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Science in the Philosophical Perspective of Indonesian Islam: Mukti Ali's Thoughts on Science

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand Mukti Ali's thoughts on science that have contributed to education in Indonesia. Mukti Ali's thoughts themselves can have their own impact as well as being a challenge in developing his thoughts in the field of science. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a library study method, whose sources are analyzed from various books and other scientific works. The results of the study show that Mukti Ali's thoughts on science in Indonesia emphasize the importance of a scientific and multidisciplinary approach, especially in the field of religious studies and the development of Islamic education. He criticized the academic weaknesses of his time, such as the lack of scientific enthusiasm, mastery of foreign languages, and methodology, and encouraged educational renewal by opening postgraduate programs and increasing social and religious research. He believed that Islamic education must prioritize religious discipline, run systematically according to the Indonesian Constitution, and respect local wisdom. He also encouraged improving the quality of lecturers and research at IAIN, developing social and religious research, and sending lecturers to study abroad to improve academic quality. Overall, Mukti Ali contributed significantly to the renewal of modern Islamic education that is relevant to current developments in Indonesia.

1. Introduction

The development of science in the Islamic world is a crucial aspect demonstrating the intellectual dynamics of Muslims throughout history. Since the classical era, Islam has produced many great scientists, such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Al-Ghazali, who sought to unite revelation with reason. However, as modernization and secularization entered the Islamic world, new challenges arose in locating science within an Islamic framework (Parida et al., 2021). In Indonesia, these challenges are increasingly complex due to its interconnectedness with cultural pluralism, diverse educational systems, and national ideologies.

In the Indonesian context, thinking about science is inextricably linked to efforts to reconcile Islamic values and modernity. One important figure who made a significant contribution to this issue was Prof. Dr. H. A. Mukti Ali, a Muslim scholar, academic, and Minister of Religious Affairs during the New Order era. Mukti Ali is known as a moderate, inclusive, and rational Islamic thinker who sought to bridge the gap between religious and general knowledge. His thinking marked a crucial phase in the development of the philosophy of science in Indonesian Islam (Wahid, 2021).

Mukti Ali's views on knowledge are rooted in the understanding that knowledge is not only a rational instrument but also part of humanity's spiritual responsibility to God. He rejected the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge that has significantly influenced the Islamic education system in Indonesia. For Mukti Ali, all forms of knowledge that benefit humanity have religious value, as long as they are directed towards the benefit of and devotion to God Almighty. This view demonstrates a strong integrative spirit between faith, reason, and good deeds. Mukti Ali's ideas emerged amidst a political and social climate that demanded harmony between Islam and national development.

At that time, Islamic education in Indonesia tended to be divided between traditional institutions (pesantren and madrasah) that emphasized religious knowledge and general institutions (schools and universities) that emphasized modern, rational knowledge (Hasan & Inayati, 2025; Saputra & Hafidz, 2025). Mukti Ali sought to offer a new model: the integration of knowledge within an Islamic framework that remained rational, open, and relevant to the national context. Besides being a thinker, Mukti Ali is also known as a figure who put his ideas into practice in educational policy and social life.

He introduced a "comparative religion" approach in Islamic academic circles, which teaches an objective and scientific attitude towards differences in belief. Through this approach, he instilled scientific values rooted in intellectual honesty, openness to other sciences, and respect for truth from all sources. These values are what make Mukti Ali's concept of knowledge dialogical and dynamic (Hayati, 2023). From an Islamic philosophical perspective, Mukti Ali's ideas can be understood as a form of integrative epistemology, a view that combines revelation and reason in the process of seeking knowledge. He argued that knowledge cannot be separated from Islamic ethical and spiritual values. Scientific truth, he argued, must align with the truth of revelation to produce both knowledgeable and devout people. This concept challenges the Western positivist paradigm that denies the moral and spiritual dimensions of knowledge (Inayati & Pratama, 2022).

Mukti Ali's thinking also reflects the spirit of Nusantara Islam, which values locality and culture. He did not simply imitate Middle Eastern Islamic thought but adapted it to the context of pluralistic Indonesian society. In this way, knowledge is no longer understood abstractly but becomes a tool for building a just, tolerant, and humanity-oriented civilization (Zuhri, 2024). Mukti Ali sought to instill an awareness that knowledge must be able to move the community towards progress

without losing its spiritual roots. Within the education system, Mukti Ali's ideas inspired the birth of an integrated approach to knowledge, which was later adopted by several Islamic universities in Indonesia. Through this model, Islamic and general knowledge are no longer rigidly separated but rather developed within a single epistemological unity. This effort aims to produce a generation of Muslims who think critically, have strong faith, and are able to face the challenges of the modern era scientifically and ethically (Ayuni & Ritonga, 2025; Nufus et al., 2025; Uluum et al., 2025). This view remains relevant today in the discourse of Islamic education reform. However, like other philosophical ideas, Mukti Ali's ideas also face challenges and limitations. Their implementation requires a prepared system, educators, and a supportive academic culture. Integration of knowledge is not simply a unification of the curriculum but also a unification of theological and scientific paradigms. Therefore, in-depth study is needed to understand how Mukti Ali's concept of knowledge can be effectively implemented in contemporary Indonesian Islamic education.

Thus, studying Mukti Ali's thoughts on knowledge is important not only in the context of Indonesian Islamic intellectual history but also in efforts to build an education system that is characterized by and relevant to global challenges. His thoughts can form the basis for the development of a modern, open, and welfare-oriented Islamic philosophy of knowledge. Therefore, this paper seeks to systematically explore Mukti Ali's views on knowledge, the fundamentals of his thoughts, and their application in the Indonesian education system.

2. Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library research method. This approach was chosen to analyze and understand the data in depth based on theory and previous research results related to Mukti Ali's thoughts on knowledge. Using this research method, the researcher did not collect data directly from the field but rather explored various written sources such as books and scientific journals relevant to the research topic. References for the analysis method were taken from Sinta-accredited journals (20 articles), as well as textbooks related to Mukti Ali's thoughts, selected based on relevance and publication year within the last 15 years. Through the library research method, it is hoped that this research will provide a theoretical contribution to Mukti Ali's thoughts on knowledge.

3. Results and Discussion

Mukti Ali's Biography and Works Relevant to Science

Prof. Dr. H. Abdul Mukti Ali (1923–2004) was a key figure in the intellectual history of 20th-century Indonesian Islam. He was born in Cepu, Blora, Central Java, into a religious and scholarly family. From childhood, he received basic Islamic education at a pesantren (Islamic boarding school) and then continued his studies

at Aligarh Muslim University (India), where he interacted with Indian Islamic modernists such as Abul Kalam Azad and Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He then pursued a doctoral degree at McGill University, Canada, known as a center for the study of world religions. This combination of classical Islamic tradition and modern scientific approaches shaped Mukti Ali's open, rational, and contextual perspective on science (Muslim et al., 2024).

As an academic, Mukti Ali dedicated himself to higher education, particularly at IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta (now UIN Sunan Kalijaga). He is known as the initiator of the scientific approach to religion, which emphasizes that religious studies must be conducted rationally, objectively, and scientifically without losing their spiritual value. This approach later became one of the main foundations for the development of Islamic studies in modern Indonesia (Supriadin, 2022; Sari & Niam, 2020). One of his important works is "Comparative Religious Studies in Indonesia," which introduces a scientific methodology for understanding religions critically and tolerantly. Through this work, Mukti Ali emphasizes the importance of opening Muslims' minds to religious plurality without compromising their theological beliefs. He has also written books and articles discussing the relationship between Islam, science, and modernity.

The following are some of Mukti Ali's key works relevant to the study of Islamic science and philosophy of education:

- a. "*Comparative Religious Studies in Indonesia*," which discusses the scientific approach to religious studies and the importance of objectivity among Muslim scholars.
- b. "*Islam and Modernization in Indonesia*," which highlights the challenges of modernity to Muslims and the role of science in strengthening faith and social progress.
- c. "*Methods of Understanding Islam*," which teaches how to understand Islamic teachings rationally and scientifically, rather than merely dogmatically.
- d. "*Some Religious Issues Today*," which reflects on contemporary religious problems and the importance of a scientific approach in addressing them.
- e. "*Religion and Development in Indonesia*," which emphasizes the social function of religion and science in building a progressive and ethical society.
- f. "*The Encounter of Religions in Indonesia*" (written in English), which introduces Indonesian Islamic perspectives to the international community and demonstrates the importance of comparative religious studies in a global context.

Mukti Ali's work and thoughts are relevant for study because they reflect a new paradigm of knowledge within the context of Indonesian Islam. He speaks not only theoretically but also grounded his ideas in educational policy and social practice. Through a scientific, inclusive, and contextual approach, Mukti Ali strives to build a bridge between Islamic scholarly traditions and the demands of modern rationality. Thus, he represents an Indonesian intellectual scholar who successfully

integrates revelation, reason, and social reality as the foundation for developing knowledge with an Islamic character.

Details of Mukti Ali's Thoughts About Science

Mukti Ali's thoughts about science are rooted in the principle of integration between religion and science. He rejected the dichotomy that separated religious knowledge (al-'ulum ad-diniyyah) and general knowledge ('ulum al-kauniyyah). According to him, all knowledge that brings benefits to humans has religious value and is part of worship, as long as it is used for the benefit of the people. This view reflects the unity between the spiritual and rational dimensions in Islamic philosophy. Mukti Ali stands out through his scientific-cum-doctrinaire or synthetic method approach in understanding religion and scientific-cum-suigeneris, which synthesizes empirical scientific methods (historical-sociological-anthropological) with Islamic normative doctrine, enabling holistic and contextual religious studies for religious research as well as the integration of modern sciences. This approach is unique because it is not only rational but also suigeneris (typical of religion itself), contributing to the renewal of the methodology of Islamic studies in Indonesian religious universities, different from a purely doctrinal focus. The following are some important points of Mukti Ali's thoughts about science:

- a. Knowledge as a Divine Trust
Mukti Ali believes that knowledge is a gift and trust from Allah SWT to humans to be used for prosperity. The search for knowledge is a form of devotion to God, as is the command in the Al-Qur'an to "read" (iqra') and use reason optimally.
 - b. Unity of Knowledge
He rejected the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge, which has led to fragmentation in Islamic education. According to Mukti Ali, all knowledge originates from the same source, namely Allah SWT. The differences between knowledge lie only in the objects and methods, not in values and goals.
 - c. Rationality and Openness of Knowledge
Mukti Ali encouraged Muslims to think rationally, critically, and scientifically in understanding their religious teachings. He emphasized that Islam does not conflict with modern science. Instead, Islam encourages humans to think and examine the universe as signs of God's greatness.
 - d. Dialogue and Plurality Knowledge
In his comparative religious approach, Mukti Ali emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary and interfaith dialogue. He believed that truth can be discovered through openness and comparison, not fanaticism. This strengthened the inclusive and humanistic character of knowledge.
 - e. Scientific Ethics and Social Responsibility
According to Mukti Ali, science cannot be separated from moral values. Knowledge without morals can be a source of destruction. Therefore, the development of science must always be based on the values of monotheism, honesty, and responsibility towards humanity (Hayati & Nuraini, 2024).
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Mukti Ali's thoughts reveal both similarities and distinctions in relation to other Islamic thinkers' views of knowledge. For example, Harun Nasution emphasizes Islamic rationality through a Neo-Mu'tazilah approach, integrating reason and revelation symbiotically to address the fatalistic stagnation among Indonesian Muslims. Harun Nasution and Mukti Ali are two Indonesian Islamic thinkers who champion a scientific-cum-doctrinaire approach, integrating empirical historical, sociological, and anthropological methods with normative Islamic doctrine for a holistic study of religion. Of the two, Mukti Ali is better known as a Muslim intellectual and expert in comparative religion and interreligious relations worldwide, while Harun Nasution is better recognized as an expert in falsafah kalam (Islamic philosophy and theology) (Abidin, 2012).

In the integration of religious and modern sciences, Nasution is more rational, imperative for internal reform of theology and non-dichotomous education, while Mukti Ali expands the interdisciplinary synthesis to the development of the whole person and global dialogue between civilizations. Nasution's unique contribution lies in stimulating the rationalism of the people against theological stagnation as the rector of IAIN Jakarta, while Mukti Ali is known as the father of interfaith harmony, who laid the foundation for sui generis religious studies at PTAI to actualize religion in national development. This comparison places Nasution as an internal theological reformer and Mukti Ali as a practical bridge between religions. Therefore, for Mukti Ali, science is a means to know God, build a civilized society, and strengthen humanity. He rejects the secularism of science and proposes an epistemological model that unites revelation, reason, and empirical experience.

The Application of Mukti Ali's Thoughts in the Islamic Education System

Mukti Ali's thoughts on knowledge have had a significant influence on the reform of Islamic education in Indonesia. He emphasized that Islamic education must integrate religious and general knowledge to produce a rational, faithful, and productive generation of Muslims.

- a. The application of the concept of scientific integration can be seen in the transformation of the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) into the State Islamic University (UIN). This change reflects Mukti Ali's idea that Islamic educational institutions should not only teach religious knowledge but also be open to modern disciplines such as science, economics, and technology, while remaining grounded in Islamic values (Al Faruq & Sukri, 2023).
 - b. The application of a scientific approach to religion introduced by Mukti Ali has influenced teaching methodologies in various religious faculties. Students no longer simply study religious texts dogmatically but are also encouraged to research them historically, sociologically, and philosophically. This fosters critical and analytical thinking skills in understanding Islamic teachings (Nasution et al., 2024).
 - c. In the context of character education, Mukti Ali emphasizes the importance of scientific ethics and social responsibility in the learning process. He believes that the ultimate goal of Islamic education is not only to produce graduates but
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also knowledgeable individuals with morals and capable of becoming agents of social change (Alvianto et al., 2023).

- d. Mukti Ali's ideas also encouraged the emergence of an integrative curriculum, in which general subjects such as biology, economics, and physics are taught alongside Islamic spiritual values. This model has been adopted by several institutions, such as UIN Sunan Kalijaga, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, and UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim, emphasizing the synergy between knowledge and faith (Rizal et al., 2022).

Strengths and Weaknesses of Mukti Ali's Thoughts on Science

1. Strengths

a. Integrative and Comprehensive

Mukti Ali's thinking successfully unites two major poles of Islamic education: religious tradition and modern rationality. This paves the way for Islamic education that is more relevant and adaptive to current developments.

b. Encouraging Intellectual Openness

By emphasizing rationality and dialogue, Mukti Ali's thinking fosters a scientific, tolerant, and inclusive attitude among Muslim academics. This is crucial for creating a scientific community open to differences.

c. Upholding Scientific Ethics

Mukti Ali places morality as the foundation of scientific development. His views prevent science from becoming a destructive instrument and return it to humanitarian and divine goals.

d. Relevant to the Indonesian Context

His thinking is not merely universalistic but is adapted to Indonesia's diverse social and cultural conditions. This makes his thinking contextual and applicable (Ridho & Siregar, 2025)

2. Weaknesses

a. Limited Implementation

Although ideal, the implementation of the idea of knowledge integration still faces structural obstacles, such as the lack of educators capable of mastering two fields of knowledge (religion and general) simultaneously.

b. Abstract Paradigm

Some of Mukti Ali's concepts remain philosophical and lack concrete operational models in the curriculum and learning methodology.

c. Lack of Systemic Support

Educational reform based on knowledge integration requires consistent national policies, and during Mukti Ali's time, these were often hampered by bureaucracy and practical politics.

d. Traditional Resistance

Some conservatives believe that a scientific approach to religion could undermine sacred values. As a result, Mukti Ali's ideas often met with resistance in traditional Islamic boarding schools (Ridho & Siregar, 2025).

4. Conclusion

From the discussion of Mukti Ali's thoughts on knowledge from an Indonesian Islamic philosophical perspective, it can be concluded that Mukti Ali was an Islamic intellectual reformer who played a significant role in establishing an integrative, rational, and contextual paradigm of Islamic knowledge. He sought to eliminate the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge by asserting that all knowledge originates from Allah SWT and has religious value if used for the benefit of humanity. Mukti Ali's thoughts emphasize five main points: (1) knowledge as a divine mandate, (2) the unity of the source and purpose of knowledge, (3) rationality and openness to modern science, (4) dialogue across disciplines and religions, and (5) ethics and moral responsibility in the development of knowledge. Through this perspective, Mukti Ali offers an integrative and functional Islamic epistemology for modern human life.

In the context of education, Mukti Ali's ideas are reflected in efforts to integrate knowledge in Islamic higher education institutions (IAIN became UIN), as well as in strengthening the scientific approach to religious studies. He emphasized that Islamic education must produce individuals who are both knowledgeable and devout, critical thinkers yet moral. His thinking has provided a philosophical foundation for reforming Indonesian Islamic education to make it more adaptive to modern developments. However, Mukti Ali's thinking also faces several challenges. The implementation of knowledge integration is often hampered by limited resources, a lack of methodological preparedness, and resistance from some traditional groups. Nevertheless, his thinking remains relevant today, particularly in building an Islamic education system capable of meeting the challenges of globalization without losing its spiritual values.

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