

Bravery from the Perspective of a Mandailing Scholar: An Analysis of *Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf*

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Abstract

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Bravery is one of the most important virtues of Mandailing ethnic, manifested in the form of non-hesitant in making difficult long-distance journey and firm in upholding the truth. This quality are among the factors that gave birth to prominent Mandailings throughout history. One of the Mandailing descendants that had stamped his name on the international level of Islamic scholarship was SyekhAbd. Al-Qadir Al-Mandili. Born in the year 1910 AD, Al-Mandili returned to his Creator in the year 1965 AD. Received his early religious education in Kedah, Al-Mandili then furthered his studies in Mecca, after which he was entrusted with a teaching position at the Al-Haram Grand Mosque. He had produced over 24 writings in various discipline of Islamic studies, including the divine creed, jurisprudence, *hadeeth*, politics, education, Islamic law and morals. Through one of his writing entitled *Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Atas Mazhab Salaf* (A Shield For Those Who Are Commissioned Or Faith Knot On The *Salaf* School Of Thought), this article strives to analyze forms of bravery displayed by Al-Mandili. The results indicated that Al-Mandili was an Islamic scholar firm in expressing new ideas, as well as beating the odds.

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1. Introduction

According to the 5th Edition Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the word 'brave' can be defined as 'ready to face and endure danger, pain or suffering; having no fear' (Hornby, 1995). Not exclusively to the struggle of defending one's nation, bravery was also the main trait in the call of the Messengers and past scholars. Bravery in preaching only carries the meaning of being brave in



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conveying the truth on the religion, in facing the incoming risks, as well as sacrificing anything deemed as necessary for the sake of the religion.

Even so, they are also a number of persons who are in fear of defending the religion. They are not in possession of bravery in stating the truth over the harms, nor do they are brave enough in defending the people of truth. They are also afraid in taking risks in defending what they themselves view as rightful truth, whereas they were among the people who are enjoying a higher degree of status within the given society, such were the actions of the corrupt rabbis and priests as described by the al-Quran.

Concentrating on the Mandailing ethnic, the aspects of their overt bravery traits varies. According to Muhammad BukhariLubis (2005) among the bravery traits seeded within the Mandailing are obedience towards the religion, firm in conveying the truth, fearless in realizing the risks, open towards critical comments and the tendency to travel afar. These were the virtues that turned them into figures prominently known among the society.

SyeikhAbd. Al-Qadir Al-Mandili was among the Mandailing ethnic who exhibited bravery during his life. Even though after his last breath, his bravery can be well traced in his writings that became primary text and reference for students engulfed in the classic way of *pondok* in seeking knowledge. Through his writing entitled *Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Atas Mazhab Salaf*, the bravery characteristics of Al-Mandili can be well examined.

This article are divided into six subtopics, beginning with the introduction to the topic. The second subtopic dealt with the concept of bravery in the Mandiling ethnic's world-view. The following subtopic is an in-depth perspective on the life of SyeikhAbd. Al-Qadir Al-Mandili. On the forth subtopic, the aspects of bravery of the life of Al-Mandili will be brought forward. The fifth subtopic is focused on Al-Mandili's traits of bravery. Beginning with the introduction of *Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Atas Mazhab Salaf* followed by an analysis of al-Mandili's bravery aspects in the book followed. The final subtopic is the conclusion of the whole article.

2. Bravery in the Mandailing Ethnic's World-View

Since the turn of 19th and 20th century, the Mandailing had earned the reputation for their tradition of travelling afar wrote Tugby (1977). They left their villages in search of a better life, or to seek religious knowledge. Migration for the Mandailing was regarded as an inherited tradition, moreover, deemed as the way of life according to Harahap (1999). This quality can be observed clearly within the nine virtues in the Mandailing culture known as *hamajuon*, progress earned through years of travelling and wandering in search of knowledge. Siregar Sirittis Dalan is assumed as the first Mandailing Muslim of Tapanuli to travel to the Malay Peninsular in seeking knowledge. Returning from his sojourn, he was diligent in conveying knowledge he had acquired, as well as encouraging his people to travel anywhere possible, including the Malay Peninsular in improving the society's quality and function (Lubis, 2005).

The people of Mandailing's bravery stood-out when they were brave enough in leaving their old religious system of belief. Originated from a nation that worshipped a spirit known as *Begu*, they embraced Islam as a result of *Padri*'s movement from *Minangkabau* somewhere around 1820-1836 AD according to Harahap (1960). Hence, the Mandailing's religious practices are hugely influenced by the practices of the *Minangkabau*. Similarly to the *Minangkabau*, the Mandailing prioritized religion as a

pillar of life. Lubis (2005) pictured obedience towards the religion are clearly demonstrated through the words of Mandailing's maxim "*Taatmarugamo, elekmaranakboru, hormat Marmora, rosumarkahanggi*" translated as "total obedience towards the religion, kind hearted towards sons and daughters in-law, respecting the parents in-law and a similar origin of brotherhood". Pelly (1994) compared; the mass conversion of the Mandailing to Islam highlighted their ethnicity even more, making themselves different from the Batak's who are generally Christians or Animists.

The Mandailing's virtue of bravery is manifested through their traditional proverb "*anggomabiarmarbustakulangitusaba*" translated as "if one is afraid of mud, he shouldn't step his feet in the paddy field". Based on the principal of standing upon the truth and fighting for shared rights, the Mandailing are well prepared in facing any risks involved. History demonstrated that the Mandailing, during their migration to the Malay Peninsular had taken part in at least four bloodiest battles. According to Lubis & Nasution (2003); The historical battle where the Mandailing fought are the Battle of Rawa in Sungai Ujong, Negeri Sembilan; the Battle of Pahang, the Battle of Selangor and the Battle of Perak. Moving from a battle field after another as an addition to their living methods of wandering and migrating did not hinder them from achieving positive improvements in their lives.

The Mandailing were also thought to be straightforward. They are not categorized as introverts, hindering their feelings from being expressed and understood. From their point of view, being straightforward is a sign of an honest soul. They are strongly against hypocrisy and similar vices such as back-stabbing. This transparency is proven to be one of the factors that outsiders found it easy to get along with the Mandailings. They are always reminded by the saying "*ulanghitamarsimonjap di natorang*", translated as "we shall not hide under the light". Types of hypocrisy condemned in Islam, are also being condemned in the Mandailing culture.

Generations after generations had clearly shown the prominence and scholarly qualities of the Mandailings. Beginning with Raja Asal in Raub, Pahang which later migrated to Selangor, followed by Raja Bilah (Papan, Perak) and Sultan Puasa (Kuala Lumpur), Mandailing figures ensured the sustenance of their Mandailing brothers in the Malay Peninsular. Their traits continued to stand out with the likes of Senu Abdul Rahman Siregar (Malaysian Ambassador to Indonesia) which later became the Malaysian Minister of Finance, also Tan Sri Mohammad Sharif Samad (the Secretary for Minister of Finance) and Tun Mohammad Haniff Omar Nasution (Inspector General of Police). So thus Datuk Mukhtar Hashim Lubis (Minister of Youth and Sports), Datuk Harun Idris Harahap (Selangor's Chief Minister) and dozens of other names in various fields such as politics, judiciary, diplomats, entrepreneur, scholars, journalists and Malaysia bureaucrats.

3. Syekh Abd. Al-Qadir Al-Mandili's Historical Background

He was born in the year 1910 AD in the village of Singgalang Padangsidempuan, South of Tapanuli, North of Sumatera. The young Al-Mandili received his early education in Dutch Primary School until he reached standard five. Awang (2008) wrote; In 1924, when Al-Mandili was 14 years old, he migrated to Kedah with the intention of pursuing religious knowledge from the classic system of *pondok* (hut) learning.

Al-Mandili was introduced to *Jawi* writing and reading in Pondok Panjang Rong located a stone-throw away from Tobiar, Pendang. Among the teachers that had a hand in his educational journey was Tuan Guru Haji Bakar. Soon after, he enrolled in Pondok Air Hitam to further his studies in Arabic grammar and syntax, such as learning *Al-Matn Al-Ajrumiyyah*, *al-Mutammimah* and *Matn Alfiyah Ibn Malik*. Under the hands of prominent masters, such as Tuan Haji Idris Bin Lebai Yusuf and Lebai Dukun, Al-Mandili started to master Arabic grammar. Al-Mandili then further his study in Pondok Gajah Mati, Pendang, focusing more on religious knowledge. He took the advantage of living within this study center, studying under a prominent religious figure in Kedah, Haji Wan Ibrahim bin Haji Wan Abdul Qadir, famously known as Pak Chu Him Gajah Mati. Al-Mandili dedicated ten years of his life in this *pondok*, not only studying rather he was given the trust to teach his own classes.

In the year 1936 AD, Al-Mandili travelled to Mecca furthering his quest for knowledge. This was the final stage of his life as a seeker of knowledge. Continuing his role as a student, he was incredibly diligent in studying under famous scholars of Mecca. Among his teachers was Wan Ismail bin Wan ‘Abd. Al-Qadir, popularly known as Pak Da Ail Patani, who was the brother of Pak Chu Him. Apart from Pak Da Ail, Al-Mandili had also studied under Syeikh Ali Al-Maliki, Syeikh Hasan Muhammad Al-Mashat, Syeikh Muhammad Al-‘Arabi bin Al-Tabani bin Al-Hussein Al-Wahidi Al-Maghribi, Syeikh Sayid Al-‘Alawi bin Abbas Al-Maliki, as well as Syeikh Muhammad Ahyad. Due to piety and in-depth knowledge according to Ghani@MohdAzmi (2013), Al-Mandili had been given the priceless mandate to lecture in the Al-Haram Grand Mosque.

Other than being active in religious classes, Al-Mandili also spent most of his time writing. A grand total of 24 books had been written by al-Mandili in divine creed, jurisprudence, politics, *hadeeth*, education, law and morals. Through his priceless works in various disciplines, Al-Mandili had vastly contributed to the Islamic world especially within the classical *pondok* system of the Malay Archipelago. Till this day, these books are still being studied and revered in the *pondoks* of Kedah, Kelantan and Patani wrote Awang (2008).

4. Bravery in the Life of Al-Mandili

The traits and bits of bravery had already been exhibited in Al-Mandili’s personality since his early age, demonstrated in his bravery to travel and migrate in the quest for knowledge. When he was 14 years old, he has already prepared to leave his hometown and migrated to Kedah seeking religious knowledge. Wandering, leaving beloved parents, and his homeland behind towards a foreign land is never an easy task. At the very least, one has to learn how to survive on his own, blending within the locals as well as working to earn his living. It is essential for him to go through sweat-breaking tests and be patient during his stay. Such as the bravery demonstrated by Al-Mandili at the tender age of 14 years old. According to Awang (2008), Al-Mandili financed his studies by using wages he earned from working in the paddy field. He also managed to set up a small business of selling religious books to ‘tokfakih’ at his *pondok* (Ilyas, 2002). After 12 years of studying in Kedah, he never hesitated to further his study in Mecca at the age of 26 years old, to the point that he himself became a teacher at the Al-Haram Grand Mosque.

Al-Mandili was also brave in learning new field of knowledge. From attending Dutch Primary School, he changed his course towards learning religious knowledge. From one *pondok* to another, he started out by mastering the *Jawi* writing. He then mastered Arabic grammar and further on mastering Islamic sciences at various *pondoks*. By furthering his study in Mecca, Al-Mandili had managed to put himself on the road less traveled by south-east Asian muslims.

Other than that, Al-Mandili was also a man of responsibility. After six years of studying in Kedah, when he was 20 years old, he was entrusted with a teaching position at Pondok Gajah Mati, Pendang, Kedah. He took up the responsibility well. It was said that Al-Mandili's phenomenal presence is the reason behind the multiplication of enrollment reaching up to 600 students to this pondok . The same quality was shown by him during his years of being a teacher in the Al-Haram Grand Mosque. According to Ghani (2013), his class was so popular in the Al-Haram Grand Mosque that his students exceeded 500 persons.

Furthermore, Al-Mandili was brave in upholding the truth that he believed in. He actually stirred a controversy relating to the issue of Muslims taking non-Muslims counterparts and leaders in politics. His work entitled *Islam Agama Dan Kedaulatan* (Islam Religion And Sovereignty) was deemed as a threat to the government of that time and was banned in Malaya (Abdullah, 1998). Al-Mandili was also fearless in refuting mainstream society's belief. Back when the Muslim society was in favour of providing Western than Islamic education to their young generation, Al-Mandili had responded by translating the work of his teacher, Syeikh Hasan Muhammad Al-Mashat. He named this translation as *Menakutkan Dan Meliarkan Daripada Memasukkan Orang Islam Akan Anak Mereka Itu Ke Dalam Sekolah Orang Kafir* (Intimidating The Muslims of Enrolling Their Children Into The School Of The Unbelievers). Apart from that, Al-Mandili was brave in manifesting his knowledge into written form. During his life, he wrote 24 books altogether in various field of knowledge, such as divine creed, jurisprudence, *hadeeth*, education, politics, law and judiciary, as well as morals. His works include two books written in Arabic and six more are translations from Arabic to Malay.

The other side of his bravery was in his practice of polygamy. Monogamy was the commonly accepted marriage form within the Malay culture. Having two, three or even four wives is not the norm of the Malays. According to Ghani (2013); Al-Mandili had three wives that lived under one roof.

5. Bravery in Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Atas Mazhab Salaf

This subtopic will be divided into two. Subtopic 5.1 is the introduction to *Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Atas Mazhab Salaf*, and subtopic 5.2 will focus more on the bravery aspects exhibited by Al-Mandili in this masterpiece of his.

5.1. Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Atas Mazhab Salaf (PBSMASIAMS)

This book was one of his translation and commentary work in the field of Islamic creed. Translated from the book *Al-Akidah Al-Salafiyah* or widely known as *Al-Akidah Al-Tahawiyah* by Al-Imam Abu Jaafar Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Salamah Al-Tahawi, this translation was completed on Tuesday, 23 Jamadil Awal in the year 1376 H equivalent to the year 1956 AD. Written in Malay Jawi, this book was

printed for the first time by Idris Al-Marbawi's printing center in Egypt during the end of Dzulqaidah 1380 H, equivalent to 15th May 1961 AD.

Among the specialty of *Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Atas Mazhab Salaf*, or abbreviated as 'PBSMASIAMS' onwards; is that the book is a complete discussion of the six pillars of faith in accordance to the *Salaf* school of thought. Other than using proof and arguments from the Holy Quran and *hadeeth* of the Prophet, this book also took into account the views of the companions of the Prophet, the *tabi'in* and the *tabi' tabi'in* as the base in understanding religion. It is not an exaggeration to say that PBSMASIAMS was the earliest book of Islamic creed in the *Salaf* school of thought ever translated into the Malay language.

Uniquely, even though this book was written in classical Malay language in Jawi writing, the interest for this book never stopped throughout time. This book had always been reprinted and the printing quality had been improvised. This classic book inherited from 'old people' is not only being studied by senior citizens, but also among the young. As a proof, this book was transliterated into Roman alphabets to ease the youth, or for those who are not capable of reading Jawi scripts. At the very least two publications had been identified as printers for the Romanized version, namely Jahabersa and Al-Hidayah Publications.

Contemporary Malay muslims still acknowledge this book as a source of knowledge. Even though it had been 60 years from the day it was completed, PBSMASIAMS still receives attentions from the society and is still being used as an educational syllabus in understanding Islamic creed up to this day. The research of Ramli Awang(2008) confirmed that this book is still being actively taught in Kedah, Kelantan and Patani.

5.2. Bravery Traits in *Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Atas Mazhab Salaf* (PBSMASIAMS)

The bravery traits of Al-Mandili was clearly expressed in the style he wrote. His words were clear, not ambiguous. Whether his view was well accepted or rejected, Al-Mandili was brave and honest in expressing his thoughts. For example, Al-Mandili (2012) bravely said in this book, page 16:

"...and the way of the *Salaf* are safer, for the matter within it are safer to understand the meanings that probably was not the meaning meant by Allah, and their way was the best since they were the best of generations..."

Even though it was within his knowledge that the creed of the *Khalaf* dominated majority of the Malay Muslim, still he insisted his view on this matter. Other than this, tons of quotes was added to PBSMASIAMS where he condemned the falsehood by groups who opposed the *Salaf* school of thought with the likes of Shia, Mu'tazilah and so on. Among them Al-Mandili (2012) was quoted saying:

"This shows that the author (Al-Tahawi) refuted all *Rafidhah* and *Nashiyah*...and as our school of thought *Ahl Al-SunnahWalJamaah*, we love all companion of the Prophet".

As such, Al-Mandili's bravery are clearly shown when he did not hesitated to teach the creed of the earliest muslims that was never been taught by any Malay scholars before him. He was not worried to be viewed as strange and maybe weird. In introducing *Salaf's* school of thought to the Malays Al-Mandili (2012) said:

“And indeed this book by Abu Jaafar Ahmad Bin Muhammad Bin Salamah Al-Tahawi was the best book in the discussion of this area. For that, my heart is at joy by translating this book into Malay language as well as writing the explanation for it, and I name this translation along with its explanation as *Perisai Bagi Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Bagi Atas Jalan Salaf...*”

Faith in Allah ordains believing in what Allah described Himself with in the al-Quran and by the words of the Messenger without *tahrif* (altering or corrupting), *ta'til* (circumventing or denying), *takyif* (describing the nature of Allah) or *tashbih* (equating the attributes of Allah with His creation). Therefore, in page 31 and 32, Al-Mandili highlighted *Salaf* principles in understanding the divine attributes of Allah. Without equating nor denying Allah's attributes, Al-Mandili stressed out that it is an obligation for all muslims to keep faith in attributing Allah accordingly to the apparent meaning of the text. Al-Mandili (2012) said:

“And it is a must for every *mukallaf*(commissioned person) to attribute Allah with what He Himself had attributed. Also with the attributes that had been set by the Prophet, in total contrast to those of a created being. Hence, we believe that Allah Listens but not in the way we listen, He Sees but not in the way we see, and He Speaks but not in the same way that we speak. And He also became Angry but not in the way we do, and He Descends in contrary with the way we descend. In fact He became Angry and Descend in a way befitting His Majesty...”

Relating to the angel *Kiraman Katibin*, a group of Muslims believe that *Kiraman* is the angel sitting on the right and *Katibin* is the angel sitting on one's left. Correcting this view, Al-Mandili(2012) in page 252 stated:

“Indeed similar to the angel on the right who was attributed with both *kiraman* and *katibin* (which means the pure who writes). So thus the angel on the left who was also attributed with *kiraman* and *katibin*. It is wrong to say the right angel is *kiraman* while the left *katibin*, such as the belief of some of the public”.

Introducing and conveying the *Salaf* school of thought among the Malays of south-east Asia also proved the bravery of Al-Mandili in taking risks. Al-Mandili was a scholar who was brave in confronting customs or false beliefs accepted as a tradition in some parts of the Malay world. In refuting local beliefs on saints, ghost or evil spirit, Al-Mandili (2012) said in page 22:

“Hence whoever believes in offering something to other than Allah, undeniably considered as an unbeliever, such as those who believe in ocean spirit seducing those who are earning on its surface, if it was not given some offering of cattle or alike, also such as those who believe that the ancestors and land spirit could do harm if they are not given some respect, or seek apologies upon, or was not given some *pulut*(glutinous rice) and lighting up candles”.

Al-Mandili also refuted some of the *sufi* belief that affirmed the holiness of some saints and sage are higher than the messengers. On page 348, Al-Mandili (2012) stated:

“And the author indicated with these words of his refutation against *Ijtihadiyyah* group and all who are ignorant that call themselves members of spiritual orders. They said that saints are higher in status than messengers. They contradict the scholars and previous people of knowledge”.

Among other example of his straightforwardness and firm attitude is in refuting a portion of Malay customs regarding sorcerers and seers that are clearly against Islamic law. Despite of names used by the

society in describing a particular person practicing magic, a faulty belief remains as it is. Al-Mandili (2012) said in page 259 to 362:

“Such as matters that are included in the discussion of sorcery, are *bomohhantu* (ghost sorcerer) that they thought could seal ghosts. Some of them squeezed the toe of a sick person, then he asked the patient: “Who is your father? Or who is your mother? Or who are you?...”. Then the patient would sometimes answer while saying: “My father is so and so, or my mother is so and so...”. Hence it is prohibited for us to believe in the sorcerer, also the patient for the cause of their words supporting each other in accusing a person...and half of it cause a stir between the patient and the accused”.

Al-Mandili's other side of bravery traits can be well observed with his attitude that is open to criticism. He was not afraid of accepting negative comments, furthermore he views it as an opportunity for him to gain new knowledge. This attitude clearly indicates the Mandailing value in being a grateful person, humble and not being boastful. This is proven in the words of Al-Mandili(2012) himself:

“O honourable readers! Matters that are contained in the translation and explanation that was true are from Allah, and matters that contained faulty mistakes then that was from me, for the reason of my lack of knowledge, hence my enormous hope for honourable readers to point out my mistakes, so that I shall return to what is true, and I can fix it good...”

6. Conclusion

Bravery is synonym with Mandailing's virtues. Various forms of bravery had been shown by the Mandailings, to the point that it gave birth to prominent figures, such as Abd. Al-Qadir Al-Mandili. He was one of the Mandailing descendants that had stamped his name on the international level of Islamic scholarship. Through his book *Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Atas Mazhab Salaf*, his bravery and heroism are manifested clearly in his attitude of upholding the truth, expressing new ideas, dare to be different from the mainstream school of thought and ready to receive criticism.

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