

Spiritual Values in Emha Ainun Nadjib's Charismatic Leadership in Maiyah Congregation

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Abstract

Leadership is integral to human capital development within organizations. This study investigates the charismatic spiritual leadership of Emha Ainun Nadjib in Jamaah Maiyah, a community he has nurtured for three decades with a fluid, self-sustaining organizational structure. Through a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research delves into Emha Ainun Nadjib's leadership, drawing from interviews with his close associates and Jamaah Maiyah members, complemented by data from observations, texts, and videos. The findings reveal Emha Ainun Nadjib's innate leadership abilities, shaped by his lifelong journey and grounded in Islamic principles and the life of Prophet Muhammad. Emha Ainun Nadjib embodies several traits of charismatic leadership, including personal charisma, vision, exceptional oratory skills, courage, empathy, and the ability to inspire and position himself relative to his audience. His leadership style emphasizes influence rather than authority, inspiring Jamaah Maiyah members through his thoughts, conduct, and charisma. The study underscores the significance of ethical leadership rooted in spiritual values, highlighting the potential of religion to foster effective leadership. However, it acknowledges limitations in confirming the broader application of Emha Ainun Nadjib's leadership beyond his immediate circle and Jamaah Maiyah.

Keywords: *Charisma, Emha Ainun Nadjib, Islam, Leadership, Spiritual.*



A. INTRODUCTION

Leadership plays a crucial role, especially in a dynamic and rapidly evolving global landscape like the present. Leaders must face complex challenges and opportunities from demographic changes, technology, and globalization.

Emha Ainun Nadjib is a multi-talented figure active in various fields such as intellectualism, literature, religion, arts, activism, and culture since the 1970s. The Padhangmbulan study group in Jombang, held since 1993, still exists and has evolved into the Maiyah movement, spreading to dozens of locations in various cities in Indonesia and abroad. These forum points are called "nodes" and "circles" of Maiyah and are all initiated by the Maiyah congregation. The Maiyah congregation in these circles and nodes routinely holds monthly discussions (known as "Maiyahan") with or without Emha's presence in the forums (Mulyadi et al., 2020).

Since its establishment in the era of the Padhangmbulan study group, Maiyah has remained loyal as a knowledge assembly and has not taken the form of a tightly structured organization with hierarchy and administration. The nodes and circles of Maiyah only serve as a means for the Maiyah congregation to discuss with each other or simply as a gathering place in one area. The Maiyah congregation also volunteers in the monthly forum activities at each node.

Whether it is the routine monthly Maiyahan forums or gatherings with KiaiKanjeng, Emha's presence always invites thousands of people to come and learn from the Maiyahan stage. All groups are welcome in Maiyah. Students wearing sarongs and caps, tattooed youths, smoking women, thugs, women in long hijabs and veils, almost all can be found in the routine Maiyahan or Sinau Bareng gatherings. Male and female congregants mingle without barriers. There is also no security detail at Maiyahan because, according to Emha, each person has secured themselves and their surroundings. Such situations occur daily in Maiyahan gatherings, lasting until two or three in the morning for years (Karim, 2019).

What is happening with Emha Ainun Nadjib and the Maiyah congregation is genuinely interesting. It is an entity that is fluid without formal administration but continues to grow independently, consistent as a knowledge assembly, always inviting the interest of thousands of young generations to attend, and Emha and Maiyah have consistently carried out all of this for almost three decades. Hence, this research attempts to understand the leadership of Emha Ainun Nadjib in the Maiyah congregation.

B. METHOD

This research uses qualitative research methods with a phenomenological approach, focusing on the experiences and views of Jamaah Maiyah participants about Emha Ainun Nadjib in the context of leadership. The research objects included Jamaah Maiyah, who were close to Emha Ainun Nadjib and Jamaah Maiyah BangbangWetan in Surabaya, and external parties from the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board. The research took place from March 2022 to June 2023. Data were obtained through interviews, media texts, and observations, with data triangulation to increase validity. The method involved direct interviews, documents, transcribed videos, and direct observation, with cross-referencing to increase trustworthiness.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Muhammad Ainun Nadjib was born in Mentoro, Sumobito District, Jombang Regency, on May 27, 1953, to Muhammad Abdul Latif and Chalimah as the third child of 15 siblings. His parents were active in education and community empowerment in Mentoro, establishing schools, cooperatives, libraries, and football clubs and organizing various activities such as drum bands, religious chanting, and other social events. Muhammad Abdul Lathif, Emha's father, invited people from various backgrounds, according to their expertise and abilities, to participate in

driving these social activities. Therefore, Emha Ainun Nadjib was not unfamiliar with social activities, mentoring, and community empowerment.

Emha is often referred to as a "multidimensional person." Another epithet given to him is "cultural phenomenon" (Pratama, 2020). This designation is entirely justified because in the 1980s, during the New Order regime, political Islam was heavily suppressed. During a seemingly militaristic situation, Emha emerged, offering alternative thoughts and insights on politics, statehood, and the relationship between citizens through essays, literary works, theater performances, and musical interpretations of poetry.

Emha Ainun Nadjib's attention to factual cases in Indonesia was expressed in writing, and he directly involved himself in the locations where these events occurred. Take, for example, his involvement in the Kedungombo dam construction case. He also staged the colossal drama "Lautan Jilbab" (The Ocean of Veils) in response to the government's ban on the use of headscarves in schools, which resulted in changing public perception towards the headscarf, shifting it from being perceived as a frightening object to one that influenced the Muslim landscape in Indonesia, especially among the middle class (Sofyan et al., 2022). Emha Ainun Nadjib was also actively involved in the 1998 Reform Movement and helped oversee the transition following Soeharto's resignation (Hasyim, 2022).

Emha's Charisma and Spirituality

Ahmad Syakurun Muzakki, Emha's younger brother and the manager of the Gamelan KiaiKanjeng group, stated firmly and convincingly when asked about Emha's leadership, "Certainly, he has charisma. In Javanese terms, it is 'wibawa'." Wibawa refers to the authority and influence a leader possesses within a group/community or organization and is one of the essential elements of charismatic leadership. Wibawa can be found in charismatic leaders' behavior, words, and attitudes. This dimension helps a leader influence, inspire, and motivate others and the team without relying on formal power or coercion. The charisma demonstrated by a charismatic leader does not solely depend on their formal position within the organization or power hierarchy but rather on their charm and character qualities. Charismatic leaders with solid energy and beliefs can captivate the attention and admiration of those around them (Aldulaimi, 2021).

Meanwhile, *katuranggan* is not directly related to *wibawa*, but a leader with *katuranggan* will be considered to have more charisma and authority. *Katuranggan* is a method or way of studying the character and traits of humans and animals based on their physical characteristics. Someone with knowledge of *katuranggan* can recognize the temperament and character of a person just by observing their physical traits (Koeswanto, 2021). Such abilities attract the attention and admiration of those around them.

The aura and leadership charisma of Emha was evident to Helmi Mustofa, a secretary staff member of Emha Ainun Nadjib and KiaiKanjeng, notably when Emha accompanied the victims of the Lapindo mud disaster to meet President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). During that moment, SBY entrusted Emha to lead the meeting between various parties involved in the Sidoarjo mud case, and Helmi saw it as a moment of leadership, showing Emha's capabilities and capacity to lead meetings and could also be interpreted as the capture of Emha Ainun Nadjib's aura and authority.

Social activities directly touching the community have been ingrained in Emha Ainun Nadjib and his family since childhood in Mentoro Village. Growing up in a santri family and receiving education at the Gontor Islamic boarding school, Islamic spiritual values are deeply ingrained in Emha Ainun Nadjib. These Islamic values are always carried across various dimensions of his work. Emha's immersion in Islam also extends to matters of leadership. One of the leadership principles offered by Emha is his interpretation of one of the verses in the Quran, namely Surah Al-Hashr [59]: 22-23.

The Quran, as the holy book of Islam, serves as a reference, consideration, and guidance for Emha in his actions and thoughts about everything. Referring to the Quran, Emha repeatedly emphasizes to the Maiyah congregation the importance of tadabbur. Tadabbur Al-Qur'an can be understood not just by understanding the verses of the Quran as text but also by finding what lies behind and beyond the text (behind and beyond the texts). One can use specific knowledge to engage in tadabbur Al-Qur'an, as long as the output and outcome are goodness (Effendy, 2020).

What is intriguing about Emha Ainun Nadjib's Islamic thoughts and spirituality is his contextual interpretation of Quranic verses and the exemplary behavior (sunnah) of Prophet Muhammad, which aligns with the demands of the times and human life. It is the influence of Emha Ainun Nadjib's background in social sciences and his knowledge of mainstream sciences (not just religious studies) that makes his religious interpretations always contextual. Islam is not seen as a static noun but as a life process, imbuing everything. With such a dimension of Islamic spirituality, Emha and Maiyah are more readily accepted by various segments of society (Pratama, 2020).

In addition to making the Quran a guide, Emha, in the view of the Maiyah congregation, also acts following what is taught by the Prophet Muhammad. Emha has repeatedly put forward the concept of the Maiyah Love Triangle: Allah-Muhammad-Servant (Al Wahfiah & Pamungkas, 2023). This concept implies that all human activities, whether in economics, politics, culture, religion, social affairs, and so forth, should be based on spiritual values through Allah's decrees exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad. Emha has also suggested that this Maiyah Love Triangle can be applied to address various issues in the world, such as poverty, violence, religious conflicts, and others (Karim, 2019).



Figure 1. Maiyah's Love Triangle (Right) Which Places Allah And The Prophet As The Main Factor In All Human Activities. (Source: Caknun.Com)

Charismatic Leadership of Emha Ainun Nadjib in Jamaah Maiyah

Jamaah Maiyah can be defined as those who attend regular forums at Maiyah's hubs or circles, as well as those who attend *Sinau Bareng* (Learning Together) sessions with Emha Ainun Nadjib and KiaiKanjeng in various regions of Indonesia (Suprpto et al., 2023). People of Maiyah have been touched by Emha directly or indirectly and have been impacted by him. This impact can manifest as gaining new understanding or awareness in one's life, experiencing a shift from negative to positive behaviour, adopting new commitments in life, and changes involving spirituality, psychology, intellectuality, economics, and so on.

Maiyah has been ongoing in the same form and character for almost three decades since the inception of *Padhangmbulan* study sessions in 1993 (Suprpto & Arshal, 2022). This means Maiyah is not structured as a rigid organization like Islamic social organizations such as *Nahdlatul Ulama*, *Muhammadiyah*, *Alkhairaat*, and others, nor does it take the form of a *tariqa*. Maiyah consistently functions as a council of knowledge. In Jamaah Maiyah, Emha has consistently positioned himself not as someone at the top or in a superior position giving directive commands. Naturally, Jamaah Maiyah would obey any command from Emha, but his attitude shows that he chooses to walk alongside Jamaah Maiyah. This aligns with the choice of the word 'Maiyah' itself, which means 'together' or 'accompany' (Karim, 2019).

One of Emha's strengths lies in his relational nature with Jamaah Maiyah, not as a superior giving orders directly or indirectly. Emha's leadership style in Jamaah Maiyah lies in two authorities: his track record and his prominent persuasive ability. Emha's leadership role is identified with the concept of *Taman Siswa* by Ki Hajar Dewantara, known as the Father of Indonesian Education. The *Taman Siswa* method does not emphasize coercion but rather nurturing so students can develop physically and spiritually (Fauziah, 2017). Emha's nurturing role extends to humans and the universe as a whole. On various occasions, Emha has emphasized the importance of respecting the surrounding environment, both living and non-living

entities, considering them as "elder siblings," as humans were created last and should be respected for their sustainability (Mustofa, 2018).

Apart from nurturing, Emha Ainun Nadjib also embodies the role of fostering harmony. In times of uncertainty, employees or organizational members need to feel secure, and this is where a leader's role comes in to provide a sense of security and safety for the team. Security is vital in organizations to maintain the spirit and motivation of team members in facing various challenges (Santoso et al., 2022). For organizational sustainability, an effective leader should focus not only on internal and external aspects. External aspects include Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the emerging concept of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), which contribute to the organization's sustainability (Alsayegh et al., 2020; Karwowski & Raulinajtys-Grzybek, 2021; Markopoulos et al., 2021).

Emha Ainun Nadjib embraces all sectors of society and is open to everyone. He is widely accepted or friendly, regardless of background or specific characteristics. This is evident during Maiyah forums, where people from diverse professions, backgrounds, social statuses, and other diversities gather. This acceptance facilitates Emha in embracing and reconciling disputes, as seen in his mediation efforts with the victims of the Sidoarjo mudflow.

It is worth noting that Emha did not initiate accompanying the Sidoarjo mudflow victims; instead, they asked him to mediate compensation with PT Minarak Lapindo Jaya. Emha agreed, but he wouldn't accept any payment. He effectively employs a non-confrontational approach to problem-solving, focusing on conflict resolution. Emha can alleviate tensions and bring all parties together to seek reasonable solutions.

Another prominent characteristic of Emha is consistency, or *istiqamah* in Islamic literature. Seeing Maiyah's journey since the Padhangmbulan era in 1993 is unsurprising, with Emha remaining faithful to accompany Jamaah Maiyah. Emha and Maiyah also adhere to their principles of independence and fluidity, not getting trapped in practical politics or pragmatism, although Emha could easily do so.

Emha is seen as consistent in his principles and uninterested in positions or social status. This can be observed, for instance, during the student movement demanding President Soeharto's resignation in 1998. At that time, Emha and Nurcholis Madjid, a Muslim intellectual who was also one of the leading figures in the 1998 Reform, shook hands, making a gentle agreement not to engage or hold any positions in the post-Soeharto government. Many figures in the New Order government withdrew their support for Soeharto before his fall and subsequently joined the reform movement, opposing Soeharto (Agustian, 2018). Even without a written agreement, Emha remained consistent and firm in staying out of the government until now. This character provides insight into the values and characteristics respected in his personality.

As previously explained, Emha's track record and persuasion skills are highly prominent, enabling him to inspire many people. This inspiration can come from Emha's behaviour, writings, speeches, and even, as Helmi Mustofa revealed, through dreams. In Maiyah forums, especially Padhangmbulan in Jombang, discussions on specific topics often begin with translating Quranic verses. Emha then provides his interpretation or commentary on these verses. Emha's interpretations are always contextual, out of the box, and wild, yet precisely this quality draws thousands of people to Maiyah forums and other Sinau Bareng events (Karim, 2019).

Emha's thinking is considered "out of the box" and has distinct characteristics. However, it is fundamental and widely accepted, although challenging for some, especially those unable to follow Emha's thought process. Emha is also regarded as a disruptor of societal norms or mentality. Hewitt (2021) notes that Emha deconstructs established thoughts, values, communication styles, cultural contact methods, education, and ingrained ways of thinking while suggesting various solutions to the community's problems. A leader must be able to inspire and generate creative ideas for competitiveness and organizational sustainability. Leadership with creative and out-of-the-box thinking is crucial for finding innovative solutions to complex challenges. Creative thinking is essential for anticipating changes. It enables a leader to see opportunities amidst challenges, discover new ways to achieve goals, and create added value for the organization (Akpur, 2020; Madi Odeh et al., 2023; Yilmaz, 2021). With creative thinking, leaders can seek innovative ways to improve efficiency, optimize resources, and address market or industry changes. Additionally, creative thinking can help leaders inspire their team to think beyond existing boundaries and contribute fresh ideas (Vahdat, 2022).

Another prominent characteristic of Emha is his ability to position himself when dealing with various people from diverse backgrounds and social statuses, known in Javanese as *empan papan*. Moreover, Emha can simplify complex concepts, even turning them into entertainment and ultimately bringing joy to every Maiyah or Sinau Bareng forum. Emha often states in Maiyah and Sinau Bareng forums that he only conveys what is in the attendees' minds. This ability makes Emha widely accepted across various sectors, as people feel he is a part of them. By adapting himself to the desires of his guests or audience, Emha shortens distances and removes invisible barriers, making those who engage with him feel accepted.

When interviewing leaders and inquiring about the skills deemed necessary in leadership, Kevin Murray found that communication consistently ranks among the top three essential skills that someone must possess to be an effective leader. Excellent and effective communication can make a difference in performance, for better or worse. All technical quality advantages a leader possesses become less significant without good communication. Analyzing situations, quickly understanding issues, and taking appropriate action might solve problems. However, communication skills allow a leader to persuade people to work together and actively engage in achieving organizational goals (Baran & Woznyj, 2020).

As Emha Ainun Nadjib demonstrates, a leader must continually develop communication skills. They must be able to see things from the perspective of their interlocutors or followers. This includes understanding the values, feelings, and needs of their followers. Understanding others' perspectives allows a leader to accommodate various viewpoints and create stronger relationships with team members. This makes it easier to inspire others and their teams, including communication and good relationships with various stakeholders, such as business partners and other stakeholders.

Visually, Emha's ability to adapt to his audience is evident when he attends Maiyah or Sinau Bareng forums in various cities with different cultures. For example, in the BangbangWetan forum in Surabaya, Emha uses the East Javanese language with the Surabaya dialect. Similarly, this happens in other places throughout Indonesia; Emha adjusts to the local culture. This is also possible because before Maiyahan events, especially Sinau Bareng, Emha appoints someone or a team to gather information about the area, including the local community and the hosts. Religious culture, social conditions, cultural and demographic data of the local population, and so on are collected as valuable information so that Emha is not entirely blind to the conditions around him.

Emha is also known as a visionary, and his awareness of this vision is reflected on various occasions. Emha's awareness of the importance of togetherness and the sustainability of the community and strategic thinking about future visions, both medium and long-term, are essential values in his leadership. Emha Ainun Nadjib's leadership is detailed and firm. Emha pays close attention to the activities and behaviours of others and has strong reactions to laziness or disorder. For Emha, laziness means sin because it denies God's gifts (Muvid, 2023). Emha is also known to care about neatness and cleanliness. Firmness is vital for a leader in decision-making. Nevertheless, no decision will please everyone because everyone has different interests, goals, and expectations.

Emha's leadership reflects a visionary character and pays excellent attention to detail. In times of uncertainty, a clear vision becomes important in guiding organizations through various uncertainties and changes. However, this vision must consider the operational details that support it. Visionary leaders can look further into the future and create an attractive and meaningful vision for the organization. Visionary leaders can inspire and motivate employees to contribute to achieving this vision. Although vision directs the organization, attention to operational details is also critical. Implementing strategies to achieve the organizational vision requires careful attention to operational aspects, such as resources, processes, finances, and tactical implementation. Focus on operational details helps realize the vision efficiently and effectively. The combination of a visionary leader and attention to detail will sustain the organization in facing uncertainty.

On various occasions, Emha also emphasizes the importance of discipline among his followers. He is strict with himself but gentle with others. Emha has instilled and practised such a mental attitude since childhood. He disciplines himself, does not take advantage of facilities and privileges that he could quickly obtain, and, at the same time, has extraordinary compassion for others. However, Emha Ainun Nadjib can treat someone harshly when he sees that a person's capacity and capabilities should indeed be high, like Emha. The criticisms he voices, for example, toward rulers, maybe a perspective that Emha expects much from someone with specific authority and power, just as Emha acts tough on himself and gentle towards others. This is one of Emha's methods for developing those around him.

Emha Ainun Nadjib's main strength lies in being an inspiration to many. His works from the 1970s onwards demonstrate Emha's high productivity ethos. An inspiring leader makes organizational members want to achieve even better results. Such a leader can convince organization members to agree on achieving organizational goals, win team support, help the team work together better, and make the team proud and meaningful to be part of a larger community.

Replacing Emha Ainun Nadjib is challenging because he is a complex and multidimensional individual. However, efforts to preserve and nurture Emha's ideas, thoughts, and inspirations have been ongoing for a long time through various print, electronic, and digital media. Emha's essays, short stories, novels, and poetry have been compiled, printed, and republished several times. The caknun.com website for example, contains Emha's writings that still need to be compiled and reports on Maiyahan and Sinau Bareng events. Emha's views, ideas, thoughts, and concepts are also expressed in videos on the CakNun.com YouTube channel and audio format in both physical and digital forms. Emha has also asked Maiyah congregation members to write their views, criticisms, ideas, hopes, suggestions, or anything about Maiyah, which will then be published on the caknun.com website and compiled into a separate section on the mymayyah.id website.

In Rumah Maiyah Kadipiro, Yogyakarta, there is also the EAN Library, which has more than 3000 titles of books, archives, and documentation related to Emha since the 1970s. Bakker et al., (2023) argues that the most effective way to drive someone to achieve better performance and results is to inspire rather than motivate them. When someone is inspired, they will have greater aspirations and hopes and an increased productivity ethos to achieve desired dreams or goals. This is because, based on Beck's experience, motivation comes from within. Whether someone is motivated depends entirely on each person's personality; to stimulate them, they must receive good examples from a leader.

A study by Catrena Elliot on black female leaders in the United States found that leaders must inspire employees by creating a positive and appreciative work environment. A leader should establish a learning culture and provide opportunities for employees to learn, listen to them, and provide balanced and objective feedback. By providing exemplary leadership and inspiration, an organizational atmosphere

is created that encourages collaboration to achieve extraordinary results (Elliott, 2022).

D. CONCLUSION

Emha Ainun Nadjib's spirituality is rooted in the Quran and the exemplary life of Prophet Muhammad. He emphasizes the importance of spiritual values in all aspects of life, as demonstrated through his actions, words, and works. Emha's leadership in Jamaah Maiyah is characterized by his charisma, vision, exemplary conduct, persuasive style, and ability to communicate with diverse individuals effectively. He avoids authoritarianism, instead influencing through his character and ideas, fostering unity and productivity within Jamaah Maiyah. Emha's teachings and thoughts are meticulously documented across various media platforms to mitigate succession crises common in charismatic leadership. This research underscores the significance of ethical leadership grounded in spiritual values, highlighting the potential pitfalls of leader dependency and the importance of documenting the ideas and behaviours of charismatic leaders for organizational continuity and future inspiration.

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