the emergence of monumental works such as *Bidayah al-Hidayah*, *Siraj al-Huda* and '*Aqidah al-Najin*. These books subsequently became the primary textbooks in *madrasahs* and *pondok* (traditional Islamic boarding schools), thereby reinforcing the creedal foundation of society while establishing a continuity of the scholarly tradition that defines the Malay-Islamic civilization (Rahim et al., 2012).

While Islamic intellectual history encompasses a diverse spectrum of theological schools (such as the Mu'tazilah, Shi'a kalam, and various philosophical traditions/Falasifah), this study purposefully delimits its inquiry to the mainstream Sunni Ash'arite-Maturidite tradition embodied in al-Sanusi's *Umm al-Barahin*. This focus is methodologically justified as Ash'arite-Maturidism represents the prevailing orthodoxy and historical foundation of creedal studies in the Malay World, thereby providing a concentrated lens to evaluate its specific epistemological mechanisms against contemporary ideological challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, library-based research design utilizing systematic document analysis. A qualitative paradigm is uniquely suited for this investigation as it enables a rigorous, context-driven evaluation of classical theological frameworks and their contemporary conceptual applications (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The research operations are structured into two definitive phases: data procurement and explicit analytical processing.

Data Procurement and Inclusion Criteria

Data collection was executed through targeted documents and divided into primary and secondary sources. The primary textual corpus comprises Imam al-Sanusi's *Umm al-Barahin* along with its classical, authoritative commentaries, specifically *Hashiyah al-Dusuqi* and *Hasyiat al-Bajuri*. Secondary data were purposively sampled from high-impact indexing databases to contextualize classical arguments within modern discourse. The inclusion criteria restricted secondary literature to peer-reviewed sources addressing the Twenty Divine Attributes framework and contemporary intellectual challenges, including atheism, agnosticism, and anthropomorphism.

Data Analysis: Analytical Procedures and Operative Steps

To ensure methodological rigour, the primary text of *Umm al-Barahin* was subjected to systematic analytical procedures combining content analysis, textual hermeneutics, and an integrated inductive-deductive reasoning loop. The critical examination of the text was carried out through three distinct analytical procedures:

a) Internal Textual Analysis (Hermeneutics and Content Extraction)

The primary text and its classical commentaries (*shurūḥ* and *ḥawāshī*) were systematically coded to identify key theological constructs. Specific focus was given to al-Sanusi's foundational breakdown of rational judgments (*aḥkām al-'aql: wājib, mustahīl, and jā'iz*) and his classification of divine attributes (specifically *ṣifāt naḥsiyyah* like *wujūd* and *ṣifāt salbiyyah* like *qidām*).

b) Logical and Epistemological Deconstruction (Syllogistic Analysis)

The study extracted and evaluated the formal logical structures (*al-qiyās*) embedded within al-Sanusi's proofs. The analytical evaluation centered on how al-Sanusi employs Islamic scholastic logic (*'ilm al-manṭiq*) to construct valid syllogisms. The research mapped the logical progression from premise (such as the temporal origination and contingency of the universe) to necessary conclusions (such as the necessity of a non-contingent, pre-eternal Creator) to assess its epistemological validity (*al-yaqīn*).

c) Comparative Conceptual Synthesis (Inductive-Deductive Integration)

To bridge classical kalam with contemporary discourse, the analysis executed a dual-directional reasoning loop:

- i. Deductive Processing: Operating from the established Ash‘arite-Māturīdite theological paradigm, the core tenets of Umm al-Barahin—such as rational judgments, syllogistic logic, and the attributes of existence and pre-eternity—were systematically projected downward to evaluate their capacity to refute modern non-theistic and deviationist claims.
- ii. Inductive Processing: Conversely, raw arguments from contemporary postmodern ideologies—including Naturalism (cosmic self-existence), modern atheism/agnosticism (empirical skepticism), and neo-literalism/anthropomorphism (tajsīm and tashbīh)—were inductively categorized into thematic premises. These modern assertions were then directly cross-examined against al-Sanusi's framework of tanzīh (divine purification), tafwīd, and ta’wīl anchored in muḥkamāt (unequivocal texts).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The text *Umm al-Barahin* authored by Imam al-Sanusi stands as one of the most influential theological discourses within the creed of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah*. Wahab & Hamad (2020) explain that the supremacy of *Umm al-Barāhīn* is manifested through its systematic and graduated structure, which enables readers to navigate creedal arguments in an organized manner grounded in robust logical principles. Imam al-Sanusi begins his writing by prioritizing the discourse on rational judgments (*aḥkam al-‘aql*), namely the rationally necessary (*wajib al-‘aqli*), the rationally impossible (*mustaḥil al-‘aqli*), and the rationally permissible (*ja‘iz al-‘aqli*).

The concept of *wajib al-‘aqli* refers to that which the intellect cannot accept as non-existent, such as the attribute of Allah’s Existence (*Wujud*). Conversely, *mustaḥil al-‘aqli* refers to that which the intellect cannot accept as existing, such as the attribute of temporal origination (*ḥuduth*) concerning Allah SWT. In his work, Imam al-Sanusi further elucidates the obligation binding every *mukallaf* to recognize and know the obligatory, impossible, and permissible attributes regarding Allah SWT and His Messengers. The logical framework of syllogism (*al-qiya*s) applied in *Umm al-Barahin* elevates the discourse of the Twenty Attributes as a valid application of formal logic (*‘ilm al-mantiq*) within Islamic theological discourse (Wahab & Hamad, 2020).

We find that the sequential arrangement of arguments in Imam al-Sanusi’s work indirectly reinforces the proofs for Theology divine matters (*ilahiyat*) and prophetic mission (*nubuwwat*) constructed upon the methodologies of Islamic theology (*‘ilm al-kalam*). Such an approach forms a solid epistemological framework to counter the denial of God’s existence by atheists, as well as the skepticism surrounding the certainty of His existence harbored by agnostics. Therefore, before evaluating the capacity of this framework to confront modern thought, it is essential to first define atheism and agnosticism as the primary challenges to the existence of God.

Al-Ihsaie (2020) notes that terminologically, an individual who believes in the non-existence of a God who created this universe is an atheist. On the other hand, agnostics do not deny the existence of God but doubt the possibility of attaining certain knowledge about Him, thereby seeking to liberate the mind from any theological inquiries (Talip et al., 2023). They represent a group that negates and harbors doubt regarding the existence of the Lord of the Worlds.

Nevertheless, the claims advanced by atheists and agnostics clearly contradict the dictates of sound intellect (*al-‘aql al-salim*). Observation of the existence and order of the universe clearly demonstrates that everything that is temporally originated (*ḥadith*) requires a creator (*muḥdith*). The universe, in reality, is temporally originated; hence, it is rationally impossible for the universe to exist by itself without a creator who brought it into being. Thus, the self-existence of the universe without a creator is absurd according to a sound mind.

Hayani et al. (2019) comment that al-Ghazali affirms that Allah SWT possesses the attribute of Necessary Existence (*Wājib al-Wujud*) and is the Creator who brings things from non-existence (*‘adam*) into existence (*wujud*). Therefore, the assertion by atheists and agnostics that the universe is pre-eternal (*qadim*) is refuted, because if the universe were pre-eternal, it would require no creator (Khairuddin, 2022). This completely contradicts both rational (*‘aqli*) and textual (*naqli*) proofs which assert that the universe is a temporally originated creation (*makhluq ḥadith*) of Allah SWT, as stated in His word:

“And of His signs are the night and day and the sun and moon. Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but prostrate to Allah, who created them”

(Surah Fuṣṣilat, 41:37)

Accordingly, within the theological discourse centered around the study of the twenty attributes that are obligatory for Allah SWT, scholars of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* comprising the Ash'arite and Maturidite schools emphasize that the intrinsic attribute (*ṣifah nafsīyyah*) refers to only one attribute: existence (*wujud*), which means actualization and affirmation (*taḥaqquq wa al-thubut*) (al-Dusuqi, 2001). In *Umm al-Barahin*, Imam al-Sanusi asserts that the first attribute of Allah SWT is *wujud*, wherein His existence is rationally necessary (*wajib al-'aqli*), and is neither permissible (*ja'iz*) nor impossible (*mustahil*). Hence, he prioritizes this discourse to prove that the existence of Allah SWT is an absolute rational necessity. Consequently, the affirmation of the attribute of existence demonstrates that belief in the existence of Allah SWT is the starting point for the entire theological structure in the Islamic creed (Addimsiki et al., 2025). This approach subsequently refutes the claims and ideologies propagated by atheists and agnostics who deny and doubt the existence of God.

Having established that Allah SWT possesses existence as the Supreme Creator, Islamic theological discourse further asserts that the existence of Allah SWT is pre-eternal (*Qidam*), meaning that the existence of Allah SWT has no beginning. As mentioned by Allah SWT in Surah al-Hadid: 3:

“He is the First and the Last, the Ascendant and the Intimate, and He is, of all things, Knowing.”

Al-Baijuri (2004) highlights an important maxim in understanding the attribute of pre-eternity (*qidam*). According to him, whatever is necessarily characterized by *qidam*, it is impossible for it to be characterized by non-existence (*'adam*). This is because everything that is temporally originated is bound by non-existence. Therefore, it is impossible for any temporally originated thing to be characterized by *qidam*.

The attribute of *qidam* clarifies for us that Allah SWT is not preceded by non-existence and does not depend on anything to bring Him into existence. Had the existence of Allah SWT required something to bring Him into being, it would lead to two implications that are rationally impossible to conceive:

- a) Infinite regress (*Tasalsul*)
- b) Vicious circularity (*Dawr*)

Both are completely impossible for the Essence (*Dhat*) of Allah SWT, as it is impossible for Allah SWT who is characterized by Majesty (*Jalal*), Perfection (*Kamal*), and Beauty (*Jamal*) to be bound by any form of deficiency or dependency (Md Toazi, n.d.).

The affirmation that Allah SWT possesses the attributes of *wujud* and *qidam* manifests to us the reality that Allah SWT exists by His own Essence, pre-eternal without a beginning, existing, and un-preceded by non-existence. Observation of the beauty and order of the universe proves that the universe is temporally originated, whereas Allah SWT is pre-eternal (*Qadim*). Therefore, the finest path to knowing Allah SWT is through His perfect, beautiful, and majestic attributes (Hilmi et al., 2018).

Scholars of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* emphasize that knowledge of these attributes is the primary foundation in forming *ma'rifah* (deep cognition) of Allah SWT. This is because His perfection is manifested through His attributes, which distinguish Him from all temporally originated things. The approach of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* exhibits a balance that purifies Allah SWT from any deficiency while simultaneously affirming all perfections that befit Him (Zarkasyi et al., 2025).

Zarkasyi et al. (2025) further explain that such an approach is fundamentally different from that of the divesters of attributes (*Mu'aṭṭilah*), such as the Mu'tazilites, who directly deny the attributes of Allah SWT. On the other hand, groups such as the corporalists (*Mujassimah*), anthropomorphists (*Musyabbihah*), *Karrāmīyyah*, *Hishāmīyyah*, *Hashwīyyah*, and *Wahhabiyyah* interpret the ambiguous verses (*ayat mutashabihat*) literally, thereby leading to the anthropomorphizing of Allah SWT with His creation. One of the critical issues that frequently serves as a domain for deviation among these extremist groups is the discourse surrounding the scriptural attributes (*ṣifat khabariyyah*) of Allah SWT. Confusion in addressing these verses not only misleads

but also corrupts the creedal understanding of the Muslim community regarding the true nature of Allah's attributes (Moris, 2020).

These groups assign meaning by assigning a literal physical object (*'ayn*), a distinct form, or limbs that resemble the attributes of creation and subsequently attempt to declare the purification (*tanzih*) of those attributes in a manner "befitting" Allah SWT. Such an understanding makes Allah SWT appear like a creation but "not like other creations," yet possessing the characteristics of creation. Consequently, through this flawed methodology, they believe that Allah SWT possesses a hand, but His hand is not like the hands of creation; Allah SWT has eyes, but His eyes are not like the eyes of creation; Allah SWT sits or establishes Himself over the heavens, but not like the sitting or establishing of creation.

This doctrine is not the true creed of the *Salaf* (pious predecessors) but is a corrupted creed (*'aqidah fāsidah*) or a reprehensible innovation (*bid'ah ḍalalah*) (Muhadir, 2018). The confusion caused by this understanding is not a new phenomenon, rather, it is an old propaganda revived among the Muslim laypersons across the globe. If traced back, this doctrine can be linked to the views of Ibn Taymiyyah, whose full name was Ahmad Taqiyyuddin, Abu Abbas bin Syihabuddin Abdul Mahasin Abdul Halim bin Syeikh Abi Qasim al-Khadar bin Muhammad bin al-Khadar bin Ali bin Abdillah. Born in the village of Harran, Palestine, on 10 Rabi' al-Awwal in the year 661 AH, he was of Kurdish descent and passed away in the year 728 AH in Damascus, Syria (Abbas, 2017).

A comparison of their respective dates of birth and death indicates that he was a contemporary of Imam al-Nawawi, who was born in the village of Nawa, Damascus, in 630 AH, yet, the approaches of the two were worlds apart. After he exceeded the age of 40, many of his views sparked controversy, particularly revolving around the attributes of Allah SWT, the issue of *takfir* (the propensity to declare other Muslims as disbelievers), and lastly, his fatwa prohibiting travel specifically to visit the tomb of Prophet Muhammad SAW, declaring that one cannot shorten (*qasr*) or combine (*jam*) prayers for such a journey (Jalil, 2015).

Referring to the books *al-Munazarah fi al-'Aqidah al-Wasitiyyah* and *al-'Aqidah al-Hamawiyyah al-Kubra*, Ibn Taymiyyah explains that the foundation of his school of thought is to interpret the verses of the Qur'an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad SAW pertaining to the scriptural attributes of God literally (*ḥarfīyyah*), according to the outward meaning (*ẓahir*) of the wording. To him, God possesses a face, hands, eyes, a flank, and He sits, comes, goes, ascends, and so forth, yet without resembling creation.

This is the deviation that misleads and leads to the doctrine of the *Musyabbihah* (those who anthropomorphize Allah with creation) or the *Mujassimah* (those who corporealize Allah). An example of his understanding is found in the verse *istiwa'*, extracted from Surah Ta-Ha, verse 5. First, according to him, the outward wording of *istiwa'* is given the meaning of "sitting," "sitting cross-legged," "establishing oneself," or "enthroned." Second, only after that is the exact nature of this "sitting," "sitting cross-legged," "establishing oneself," or "enthroned" consigned (*tafwīd*) in a manner befitting Allah SWT. For him, the outward meaning of the word is knowable, and it is only the modality (*kayfiyyah*) that remains unknown. This idea has resurfaced as a tribulation (*fitnah*) and a trial concerning the fundamentals of creed (*uṣul al-'aqidah*) regarding divinity (*ilahiyyat*) in the contemporary era (Rahim, 2024).

Responding to this issue, Joll (2018) provides a framework for understanding figurative interpretation (*ta'wil*) correctly, guided by the exegesis of both the *Salaf* and *Khalaf* scholars through the following steps:

- Both the *Salaf* and *Khalaf* practice *tanzih* (purification) by firmly believing that the outward meaning (*ma'na ẓahir*) in the textual sources of the Qur'an and Hadith is not the intended meaning (*murad*) willed by Allah, because the outward meaning is impossible or unfitting for Allah SWT.
- The *Salaf* consign the ultimate meaning (*tafwīd al-ma'na*), thereby purifying Allah SWT from resembling creation. Conversely, the *Khalaf* adopt a different step by metaphorically interpreting the meaning (*ta'wil al-ma'na*), thereby shifting the intended meaning (*murad*) toward unequivocal scriptural texts (*muḥkamāt*). In other words, the *Salaf* lean toward brief metaphorical interpretation (*Ta'wil Ijmali*), whereas the *Khalaf* employ the approach of exhaustive and detailed metaphorical interpretation (*Ta'wil Tafsili*). This ensures that the understanding of ambiguous verses does not contradict the verse: "There is nothing like unto Him" (Surah al-Shūrā: 11), which signifies that Allah is completely free from any likeness to His creation.

Hence, the approach to knowing God must be grounded in an understanding of the unequivocal attributes (*ṣifat muḥkamāt*) of Allah SWT, ensuring that a Muslim's creedal foundation remains robust, clear, and untainted by any form of deviation. Cognizing Allah SWT through the instruction of the Twenty Divine Attributes safeguards the Muslim community from the pitfalls of anthropomorphism (*tashbih*), corporealism (*tajsīm*), and *ta'ṭil* divestment of attributes (*ta'ṭil*) (Rahim et al., 2021). Therefore, the approach of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* in knowing God which pivots upon the unequivocal scriptural texts (*muḥkamāt*) is profoundly precise because their meanings represent the most explicit clarity within the textual sources of the Shariah. Such clear exegesis leaves no room for distortion, remaining entirely detached from ambiguity and the whims of personal desires (*hawa*) (Jalil, 2021).

The Muslim community today must continuously defend the instructional framework of the Twenty Divine Attributes, as it aligns perfectly with the true understanding of the righteous predecessors (*al-Salaf al-Salih*) and the noble Prophet Muhammad SAW regarding Allah SWT. This classic text, *Umm al-Barahin* remains the primary theological compass for mainstream of Sunni scholars across the world especially Malaysia. It also actively shapes faith, thought, and society today. The details as below:

Pedagogical Transmission: From Traditional Pondok to Contemporary Education

Pidrus & Shuhari (2022) explain that the teaching of *Umm al-Barahin* spans every stage of life in Malaysia currently. At traditional *pondok* seminaries—like Pondok Lubuk Tapah and Pondok Bakriyyah—students still pore over the original text and its classical commentaries. Meanwhile, the formal school system introduces it early: toddlers memorize the basic attributes, high schoolers learn to blend logic with scriptural proofs, and university students dive deep into advanced Arabic theology (*Kalam*) and logic (*Mantiq*). Beyond schools, the message reaches the public through mosque lectures, social media, and even pop culture—most famously through Raihan's classic nasheed, "*Sifat 20*."

Epistemological Perception: Harmonizing Revelation and Rationality

Rahman et. al., (2020) elaborate that muslims in Malaysia see this framework as a balanced middle path (*wasatiyyah*) that avoids emotional extremism on one end and neglect on the other. By pairing divine revelation (*naqli*) with sound human reason (*aqli*), it makes complex theology easy to grasp and intellectually satisfying. Ultimately, it's understood as a tool for keeping core Islamic beliefs pure and free from conflicting philosophical ideas.

Socio-Theological Application: Safeguarding Creed and Social Harmony

In practice, *Sifat 20* acts as a defense mechanism and a social anchor. On an intellectual level, its arguments help the community counter modern atheism, extreme literalism, and unorthodox theological views. Pidrus & Shuhari (2022) clarify that on a social level, shared belief builds shared character. When society and its leadership operate from the same solid spiritual foundation, it wards off religious conflict and keeps the peace in a multicultural nation.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

It should be noted that this study primarily examined the internal logic and defensive utility of the Ash'arite-Māturīdite tradition as structured in *Umm al-Barahin*. Consequently, its findings are bounded by this specific theological paradigm. Future research could expand upon these insights by conducting comparative analyses with alternative Islamic theological perspectives (such as contemporary Shi'i thought or modern neo-Mu'tazilism) or by directly juxtaposing al-Sanusi's rationalism with contemporary Western philosophy of religion, particularly regarding reformed epistemology and modern analytical *kalam*.

CONCLUSION

It's clear that Imam al-Sanusi's *Umm al-Barahin* is far from just a historical text; it remains a living, highly sophisticated framework for protecting Islamic theology from modern skepticism. By elegantly bridging the gap

between rigorous logic and scriptural revelation, the book's structure of the Twenty Divine Attributes offers a powerful tool for modern scholars to engage with contemporary crises of faith. The text addresses today's intellectual challenges on two distinct fronts. On a philosophical level, al-Sanusi's defense of the attribute of existence directly answers the core doubts raised by modern atheists and agnostics. At the same time, the attribute of pre-eternity completely deflates the arguments of Naturalism by exposing the logical absurdities of a self-creating universe. On a theological level, this structured approach offers a clear remedy to internal doctrinal confusion, particularly the rigid literalism that leads to anthropomorphism. By anchoring the discussion of scriptural attributes to unequivocal texts—using the balanced methods of both the Salaf and Khalaf scholars—the text safely navigates between the extremes of physicalism and total denial. Ultimately, this study underscores that the intellectual legacy embedded within *Umm al-Barahin* should not be treated as an obsolete artifact of the past. Instead, revitalizing this classical tradition gives contemporary Islamic scholarship a resilient, time-tested baseline to ground the community's faith against the shifting tides of postmodern ideologies.

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