

FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA PALESTINE WILL BE FREE

من النهر إلى البحر
PALESTINE KAN BEBAS
从河到海

IIS DIGEST

A Quarterly Dive into Books, Publishing, and Literary Treasures

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PALESTINE WILL BE FREE
PALESTINE KAN BEBAS

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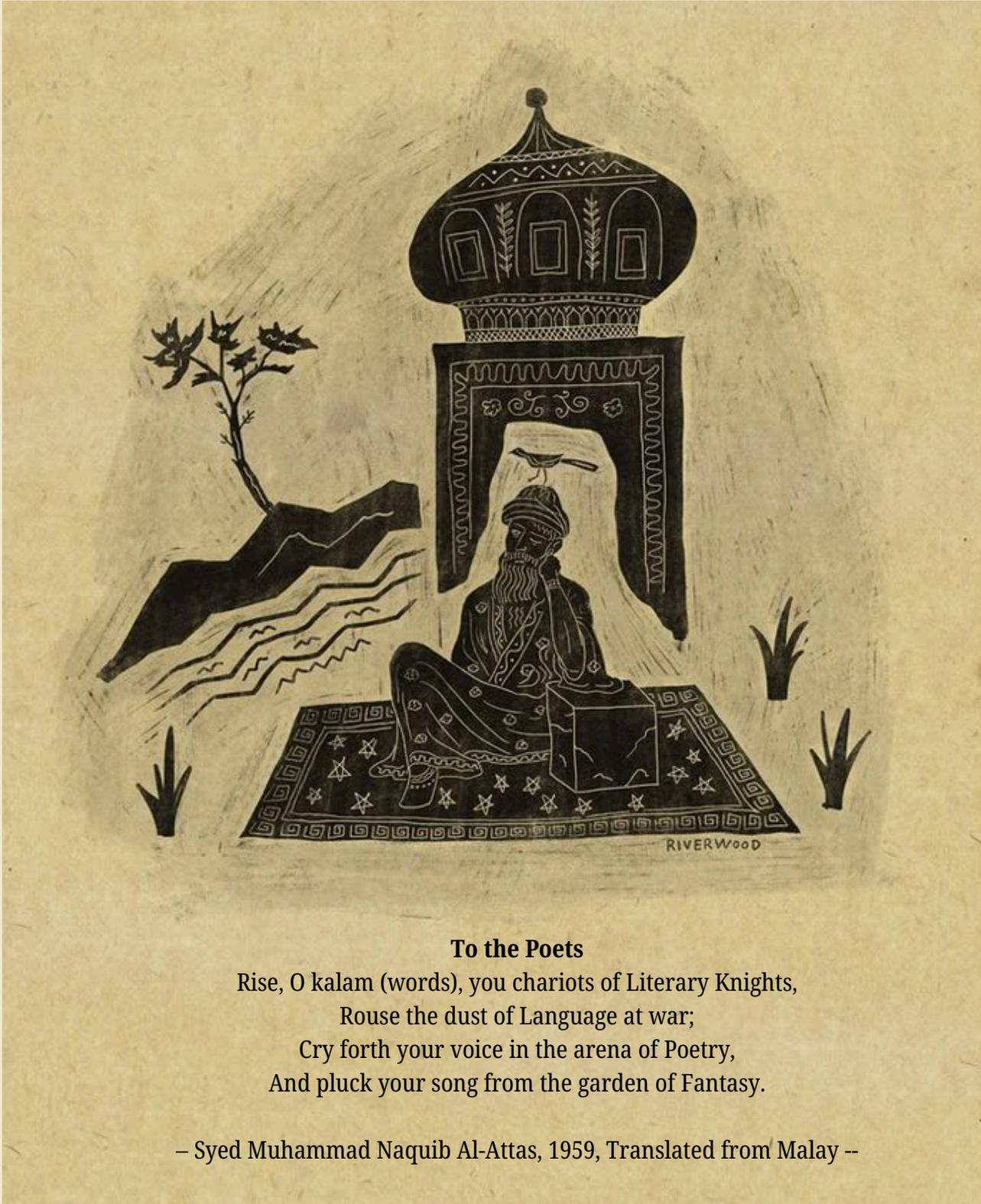
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ILS DIGEST

ILLUMINATIONS

Contemplating the Ruba'iyat of al-Attas

By Zaiti Athirah



To the Poets

Rise, O kalam (words), you chariots of Literary Knights,
Rouse the dust of Language at war;
Cry forth your voice in the arena of Poetry,
And pluck your song from the garden of Fantasy.

– Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, 1959, Translated from Malay --

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Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas is widely regarded as one of the foremost Malay-Muslim scholars, philosopher-poets, and intellectuals of the modern era. Born in 1931 in Malaysia, al-Attas has devoted his life to revitalizing Islamic thought by bridging classical Islamic philosophy with Malay cultural traditions and contemporary concerns. His work spans rigorous philosophical texts as well as poetry, especially his *Rangkaian Ruba'iyat* (Sequence of Quatrains), where he harnesses the power of the classical *ruba'iyat* form, a four-line stanza traditionally used by Persian poets like Omar Khayyam, but infuses it with deeply spiritual and metaphysical meaning rooted in Sufism and Malay identity. The above *Ruba'i*, like many in al-Attas's *Rangkaian Rub'iyat*, reveals his deep commitment to reviving the spiritual and ethical dimensions of poetry.

Unlike classical Persian *ruba'iyat*, which often meditate on mortality and worldly pleasure with a tone of skeptical resignation, al-Attas's quatrains emphasize *tawhīd*, the oneness of God and existence, and urge active striving for spiritual knowledge and ethical refinement.

This interplay of poetic artistry with Sufi mysticism and Islamic philosophy reflects al-Attas's broader intellectual mission: to revive Islamic thought in the modern world through engaging with tradition and culture. His poetry challenges the modern marginalization of poetry as mere entertainment, positioning it instead as a sacred practice that shapes character and consciousness.

Reading al-Attas's *Rangkaian Ruba'iyat* is to enter a mystical dialogue, where each quatrain invites a space for contemplation and invites the reader to participate in the timeless quest for meaning and union with the Divine. His poetry speaks to both the individual soul and the

collective identity of Malay-Muslims, offering a voice that is at once deeply traditional and urgently contemporary.

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's *Rangkaian Rub'iyat* are a remarkable fusion of Sufi mysticism, Malay cultural identity, and poetic mastery. Al-Attas invites us to see poetry as a living, transformative practice that deepens our connection with language, faith, and the Divine.

About the author:



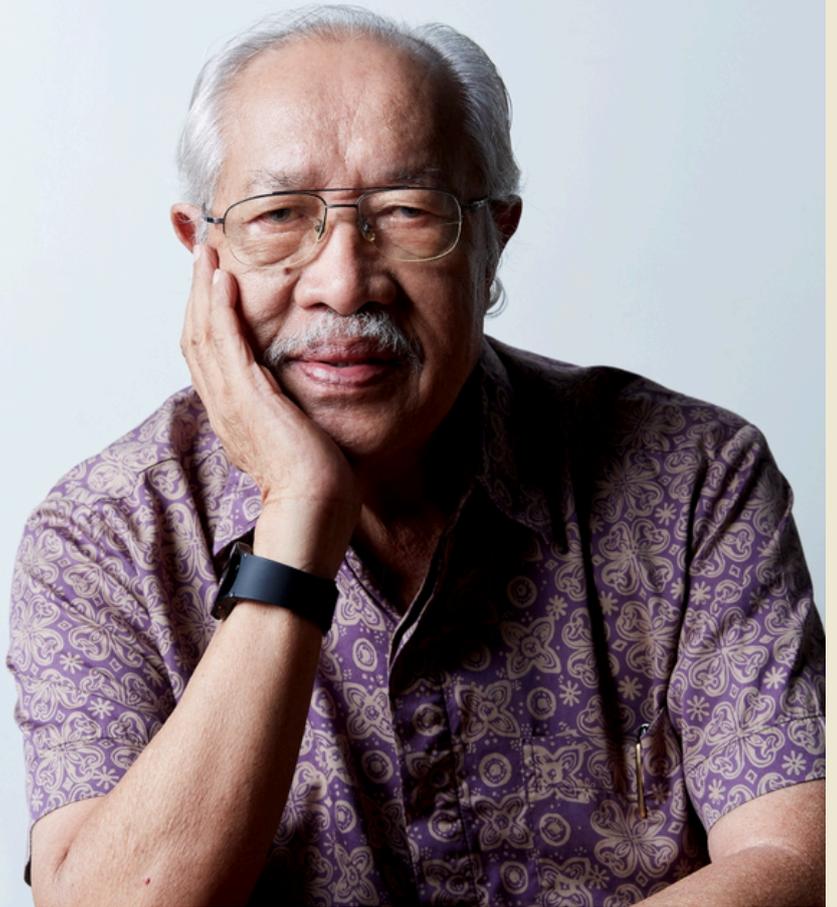
Zaiti Athirah is an undergraduate in English Literature at the International Islamic University Malaysia and currently serves as the ILS Digest Editor and Manager. Her focus on the Islamic thought and current issues are among the influences of her writing. She is immensely committed to thoughtful discourses, literary art appreciation and cultural criticism. Topics and themes of interest include gender dynamics, social justice, local literature and Muslim writing.

“Literature and the study of it bring to human meanings as beings in the world, as well as the refinement of the lines and colours of human life.”

Muhammad Haji Salleh

Why Literature?

By Hannaan Fuad



Such were the words of the sixth National Laureate of Malaysia, Professor Emeritus Muhammad Haji Salleh, during a seminar held at the International Islamic University of Malaysia. The seminar was organised by the Secretariat of English Language and Literature, IIUM, in collaboration with the Secretariat of Arabic Language and Literature, IIUM, as well as Korpus Kesarjanaan Sastera dan Kemanusiaan (Scholarly Corpus of Literature and the Humanities) under Akademi Profesor Malaysia (Academy of Professors Malaysia).

The quoted line above encapsulates the essence of the whole seminar, which was aptly titled "Why Literature". As students majoring in English Language and Literature, this question is not foreign to our ears, in fact, it is the heart of our study, one we need to constantly ask ourselves during the years of our degree life. Yet, more often than not, we found ourselves stuck when trying to explain to the public, "Why literature?"

This is an important question that needs to be answered. The weight of figuring out the answer lies on the shoulders of literature students, but the borders of it should not stop with us. For a civilisation to thrive, literature must be loved by its people, and for literature to be loved, this question must be asked and answered by each member of the society.

According to Prof. Haji Salleh, good literature is more than just about the emotions. Rather, it carries all of the best that the world has to offer: the sounds, the intellect, the taste, the aesthetic as well the emotion. This ties back to what Professor Emeritus Datuk Dr. Osman Bakar, who gave the welcoming address as the 7th IIUM Rector, said, which is that literature should serve not only the beauty (aesthetic), but also men's need for spiritual and moral power, truth and justice.

In the Malaysian context, literature to the nation is not only poems and proses, but most

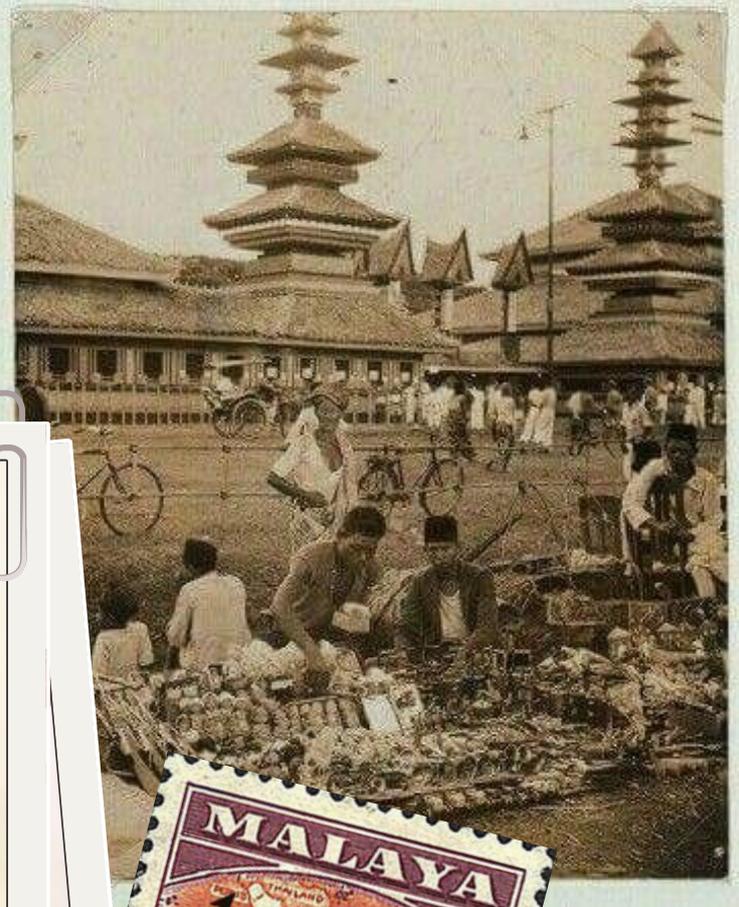
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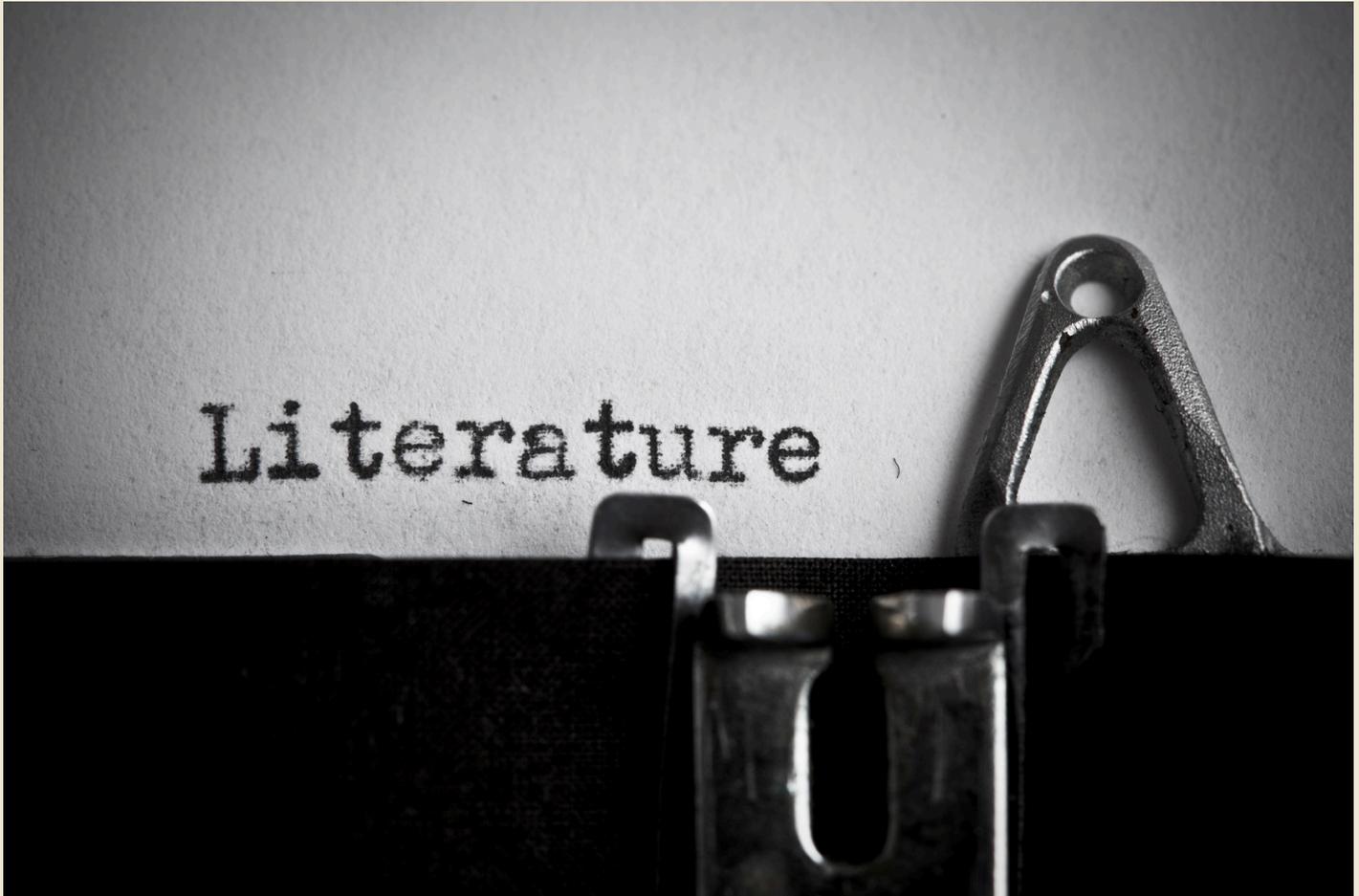
importantly, it stems from the utilisation of language due to the need to convey meaning, to record and teach history, to record customs and laws, and above all, to preserve the local wisdom. This acts as the signs of identity, as well as the painting of the self: who we are, why we are here, and how we should interact with one another. However, this is of course, not specific to Malaysia, but are universal values, pinning literature as one of the pillars to build a civilisation upon. Literature also draws the philosophy of nature and life and is the manifestation of men's souls. It is the most beautiful flower in a beautiful garden of language.

Through literature, one's emotion can be educated, as emotion too requires education. Prof. Hj Salleh refers to storytellers and poets as the heir of the human heart and mind. They are trusted to be able to record the wounds and the scars of the society's heart, and they are also counted upon to paint the smiles and the victories of it. Thus, said Prof. Hj Salleh, to know

a nation is to read its literature. The nation's genius is illustrated and recorded in literature. Richard Olaf Winstedt was quoted as an example, with his saying that one will not be able to understand the Malays if one does not read pantun, which is one of the forms in Malay poetry.

The seminar neared its ending when Prof. Hj Salleh imparted his advice to the listeners, telling us to learn from literature. Words are the bricks to our thoughts, and the literary language, which is often coated and refined with gentility, is the home to our intellect.





So, if you ask me again, why literature? I say, because it allows me to understand the truth of life.

It helps me understand who I am in the grand scheme of things, how I came to be in this position in life, and what kind of stories have my people witnessed.

But above all, it helps me understand where I am in relation to the Creator of all meanings, what I am meant to be and what kind of stories am I supposed to write. After all, literature is meant to serve justice, and according to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, to serve justice is to recognise and acknowledge the proper and rightful place of all creation, such that it leads to the recognition of the proper and rightful place of God.

So, dear readers, now I ask you, why literature?



Hannaan Fuad is an English Language and Literature undergraduate at IIUM. Her main interest is speculative fiction and its exploration of socio-political issues, especially themes of tragedy, spectacle, nationalism, and resistance. She seeks to understand how Islamization of Knowledge can enhance literary studies beyond simple classification.

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REFLECTIONS

The story of aspiration...

by Abdul Hai

An inspiring episode of high aspiration comes from the lives of great men throughout history—men whose greatness has been immortalized by the pen, and whose achievements history has refused to forget. Their stories serve as a powerful source of inspiration, especially in our current condition.

For these men, aspiration was never merely a desire or wishful thinking. It was a real, driving force. Fueled by their lofty ambitions, they worked tirelessly—and indeed, they achieved what they set out to accomplish. Today, their aspirations and achievements make them our role models. Their stories have awakened something deep within my soul, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to share them.

Under the blessing of the Kaaba, four young men sat together: Abdullah ibn Umar, Mus'ab ibn al-Zubayr, Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, and their friend Abdul Malik ibn Marwan. As the sun began to set and the night quietly approached, a deeply intriguing and aspirational conversation unfolded.



Mus'ab ibn al-Zubayr turned to the others and said, "Let us each make a wish."

The others replied, "Since you started the conversation, you should make the first wish."

Mus'ab said, "I wish to become the governor of Iraq and to marry Sakina bint Al-Hussein, as well as Aisha bint Talha ibn Ubaidullah." He worked diligently to fulfill his dreams, and indeed, he achieved what he aspired to. He became the governor of Iraq and married the two noblewomen he mentioned. He provided them with a home and belongings valued at five hundred thousand dirhams.

Then his brother, Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, spoke. "As for me," he said, "I wish to become a scholar of the highest rank in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), and I hope that people will come to me to learn the knowledge of hadith." Urwah indeed became one of the Seven Jurists of Medina (Fuqaha al-Sab'a). As the poet says:

إذا قيل من في العلم سبعة أبحر
روايتهم ليست عن العلم خارجة
فقل هم عبيد الله عروة قاسم
سعيد أبو بكر سليمان خارجة

If it is said that in knowledge there are seven seas,
Their narration in knowledge is not outside of them.

Then say: They are 'Ubaydullah, 'Urwah, Qasim, Sa'id, Abu Bakr, Sulayman, and Kharijah.

Urwah ibn al-Zubayr was such a renowned and respected jurist and hadith scholar that there is hardly a hadith collection in which his name does not appear as a narrator. His knowledge and reliability earned him a lasting place in the transmission of Islamic tradition.

As for Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, he said, "I desire and aspire to become the Caliph of the Muslims." Indeed, he went on to become the Caliph of the Islamic world, fulfilling his ambition with determination and resolve. And as for Abdullah ibn Umar, he said, "I only ask that Allah grant me Paradise." It is hoped, in shā' Allāh, that he is among the people of Paradise, as Allah the Exalted said:

وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ
جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ
خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا ذَلِكَ
الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

"Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. And He has prepared for them Gardens beneath which rivers flow, where they will abide forever. That is the ultimate triumph."

The stories of these four men should serve as a powerful guideline and source of inspiration for us and for our children—especially those living in the Western world. Aspiration is the first step toward greatness, the foundation for pursuing meaningful projects, and for becoming agents of change who can alter the course of history. No nation or people have a greater right to lead and uplift the world than the followers of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). Allah (may He be exalted) said;

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا
لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ
وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ
شَهِيدًا

And so We have made you 'believers' an upright community so that you may be witnesses over humanity and that the Messenger may be a witness over you.

Throughout recent history, we have seen clear examples that when aspiration and determination are embedded in a Muslim's identity—regardless of what others say or the resources available—success can be achieved, and noble intentions can be fulfilled.

When the great Caliph Abdul Hamid II proposed the construction of a railway from Damascus to Medina, the initial response was one of defeatism, discouragement, and, at times, mockery. Rather than offering support, many focused on the challenges, claiming the project was unrealistic and impossible. Yet, despite all the negativity directed at him, Abdul Hamid remained undeterred in his vision and commitment.

His determination ultimately led to the creation of the Hejaz Railway, which officially opened in 1908. Though the railway ceased operations in 1920, its legacy remains a powerful symbol of vision and perseverance.

As Muslims, we are not merely dreamers. Our dreams are grounded in faith and purpose—and with conviction, they become reality. It is only when we adopt a mindset of self-doubt and defeatism that we risk becoming passive daydreamers rather than active builders of the future.

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We are the nation of Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him)—a nation that aspires to greatness and never settles for anything low. As the renowned Arab poet Abu Tayyib Al-Mutanabbi once said:

إِذَا غَامَرْتَ فِي شَرَفٍ مَرُومٍ
فَلَا تَقْنَعْ بِمَا دُونَ النُّجُومِ

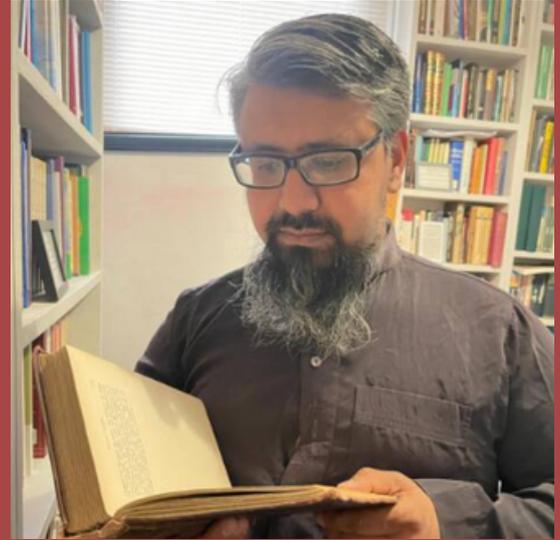
**“If you venture in pursuit of noble glory,
Then do not settle for anything less than
the stars”**

It is unfortunate that many Muslims today have lost the tradition of having high aspirations. Instead, they are often content with sensational internet speeches by popular YouTube speakers that offer emotional boosts but lack long-term vision. The deep, enduring drive to achieve something meaningful for the sake of Allah is largely missing from the lives of many. If we can revive this spirit of aspiration—to become something great and to work hard for it—just as we strive for success in our education to become doctors, engineers, or lawyers, then we can once again become people of positive change.

If we desire to be individuals who wake up early to learn, to travel for the sake of gaining Islamic knowledge, and to let our dreams and ambitions be shaped by our faith and values, then the revival of the Muslim Ummah will come swiftly. We once led the world, as our forefathers did, not because of external power, but because of inner strength—faith, knowledge, and unwavering commitment.

Today, it is not outside forces that are holding us back; rather, it is our own laziness, our contentment with minimal religious knowledge, and our lack of aspiration in matters of faith that are hindering us. If we overcome these weaknesses, we can once again become the great nation that leads the world toward truth and success.

About the author:



Abdul Hai is a book lover, bookbinder, book restorer, and leisure writer. His other interests include book collecting, woodwork, gardening, and fishing. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Social Science and a Certificate of Higher Education, both from Birkbeck, University of London. He also holds a Master's degree from the University of Wolverhampton. He is very passionate about sharing his reading experiences, especially on topics related to Islam

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When Will Allah's Justice Arrive?

By Ahmed Hammuda

There is no doubt that if the onerous trial that besets the believer is for a Divine Purpose incomprehensible to Him, the duration of that tribulation also serves a Divine Purpose beyond our understanding. It makes little sense to ask when 'when' our minds are too limited to even fathom 'why'.



Mankind was created in haste. In our impatience, we yearn for the swift arrival of Divine Justice. Our souls instinctively detest injustice, and we are deeply troubled when we witness sin and oppression prevailing around us. We question why the tyrants and wrongdoers seem to enjoy a free pass to disobey the Creator and oppress the weak, and we long for a resolution to the forms of injustice that plague our world.

We see countless people living in abject poverty, struggling to meet their basic needs, while a small portion of society holds unimaginable wealth and resources.

We struggle to comprehend the taking of innocent lives through brutal occupation and genocide, such as that the Zionist war machine inflicts on Palestine, leaving families shattered and communities destroyed. We are short-sighted. Such short-sightedness not only impels us to desire seeing causes immediately followed by their effects, but also to see the manifestation of the Divine Promise of truth prevailing over falsehood and justice vanquishing injustice. Allāh, on the other hand, is not.

Such promises of Divine Will prevailing belong to Allāh to begin with. It would not make sense to dictate the terms for His promises to be

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fulfilled. In fact, even though Allāh guarantees the outcome, He does not provide the specific “schedule” for when it will happen. There is no doubt that if the onerous trial that besets the believer is for a Divine Purpose incomprehensible to Him, the duration of that tribulation also serves a Divine Purpose beyond our understanding. It makes little sense to ask when if, more fundamentally, our minds are too limited to fully fathom why.

In the Qur’ān, Allāh mentions two times when the Pharaoh, who was a despised ruler, committed a great evil act by claiming to be God. He dared to defy his Creator and declared that he possessed what only Allāh possesses. The first time he did this, he gathered his people and made his claim.

“Council, I do not know of any other God for you apart from me.” (Quran 28:38)

On the second, and again in front of a gathering he said:

“I am your Lord Most High.” (Quran 79:24)

We are aware that the punishment inflicted upon Pharaoh for his crimes was truly remarkable, but it was by no means immediate. According to commentators of the Qur’ān, there was a span of up to forty years between the two instances when Pharaoh declared himself as a deity.

Throughout these forty long years, Allāh granted Pharaoh numerous opportunities to feel remorse and seek redemption. However, when Pharaoh adamantly persisted in his wickedness and refused to repent, Allāh ultimately caused him to be submerged in the very waters he falsely claimed dominion over. Despite the delayed retribution, it is specifically Pharaoh’s subsequent and prior acts of defiance that Allāh refers to.

“So Allāh seized him with punishment for his last and first transgression.” (Quran 79:25)

Allāh is not a passive observer. No are His actions impulsive or reactionary, Glory is His. When Allāh delays, he does so out of his supreme knowledge. Allāh gives chances and opportunities for repentance even to the evillest of people. And He delays and postpones punishment for whatever duration he sees fit. But be warned that He never, ever forgets.

About the author:



Ahmed Hammuda is a regular contributor to Islam21c, with a keen interest in Qur’anic Tafsir and Middle East affairs—particularly how these issues impact Muslims living in the West. Trained as an Electrical Engineer, he has been actively involved in various Da’wah initiatives throughout his academic and professional life. Ahmed brings the same analytical rigor from his engineering background to his writing and commentary, applying a thoughtful and balanced perspective to contemporary issues. He is also the owner of the **blog Sarim** where he shares further insights and reflections.

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EDITORS' PICKS

**On the Love of Books in the Islamic Tradition,
with Special Reference to Al-Jahiz's Kitab Al-
Hayawan by Azenita Abdullah**
Recommended by Zaiti Athirah

The Islamic tradition holds a profound reverence for knowledge, reading, and the written word. From the earliest revelations of the Qur'an, beginning with the command "Iqra'" (Read), Islam established a deep-rooted cultural and spiritual emphasis on literacy and learning. This reverence naturally extended to the production, collection, and preservation of books. The book *On the Love of Books in the Islamic Tradition* explores this intellectual heritage in rich detail, showcasing how bibliophilism became an essential aspect of Islamic civilization.

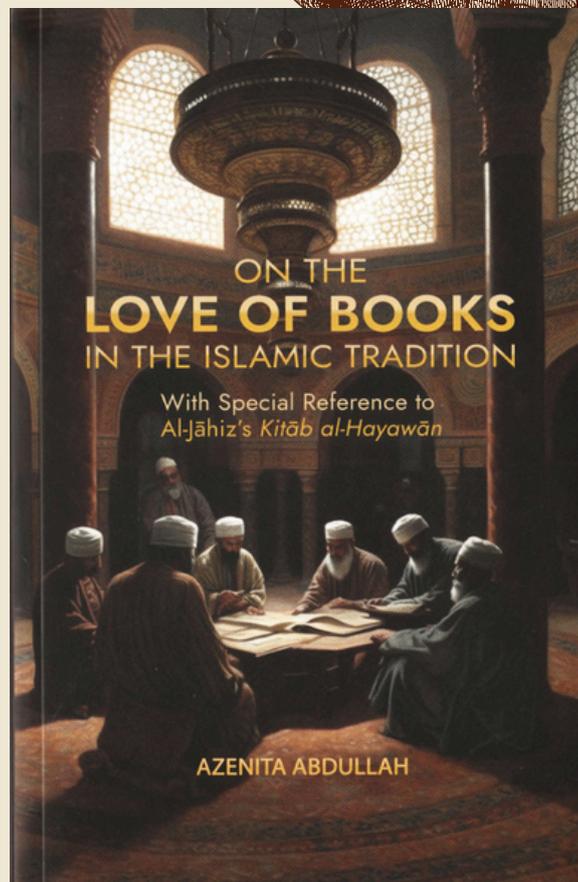
One of the most remarkable features of early Islamic societies, particularly during the 'Abbasid era (750 to 1258 CE), was the development of vibrant scholarly and

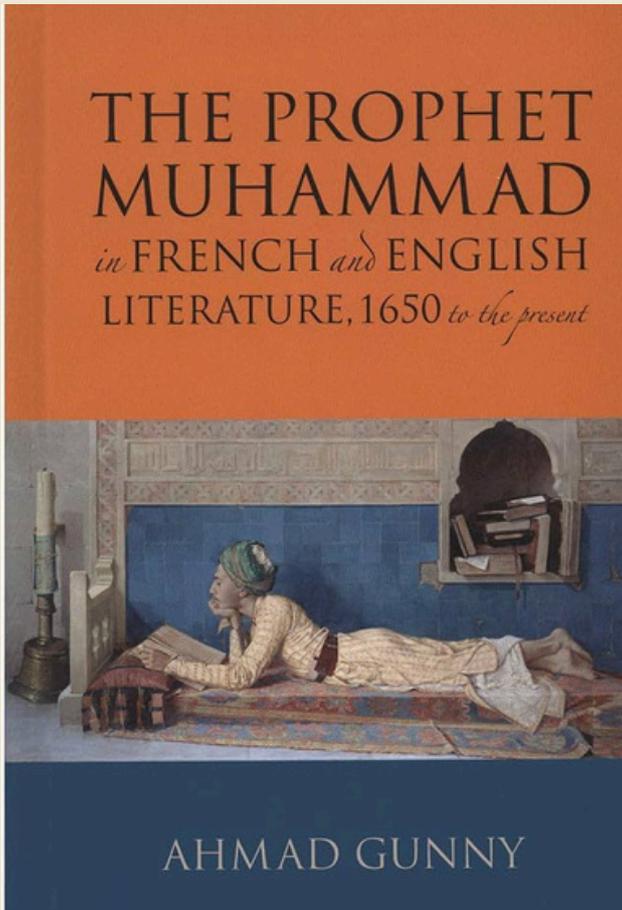
literary cultures centered around books. The 'Abbasid caliphate, with Baghdad as its intellectual capital, witnessed the flourishing of institutions such as the Bayt al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom), where scholars translated and preserved works from Greek, Persian, Indian, and other traditions into Arabic. This cultural blossoming also saw the rise of libraries both public and private, and an active market for books, where scribes, calligraphers, binders, and booksellers were highly esteemed.

A prominent figure exemplifying this tradition is the ninth-century polymath Al-Jahiz, whose encyclopedic work *Kitab al-Hayawan* (The Book of Animals) stands as a testament to the Islamic love for books and knowledge. He showcased not only the breadth of his learning but also the joy he found in the written word. Al-Jahiz himself was known for his deep love of books. According to some accounts, he died when a pile of books collapsed upon him in his library, a tragic yet telling detail of his lifelong devotion.

Al-Jahiz's Kitab al-Hayawan reflects how Islamic intellectuals engaged with books not merely as tools for learning, but as companions that inspired curiosity and critical inquiry. Through his lively prose and erudition, Al-Jahiz made reading a dynamic and pleasurable pursuit.

For those interested in the intellectual and literary heritage of the Muslim world, *On the Love of Books in the Islamic Tradition* is an enlightening and beautifully crafted read. It is highly recommended for anyone who appreciates the enduring relationship between faith, knowledge, and the written word.





Prophet Muhammad in French and English Literature: 1650 to the Present by Ahmad Gunny

Recommended by Abdul Hai

Muhammad in French and English Literature, 1650 to the Present by Ahmad Gunny is a groundbreaking scholarly work that explores over 350 years of Western literary and theological representations of the Prophet Muhammad. Gunny, a pioneering figure in the field, delves into how the Prophet's image has evolved in both French and English contexts from the early modern period to contemporary times.

This magisterial study serves both as a cross-cultural history and a critical intellectual analysis, revealing how depictions of the Prophet have been shaped by broader historical, political, and religious

transformations in Europe. Drawing on a vast range of original published and unpublished manuscripts, Gunny systematically examines texts that span the Enlightenment, colonialism, the postcolonial period, and the modern era.

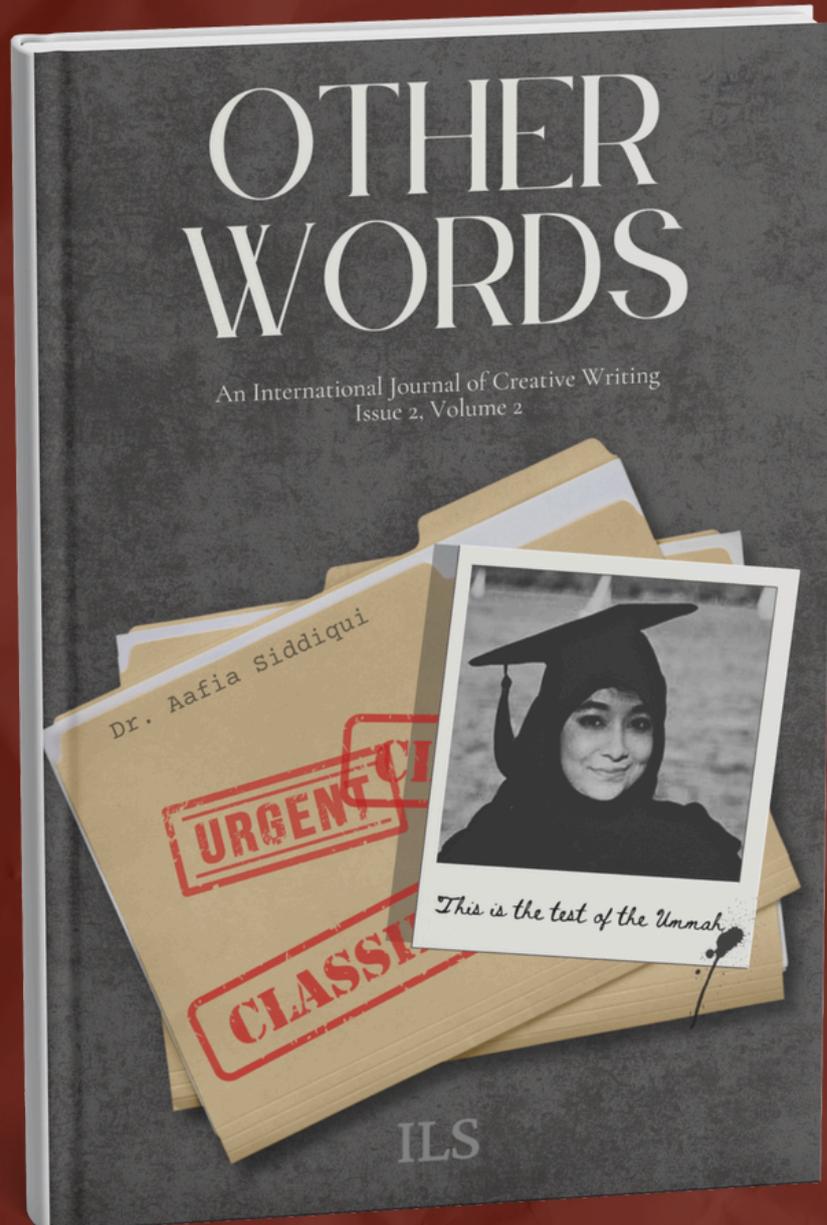
As Islamic Horizons notes, the book is “a survey of over 350 years, which is both a cross cultural history and a discussion of the intellectual changes in the representation of the Prophet's life based on the examination of original published and unpublished manuscripts.”

Nabil Matar, a leading scholar of early modern Christian-Muslim relations, praises Gunny’s contribution:

“Ahmad Gunny has been a pioneer in the study of French and European literary and theological representations of Islam in the modern period. Thanks to his acclaimed critical studies, students and scholars alike have found in his work new and important directions for research.”

Through meticulous research and nuanced analysis, Gunny offers readers an essential resource for understanding not only the evolving Western portrayals of the Prophet Muhammad, but also the broader cultural and intellectual dialogues between the Islamic world and the West. This book is indispensable for students of comparative literature, Islamic studies, religious studies, and intellectual history.

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