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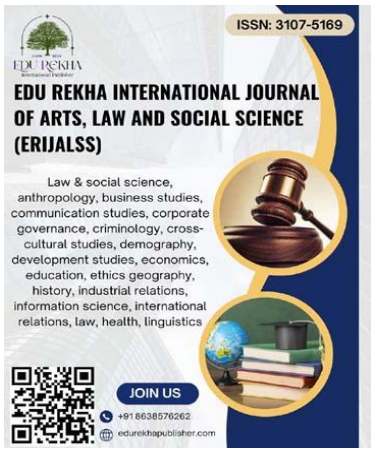

DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT IN THE NOVEL *"IMAM"* BY NATIONAL LAUREATE ABDULLAH HUSSAIN

Refaznol Bin Ahmad Tasman[1] & Prof Dr. Azhar Bin Hj. Wahid[2*]

Faculty of Languages and Communication, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia

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Corresponding author:

Prof Dr. Azhar Bin Hj. Wahid

Faculty of Languages and Communication, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia

Abstract

This study analyses the principles of management and democratic leadership as portrayed in the novel Imam by National Laureate Abdullah Hussain. Employing a qualitative approach, the study examines how democratic values such as consultation (musyawarah), openness, social responsibility, and human development are manifested through the actions and thoughts of the main character, Imam Mihad. The principle of planning is illustrated through Imam Mihad's initiatives to reform society, including the reconstruction of Haji Saleh Mosque, personally delivering Friday sermons, and introducing inclusive usrah sessions and spiritual education programmes. Imam Mihad's leadership style reflects a democratic approach that emphasises two-way communication, tolerance, and a willingness to listen to the voices of the community. In contrast, the character of Haji Syamsuri represents an autocratic leadership style that is more closed, directive-oriented, and less flexible. The study also highlights important leadership elements such as visionary thinking, steadfast adherence to principles, and the ability to face challenges in guiding society towards the common good. The findings demonstrate that democratic leadership principles not only strengthen the narrative of the novel but also convey management values that remain relevant to contemporary society. Therefore, literary works such as Imam serve as an effective medium for value-based education and leadership development, contributing to the formation of a competitive and ethically responsible society.

Keywords: democratic leadership, planning, *musyawarah* (consultation), literary management, human development

INTRODUCTION

This writing focuses on the management of human development through two main principles: planning and leadership management. The focus of this writing is the novel Imam by National Laureate Abdullah Hussain. Creative works in Malay literature not only convey stories; they also contain issues, values, and management elements that can shape the identity of society.

As stated by Mohamad Mokhtar Abu Hassan (2022), literary studies often employ various approaches, such as formalistic, moral, sociological, and psychological approaches. However, the management approach is still new. This approach enables a more comprehensive analysis of literary works in terms of management elements. Literary criticism is also important for evaluating the quality of literary works, developing critical thinking, and ensuring that literary works are beneficial to society.

Planning and leadership are very important components of management because they determine the direction, vision, mission, and effectiveness of organisational implementation. Leadership demonstrates the ability of a leader to manage, guide, and motivate others to achieve success, while planning enables weaknesses to be identified at an early stage. Organisational effectiveness is influenced by leadership styles such as laissez-faire, autocratic, and democratic. These leadership styles are portrayed in literary works.

Therefore, this writing emphasises how the novel *Imam* portrays and analyses the principles of planning and leadership in management. This demonstrates the close relationship between literature and the field of management.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Developing society requires leadership to balance change and stability. Haji Mihad is an imam who not only leads acts of worship but also influences the way society thinks and acts. However, he is hindered by conservative groups and stakeholders who wish to maintain the status quo.

The governance system in *Imam* emphasises just leadership that is deeply rooted in Malay and Islamic culture. Haji Mihad views leadership as a trust, not power, but those who are afraid of abandoning tradition often oppose him because he attempts to bring about change. When Haji Mihad's decisions create tension, leadership conflict becomes the main issue. While being pressured by stakeholders and opposed by conservative groups, he is forced to choose between defending his idealism or adapting for the sake of stability.

In addition to facing pressure from external sources, Haji Mihad also faces an internal dilemma between pragmatism and idealism. His efforts to uphold justice demonstrate the struggle to maintain Islamic principles in a society that is not ready for change. The role of *musyawarah* and tolerance in leadership is examined in this study. Although frequently rejected by conservatives, Haji Mihad emphasises inclusive leadership based on justice and the voice of the community. Democratic theory is evaluated based on how effectively it reduces conflict and the extent to which it remains relevant in the present day.

Furthermore, this research examines the impact of Haji Mihad's leadership on his relationship with the community. Although he is not always accepted when his views conflict with certain interests, as a leader, he emphasises morality, justice, and exemplary conduct. How this approach influences the community's acceptance is examined in this study.

Overall, this study examines the leadership challenges presented in *Imam* and how the principles of *musyawarah*, justice, and tolerance can serve as guidelines for contemporary leadership. It contributes to the understanding of leadership in literature and society, particularly in addressing conflicts and challenges.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to examine the principles of planning and democratic leadership presented in the novel *Imam* by Abdullah Hussain. In conducting this study, several objectives have been established, namely:

1. To formulate the concept and style of democratic leadership management presented in the novel Imam, including the application of the values of *musyawarah*, justice, and tolerance in the context of organisations and society.
2. To explain the function of democratic leadership management in addressing challenges and resolving conflicts presented in the novel.
3. To analyse the attitudes and strategies of democratic leadership management demonstrated by the main character and their implications for relationships with society based on the principles of leadership and the Malay Methodology.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions proposed in this study are as follows:

1. How does the democratic leadership style in the novel Imam reflect the values of musyawarah, justice, and tolerance in the context of organisational and social leadership?
2. What is the role of the principles of democratic leadership in resolving the social and religious conflicts portrayed in the novel Imam?
3. How does the democratic leadership attitude demonstrated by the main character in the novel Imam influence his relationship with the surrounding community?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section consists of six components, namely the introduction, research design, research instrument, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and conclusion.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter examines the novel Imam by Abdullah Hussain (1996) on democratic leadership management through library research and text analysis methods based on Literary Management and the Malay Methodology Theory by Mokhtar Abu Hassan (2003; 2008). Using textual excerpts as the primary data, the analysis focuses on the narrative, characters, events, issues, setting, and dialogues that highlight leadership values such as *musyawarah*, justice, and social responsibility.

Although opposed by conservative groups, Haji Mihad is portrayed as a respected leader who adopts a democratic and progressive approach in leading the community. Abdullah Hussain's portrayal of leadership involves social conflict, mosque management, and spiritual matters. Mokhtar Abu Hassan (2008) states that literature based on Malay epistemology enables a deeper understanding of implicit meanings. In contrast, Fathin Noor Ramli (2015) argues that Islamic literature should emphasise the values of humanity, ethics, and social responsibility. In line with this, Haji Mihad rejects punishment and instead chooses to educate and guide.

Furthermore, Zuber Ismail (2010; 2012) emphasises Malay management principles such as consensus (muafakat), *musyawarah,* and tolerance. This is illustrated in the novel through the way Haji Mihad involves the congregation and the mosque committee in every decision he makes. Characters such as Tok Guru Haji Salleh, Imam Syukri, and Ustaz Hadi demonstrate the characteristics of democratic leadership, such as openness to criticism and the desire to foster unity. This reinforces the belief that literature is not merely an artistic medium; it is also a platform for teaching values and discussing leadership.

Overall, the findings of the analysis prove that Imam is a text rich in meaning that portrays inclusive, just, and ethical Islamic democratic leadership in accordance with the principle of *musyawarah*. Abdullah Hussain (1996) successfully presents a leadership narrative that is relevant to the local culture, thereby demonstrating that literary works can serve as a source of knowledge for understanding and advancing the discourse on management and leadership in a highly cultured society.

Leadership Principles Based on Democratic Leadership in the Novel *Imam*

The ability of a leader to lead, influence, and manage society in order to achieve common objectives is referred to as leadership management. This principle is clearly portrayed in the novel *Imam* by Abdullah Hussain through the character of Haji Mihad, who manages the mosque and leads the community towards spiritual and social transformation. Mohamad Mokhtar Abu Hassan (2022) states that management is a systematic process in which everyone works together to achieve organisational goals. This principle is consistent with Haji Mihad's efforts, which emphasise *musyawarah* and the cooperation of the congregation in making important decisions, such as planning the development of the mosque institution.

Leadership requires the qualities of integrity, empathy, self-confidence, creativity, and effective communication. This is portrayed through Haji Mihad, who approaches the community with courtesy, listens to the views of various parties, and has the courage to uphold the truth despite facing opposition from conservative groups. According to Mokhtar Abu Hassan (2022), leadership is the art of influencing people to work willingly in order to achieve organisational goals. This characteristic is evident when Haji Mihad does not resort to force or authoritarianism but instead chooses to educate and advise, enabling the community to follow his guidance out of awareness rather than compulsion.

The role of Haji Mihad is consistent with the view of Stogdill, as cited in Djoko Santosa (2008), that leadership is a process of influencing group activities. It is not merely authority that he uses to influence society, but rather the arguments he presents based on knowledge, moral values, and his religious credibility. He faces challenges such as internal conflict, opposition from traditionalists, and cultural change, yet he continues to uphold a democratic approach based on *musyawarah* and consensus. This demonstrates that the actions, discussions, and leadership strategies of Haji Mihad in the novel *Imam* reflect the principles of democratic leadership as explained by the theory.

Leadership Styles in the Novel Imam

These leadership styles are still practised by leaders according to their personalities and the suitability of their organisational influence. In Malay literary works, these leadership styles can be observed through the personalities of the characters in managing their subordinates, whether in the context of work, relationships, or situations that require an individual to lead. Reddin (1970) categorises leadership styles according to a dimensional model consisting of three basic styles. The diversity of leadership styles indicates that the concept of leadership is highly complex.

According to Reddin (1970), there are three basic leadership styles, namely task-oriented, relationship-oriented, and integrated styles. In the novel Imam, Haji Mihad demonstrates leadership based on religious values, honesty, and sincerity, driven by his determination to develop a more open and progressive society within the framework of Islam. Despite facing opposition from conservative groups and the authorities, he remains steadfast in his principles, demonstrating leadership that is courageous, firm, and visionary.

In addition to Haji Mihad, the novel also presents other characters with different leadership styles, some authoritarian and others passive without a firm stance. This diversity shows that leadership depends on context and personality, not merely on position or authority, but also on wisdom, fairness in decision-making, and sincerity in carrying out responsibilities.

In conclusion, the novel Imam is not merely a literary work that discusses religious and social issues, but also presents the concept of leadership in various forms and challenges. Abdullah Hussain has successfully elevated the theme of leadership as an important and relevant issue, particularly within the context of a society searching for direction and genuine leadership values. The study of leadership styles in this novel not only enriches readers' understanding of the literary text but also contributes to a broader understanding of the role of a leader in developing a knowledgeable, moral, and competitive society.

- **Autocratic Leadership Style**

In the novel Imam, Abdullah Hussain presents an autocratic leadership style that emphasises the absolute authority of the leader in making decisions without considering the opinions of subordinates. The leader is portrayed as reserved, acts independently, and subordinates merely carry out instructions without the opportunity to express their opinions.

In the novel Imam, the autocratic leadership style can be clearly observed through the character of Haji Mihad. He frequently carries out actions based on his own judgement and wishes without seeking the views or approval of the mosque committee members. This can be demonstrated through the following excerpt:

> *"Masa-masa yang akhir ini dia mulai buat kerja yang bukan jadi tugasnya. Seperti yang saya katakan tadi dia ajak orang kampung buat terusan waktu kemarau. Saya suruh dia ajak orang kampung sembahyang hajat minta hujan, itu sudah cukup, buat apa terusan lagi? Allah akan turunkan hujan itu, ini mau memandai-mandai pula dengan kuasa Allah. Kemudian dia tanam pokok-pokok bunga dan buah-buahan di dalam kawasan masjid, dia buat bangku untuk orang duduk macam taman persiaran di dalam kota. Itu kan tanah wakaf. Itu kan perbuatan menarik orang buat maksiat dalam kawasan rumah suci. Dia buka tadika, itu memang baik tapi bininya itu mualaf, apa dia tahu tentang agama Islam. Dia dulu Kristian, bila dia pelawa anak Cina dan anak Hindu ikut belajar saya mulai curiga…"*
>
> *(Imam, 1995: m/s 147)*

The excerpt above clearly shows how Haji Mihad's actions, such as constructing irrigation canals, planting trees, providing benches, and establishing a kindergarten, are regarded as his own initiatives without undergoing extensive discussion with other parties. In fact, some individuals questioned these actions because they believed that

they were not in line with the actual responsibilities of an imam. Nevertheless, Haji Mihad's actions illustrate that he possesses an autocratic leadership style that is firm and courageous in making decisions for the benefit of the community.

In general, autocratic leadership requires complete obedience from subordinates and rejects their involvement in the decision-making process. The leader makes decisions independently, while employees merely carry out the instructions given. Although this leadership style may be effective in crisis situations because it enables quicker action, it is generally less favoured as it disregards the opinions of subordinates, creates a tense working environment, and may lead to dissatisfaction in the long term.

- **Democratic Leadership Style**

The democratic leadership style is a form of leadership that emphasises the involvement of employees in decision-making through discussion and the sharing of ideas. Although the leader has the authority to make the final decision, employees' opinions are still valued, making them feel more comfortable, respected, and motivated to perform their duties. This approach enhances commitment, creativity, and productivity because employees feel that their expertise and contributions are recognised. An example of this can be seen in the following text excerpt:

> *"Haji Mihad itu orang pandai, walaupun dia lebih suka membaca doa memohon hujan dalam khutbah Jumaatnya, tetapi dia tetap ikut kemahuan dan pandangan orang ramai. Kami semua selalu solat hajat minta hujan di tengah sawah."*
>
> *(Novel Imam, Halaman 218)*

This excerpt shows that Haji Mihad practises a democratic leadership style by being open to accepting the views of the community, as demonstrated when he agreed to perform the *solat hajat* in the paddy fields during the drought based on the villagers' suggestion. This action reflects his leadership, which emphasises *musyawarah*, strengthens unity, and makes the community feel valued and appreciated, thereby fostering mutual confidence and trust.

- **Laissez-Faire Leadership Style**

The laissez-faire leadership style is a form of leadership that gives employees complete freedom to make decisions and solve problems independently with minimal intervention from the leader. The leader only provides the necessary resources, while employees are expected to carry out their duties independently. This leadership style is suitable when employees are highly skilled and motivated; however, it may negatively affect performance if employees lack the necessary skills or experience. An example of this can be seen in the following text excerpt:

> *"Bagi saya tak jadi masalah. Saya boleh bagi-bagikan waktu. Lagi pula semua usaha saya itu telah berjalan dengan lancar dan ada orang yang mengurusnya, saya cuma mengawasi sahaja," kata Haji Syamsuri."*
>
> *(Novel Imam, Halaman 171)*

This excerpt shows that Haji Syamsuri practises a laissez-faire leadership style by delegating tasks entirely to his subordinates, only monitoring from a distance and intervening when problems arise. This attitude reflects his confidence in the ability of his subordinates to manage their work independently.

Characteristics of Leaders in the Novel Imam

Democratic leadership emphasises justice, integrity, and responsibility, and this theme is portrayed by Abdullah Hussain in the novel Imam through the character of Haji Mihad. As a highly educated young imam, Haji Mihad is portrayed as courageous, fair, open-minded, and principled in bringing about reforms in the thinking of the Muslim community despite facing opposition from conservative groups. The novel highlights the conflict between change and tradition while emphasising the characteristics of ideal leadership based on progressive Islamic values and inspiring the role of leaders in shaping a modern society.

- **Knowledgeable Leader**

In an organisation, a knowledgeable leader is very important because he or she is able to make wise decisions, guide subordinates, and serve as the foundation of the group's success. In the novel Imam, this characteristic is clearly portrayed through the character of Haji Mihad, whose knowledge is the result of his studies abroad, particularly in Egypt. His leadership is based on reason, wisdom, and religious knowledge, enabling him to educate the community, change perceptions of worship, and lead them towards a more comprehensive understanding of Islam. An example of this can be seen in the following text excerpt:

> *"Sebagai contoh tentang solat saja, yang selalu menjadi topik dalam khutbahnya. Haji Mihad sebagai imam pemimpin jemaah membawa kita untuk melihat solat itu sebagai satu amalan yang paling penting daripada segala amalan yang lain, bukan sebagai satu perbuatan rutin yang biasa kita lakukan. Pertama sekali beliau tunjuk kepada kita mengapa solat itu penting. Solat itu diperintah langsung oleh Allah SWT kepada Nabi kita. Haji Mihad itu sangat berpengetahuan dalam ilmu agamanya untuk membimbing kita" kata Haji Ismail.*
>
> *(Novel Imam, Halaman 267)*

Haji Mihad's knowledge is not only possessed for his own benefit but is also shared with the community, thereby shaping their way of thinking about the values and philosophy of religious practices, making him not merely a religious figure but also an educator who provides enlightenment.

- **Trustworthy Leader**

Among the leadership characteristics portrayed in the novel *Imam* is trustworthiness, which refers to a leader's ability to build the confidence of the community through sincerity, integrity, and consistency. This trust enables followers to provide support and cooperation, and it is clearly portrayed through the character of Haji Mihad. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

> *"... Haji Mihad itu memang faham tentang hukum-hakam apatah lagi pernah belajar di Makkah tempat aku belajar dulu. Aku rasa dia cukup sesuai untuk mengambil tempatkusebagai imam, kembali menjadi waris tempat bapanya dulu. Banyak sebab yang membuat aku menyokongnya, dia aku kenal dari kecil kerana pernah menjadi muridku waktu di Sekolah Melayu. Aku tengok dalam dirinya itu ada tokoh pemimpin. Aku rasa waktu itu macam sudah takdir Allah suruh dia balik ke mari untuk mengambil alih tempat aku, aku pun sudah sakit-sakit saja."*
>
> *(Imam, 1995:m/s 144)*

Haji Mihad is portrayed as a trustworthy leader because of his religious background, good character, and credibility from an early age, which led the community to believe that he was worthy of succeeding the former imam. This quality of trustworthiness forms the foundation of the relationship between a leader and the people in a democratic system, as trust encourages support, *musyawarah*, and collective decision-making. It also serves as a safeguard against misconduct, as portrayed in the novel *Imam* when the people of Kampung Anggerik chose Haji Mihad as a credible and just leader.

- **Confident Leader**

Self-confidence is an important characteristic of a leader because it is capable of building the trust and support of the community, whereas doubt will weaken leadership. In the novel *Imam*, Haji Mihad is portrayed as having a high level of confidence in delivering *dakwah* and carrying out his responsibilities towards the community of Kampung Anggerik Desa. An example of this can be seen in the following text:

> *"Saya mahu mengajak anak-anak muda itu berjinak-jinak dengan masjid. Pada waktu azan mereka berada di sekitar masjid. Mahu tidak mahu, satu hari nanti mereka akan ikut bersolat juga. Mungkin pada mulanya liat sedikit tetapi lama-kelamaan jadi kebiasaan. Alhamdulillah, sekarang ini kalau datuk dapat datang melihatnya, datuk tentu akan membenarkan katakata saya ini," kata Haji Mihad lagi.*
>
> *(Novel Imam, Halaman 345)*

This excerpt shows that Haji Mihad's confidence in his approach to *dakwah* plays an important role in attracting young people to the mosque. Despite facing challenges, he remains confident that continuous efforts carried out with gentleness and wisdom will produce positive results. This confidence stems from his understanding of the community, his experience in *dakwah*, and his clear vision, together with his direct involvement in improving the moral character of the younger generation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study shows that the novel *Imam* by National Laureate Abdullah Hussain presents democratic leadership through the character of Haji Mihad, who is principled, just, courageous, and places emphasis on *musyawarah* and the trust of the community. His leadership not only manages ritual and religious matters but also guides the thinking, moral values, and social structure of the community. The findings of this study emphasise that effective leadership depends on integrity, wisdom, and the ability to build relationships with followers, in line with the objective of the study to understand the principles of democratic leadership within the context of the Malay-Muslim community and literature, thereby making this work an important reference in ethical leadership management that remains relevant across time.

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