

REVITALIZING ISLAMIC LIBERATION THEOLOGY ACCORDING TO ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER: INSIGHTS INTO HUMAN EQUALITY, GENDER INJUSTICE, AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

Alif Jilham Kusuma Putra
Pascasarjana UIN Salatiga
Email: Putraalif4466@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to obtain an overview of the concept of Islamic liberation theology according to Asghar Ali Engineer. The method used in this research is a descriptive library research method, which means that researchers examine the results of the literature in the form of book studies or recent journals regarding the concept of Islamic liberation theology by Asghar Ali Engineer, the findings of which researchers examine or explore, then describe in a scientific article study. The findings obtained by researchers regarding the concept are that Asghar Ali Engineer is a da'i, human rights activist, social activist, teacher, and writer. At least, there are three major problems that concern Asghar Ali Engineer in realizing the project of revitalizing Islamic liberation theology, namely the problem of human equality, the problem of gender injustice, the problem of economic inequality. The main concept of Engineer's idea is to humanize human beings. Responsibility or concern among humans to look right - left, care for the environment or the surrounding area, lend a hand to those in need and avoid being greedy / greedy for wealth so that a peaceful and prosperous society can be created.

Keywords: *Theology, Asghar Ali Engineer's Thinking, Human Equality, Gender Injustice, Economic Inequality*

INTRODUCTION

Etymologically, the term "theology" comes from the Greek language, where "Theos" refers to God, and "logos" refers to knowledge. Therefore, theology can be defined as "The Science of God" or "The Science of Godhead." In terminology, Fergilius Ferm explains that theology is "The discipline which concerns God and God's relation to the World," which can be translated as a discipline relating to God and God's relation to the world, encompassing systematic thinking related to the entire universe. (Hafid, 2018, 3)

In the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the concept of theology is explained as "Science of religion, dealing therefore with God, and man in his relation to God," which can be interpreted as knowledge about religion that discusses God and man's relationship with Him. By referring to this definition, the researcher concludes that theology is a scientific discipline that studies facts and phenomena in religion, as well as the relationship between God and humans, especially in the context of the Islamic world.

Basically, liberation theology is not only limited to ritual obligations and promises for its adherents. More than that, this theology examines how to liberate individuals from various forms of oppression, such as exploitation, hegemony of the ruler, injustice, and social inequality. Asghar Ali Engineer articulates the concept of "liberation" as an attempt to "humanize man." In other words, the main focus of liberation theology is to achieve well-being and justice for human beings.

Engineer not only formulated the concept of liberation theology, but also actively invited the younger generation to reconstruct theology to be more radical and transformative. This is an effort to give birth to a theology that cares and is responsive to social reality. Although Engineer faced challenges from the older generation who tended to be conservative and resistant to change, he remained persistent in inviting them to build a theology that prioritized human welfare and justice. (Baehaqi, 2012, 80)

From the explanation above, this research aims to gain further understanding of Asghar Ali Engineer's views regarding the concept of liberation theology in Islam, including the efforts he made to realize these liberation ideas.

RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this research is a descriptive library research method, which means that researchers examine the results of the literature in the form of book studies or recent journals regarding the concept of Islamic liberation theology by Asghar Ali Engineer, the findings of which researchers examine or explore, then describe in a scientific article study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biography of Asghar Ali Engineer

Asghar Ali Engineer was born on March 10, 1939 in Rajasthan in mainland India. Engineer was born into a family of santris, he learned Arabic from his father, sheikh Qurban Husin and received a secular education until he obtained a degree in civil engineering from the University of Indore. Asghar Ali Engineer has served as the General Secretary of the Governing Council of the Daudi Bohras Community in 1977, founded the Institute of Islamic Studies in Mumbai in 1980, and participated in the establishment of the Center for the Study of Society and Secularism in 1993. (Gutierrez, 2013, 235)

In his biography, Asghar Ali Engineer recounts his childhood experience when he witnessed a dialogue between his father and a Hindu Brahmin priest. Despite attempts to exchange ideas about faith, his father remained steadfast in his beliefs. Since his father became a Bohro cleric, Asghar Ali Engineer often witnessed exploitation done in the name of religion. Back then, no one dared to challenge the system of oppression, including his own father as a cleric who felt limited in his actions. Despite the hatred in his heart, his father had to choose between serving the system, facing starvation, or even risking cruel torture. Later, Asghar Ali Engineer rose to prominence as an Islamic scholar after receiving an honorary D.Litt degree from the University of Calcutta in February 1983. The award was given for his contribution to societal harmony and his writings on social unrest since the outbreak of India's first riots in 1961 in Jabalpur.

After that, Asghar Ali Engineer started writing books and participating in international Islamic conferences in various countries and universities. He also lectured at various universities in India. Engineer, who is known as a Da'i and a renowned scholar with a command of multiple languages including English, Urdu, Arda, Persian, Gujarati, Hindu, and Marathi, lectured at leading universities in the United States, Canada, England, Switzerland, Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Yemen, Egypt, and Hong Kong. In August 2008, Engineer visited Indonesia, gave a lecture on Islam and the Nation State, and

met with a number of Indonesian Islamic scholars, including former president Abdurrahman Wahid. (Engineer, 2016)

Works of Asghar Ali Engineer

Asghar Ali Engineer is a da'i, human rights activist, social activist, lecturer, and writer. More than 30 books have been written by Engineer and have been licensed by standard publishers, among his famous books are *Islam and Liberation Theology* (1990), *Islam and Revolution* (1984), and *Islam in Contemporary World* (2007).

Beyond his intellectual activities, Asghar Ali Engineer is a social activist who has held various important positions. He has served as Vice President of the People's Union for Civil Liberties, chaired the Rikas Adhyayan Kendra (Center for Development Studies), headed the EKTA (Committee for Communal Harmony), was the founding Chairman of the Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism, and previously served on the Executive Board of Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. In addition, Engineer has also served as General Secretary of the Central Board of Dawoodi Bohra Community and as Coordinator of the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN). (Huntington, 2014, 245)

Asghar Ali succeeded in introducing the world to the concept of liberation theology that he thought, that humans (capitalists) have no right to be treated like God. The nature of God can only be owned by God himself, returning his rights from human behavior is the goal concept of Asghar Ali Engineer's thought.

Character's Main Idea

In the article entitled "What I Believe," Asghar Ali Engineer outlines three main aspects on which he bases his thinking. First, he discusses the mutually supportive relationship between reason and revelation. In other words, he believes that the truth of revelation cannot possibly contradict human reason. Second, Engineer highlights the importance of plurality and diversity as something that cannot be avoided. Third, he emphasized the character of religiosity that is reflected in sensitivity and sympathy for the suffering of weak groups in society. These key thoughts became the foundation for Engineer in formulating liberation theology in Islam, as revealed in his work entitled "Islam and Liberation Theology" (1990). According to Engineer, classical theology tends to be abstract and speculative, while liberation theology focuses more on concrete and historical matters. Its main emphasis is on present reality, not just in the world of imagination. (Nuryatni, 2013, 37-39)

The liberation theology introduced by Asghar Ali Engineer is a conceptual innovation that connects the need for a new paradigm in the field of theology that aims to fight injustice in the socio-economic framework. This paradigm emerged as a response to various forms of abuse of power, injustice, oppression of vulnerable groups, restrictions on people's aspirations, discrimination based on skin color, race, and gender, as well as the accumulation of wealth and concentration of power that occur in the reality of today's society. Engineer views Islam as both a technical religion and a motor of social revolution committed to fighting the structures that cause oppression. Its main basis is to realize universal brotherhood, equality and social justice. (Mahfud, 2012, 11-12)

In the spirit of liberation theology, Engineer changed three of his practical frameworks, starting with the concept of tawhid. Tawhid, according to him, includes not only the oneness of God, but also the unity of mankind. This unity is not only related to belief, but also to justice that transcends the boundaries of belief. Engineer views oppression as a problem not between religious adherents, but as a conflict between the "oppressor" and the "oppressed" who can be of different religions, races and ethnicities. Tawhid, he argues, includes a socio-economic dimension, where infidels are not only those who do not believe in God, but also those who oppose efforts to build a more just and egalitarian structure of society.

Secondly, the concept of faith according to Engineer is not only about belief in God, but also contains social and economic dimensions. Faith, according to him, comes from the word *amn* which means safety, peace, and trustworthiness. Believers are expected to be trustworthy, contribute to peace, and affirm good values in life. The Engineer also emphasizes that unbelievers are not only those who reject God, but also those who obstruct honest efforts to establish a just society.

Third, the concept of jihad in liberation theology is defined as a struggle to eliminate exploitation, corruption and injustice. Jihad, according to Engineer, is not just limited to military warfare, but is a dynamic and progressive activity to combat oppression. He emphasized that jihad for liberation is a struggle to transform oppressive social structures into more just ones, requiring tremendous sacrifice, faith, optimism and patience. Patience in this context not only indicates endurance during the struggle, but is also a powerful psychological weapon in the face of adversity. (Prihantoro, 2012, 233)

The Social and Political Context of the State of the Figure

In social terms, the main concept of Engineer's idea is to humanize people. Responsibility or care among humans in order to look right - left, care for the environment or the surrounding area, lend a hand to those in need and avoid being greedy / greedy for personal property and wealth. Engineer strongly condemns discriminatory actions, oppressing the weak, even he classifies them into the realm of *kufr*. In every opportunity to teach or convey views even across countries, Engineer often echoes about his version of Islamic liberation theology, his concern then gains a lot of sympathy from the community.

According to Engineer, no exception to anyone including a political state, that any country must have a basis in the form of solid roots as the concept of tawhid, faith, and jihad conveyed by him. Departing from Engineer's observations in the Arab region, India, Europe, America and Indonesia that the efforts of "oppression" are still very thick and rampant. Whether it starts from discrimination caused by the politics of a country, in the name of religion, or even from the mindset of individual people. Therefore, the state needs to make pro-socio-economic revolution laws that guarantee and protect against oppression and discriminatory attitudes. At least, there are three main issues that attract Asghar Ali Engineer's attention in realizing the project of revitalizing Islamic liberation theology. These three issues involve human equality, gender injustice and economic inequality. For example, Engineer looks at a woman's right to participate in political and governmental affairs as part of his efforts to respond to these social challenges. (Wajidi, 2018, 23-24)

Influence of Thought Leaders

True believers, according to Asghar Ali Engineer, are individuals who actively participate in shaping a just society. This is achieved by contributing to the care of orphans, defending the oppressed, and empowering marginalized individuals. In this context, liberation theology plays a role in reconstructing the system of private ownership by setting its limits. According to Engineer, the belief that God is the true owner of the entire universe encourages the view that humans are not the absolute owners of property, but only its custodians. Wealth is allowed for the purpose of common welfare, by avoiding waste so that the poor can get their fair share. Such an approach, according to Engineer, can help reduce poverty among Muslims, especially in Asia.

Besides focusing on liberation from poverty, liberation theology also seeks to address inter-religious conflict. Engineer believes that such conflicts stem from an understanding of theology that has not undergone a paradigm transformation. Therefore, it is important to include an understanding of pluralism as a key element in liberation theology. Engineer also highlighted the need to liberate women's groups from injustice and oppression. In this framework, liberation theology includes elements of feminism and the need to pay special attention to women's liberation. Summarizing these views, Asghar Ali Engineer argues that liberation theology leads not only to economic liberation, but also to a broader understanding of justice, pluralism, and liberation from gender inequality. (Muhammad, 2016, 244)

Reflection on the Thought of the Featured Figure

Asghar Ali Engineer, a revolutionary pioneer especially in the domain of Islamic liberation theology, has managed to steal the attention of the global community with his progressive views. In his vision, liberation theology is able to liberate its adherents from various forms of oppression, such as exploitation, ruling hegemony, injustice, and social disparity. In his ideas, Engineer defines "liberation" as an effort to "humanize man."

Engineer's liberation theology is a creative initiative that connects the need for a new paradigm in theology to fight oppression in socio-economic structures. There are three main issues that Engineer focuses on in realizing the project of revitalizing Islamic liberation theology: human equality, gender injustice, and economic inequality. With his holistic approach, Engineer seeks to present innovative solutions to respond to and overcome these challenges in society.

CONCLUSIONS

Asghar Ali Engineer, born on March 10, 1939 in Rajasthan, India, came from a family of santris and learned Arabic from his father, Sheikh Qurban Husin. In his efforts to realize the project of revitalizing Islamic liberation theology, Engineer addressed three main issues, namely human equality, gender injustice, and economic inequality. The main concept underlying Engineer's thought is the attempt to make human beings more humane. He emphasizes responsibility and care among humans by promoting an inclusive perspective, looking right and left, caring for the environment, providing help to those in need, and denouncing greed and gluttony for personal property and wealth. In his stance, Engineer strongly opposed all forms of discrimination and oppression against weaker groups.

REFERENCES

- Abdel-Motey, T. (1993). The rights of women in Islam: Asghar Ali Engineer. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 2(4), 75-77. doi:10.1111/j.1949-3606.1993.tb01018.x
- Ahmad, M. K. (2016). Teologi Pembebasan Dalam Islam: Telaah Pemikiran Asghar Ali Engineer. *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 10(1), 51. doi:10.18592/jiu.v10i1.744
- Ahmed, H. (2019). *Siyasi Muslims: A story of political islams in India*. Gurgaon, India: Penguin Viking.
- Asghar Ali Engineer Dan Reformulasi Makna Tauhid - Researchgate. (n.d.). Retrieved April 5, 2023, from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Muhaemin-Latif-2/publication/327794073_Asghar_Ali_Engineer_Dan_Reformulasi_Makna_Tauhid/links/5ed49134299bf1c67d3218e3/Asghar-Ali-Engineer-Dan-Reformulasi-Makna-Tauhid.pdf
- Berger, P. L., Huntington, S. P., Dun, H. T., Ge, B., & Wang, B. (2002). *Hang Ting Dun & Bo Ge Kan Qian Qiu Hua da Qu Shi*. Tai bei shi: Shi bao wen hua.
- Dandi, I. (2017). Asghar Ali Engineer Dan Pemikirannya mengenai teologi perdamaian. *Jurnal Tamaddun : Jurnal Sejarah Dan Kebudayaan Islam*, 5(1). doi:10.24235/tamaddun.v5i1.1989
- Engineer, A. A., Prihantoro, A., & Mas'ud. (1999). *Islam Dan Teologi Pembebasan*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Gutiérrez, G., & Söng, Y. (2000). *A theology of liberation: History, politics and salvation*. Kyöngbuk Ch'ilgok-gun: Pundo Ch'ulp'ansa.
- Kartin, C. (2015). Samuel Huntington, Clash of Civilizations: A Book Review. *Eurasian Academy of Sciences Social Sciences Journal*, 2(1), 73-89. doi:10.17740/eas.soc.2015-v2-07
- Machali, R. (2005). *Wacana Poligami di Indonesia*. Bandung: Mizan.
- Maulana, L. (2016). Teologi Pembebasan Perempuan Dalam Islam. *Muwazah*, 7(1). doi:10.28918/muwazah.v7i1.514
- Mohammad, H. (n.d.). Tokoh-Tokoh Islam Yang Berpengaruh abad 20. Retrieved April 5, 2023, from https://books.google.com/books/about/Tokoh_tokoh_Islam_yang_berpengaruh_abad.html?id=s3dw1plnW5gC
- Rambe, K. M. (2017). Hak-hak Perempuan Dalam Hukum Islam (Studi Pemikiran ashgar ali engineer). *Jurnal Mercatoria*, 10(2), 109. doi:10.31289/mercatoria.v10i2.1095
- Teologi Lingkungan Hidup Dalam Perspektif Islam. (n.d.). Retrieved April 5, 2023, from <https://ejournal.uin-malang.ac.id/index.php/ululalbab/article/download/2666/pdf>