

In Memoriam of Buya Ahmad Syafii Maarif (1935-2022)

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Professor Dr. Ahmad Syafii Maarif, or better known as Buya Syafii Maarif, was born in Nagari Cilau, Sumpur Kudus, Minangkabau, West Sumatera on the 31st of May 1935 to Ma'rifah Rauf Datuk Rajo Malayu and Fathiyah. In the very early age of approximately one and half years old, his mother had died. He, subsequently, lived with his uncle, his father's younger brother. In 1942, little Buya went to *Sekolah Rakyat* (elementary school level education institution) in his place of birth at Sumpur Kudus West Sumatera. After finishing SR (*sekolah Rakyat*) in Minangkabau, he left for Yogyakarta, a city known as the center of Muhammadiyah's development. In this city, he adamantly pursued his education at *Madrasah Muallimin* from 1950 to 1956, although he was initially rejected by this school. He learned many things there at Muhammadiyah's oldest school. "At Muallimin I was taught to fear no one but God", was one of the statements made by Buya Syafii Maarif, indicating his commitment and consistency in voicing the truth.

Syafii Maarif's formal education was mostly completed outside of his home town in West Sumatera. He completed his baccalaureate degree at Cokroaminoto University of Surakarta in 1964. Four years later, he obtained a bachelor's degree from the Institute of Teacher Training and Education (IKIP) of Yogyakarta (currently Yogyakarta State University (UNY)). In 1979, he finished his master's degree at Ohio University and obtained his doctorate from the University of Chicago in the United States in 1983. Buya Syafii completed the doctoral program at the

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NearEastern Languages and Civilizations with a dissertation titled *"Islam as the Basis of State: A Study of the Islamic Political Ideas as Reflected in the Constituent Assembly Debates in Indonesia"*. Buya Syafii's field of expertise was history, which eventually led to his professorship in the field of history at Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia. Between 1990 to 1992, he served as a visiting professor at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia).

Buya Syafii's held the position as General Chairperson of Muhammadiyah Central Executive Board during the 2000-2005 period. Prior to that, he was the Chairperson of the Islamic Practice and Research Institute from 1990 to 1995, and became the Chairperson of the Muhammadiyah Central Executive Board between 1995 and 2000. Even long before this time, he was already an active member in Muhammadiyah since he was in high school in his birth place of Sumpur Kudus, West Sumatera. He was also a teacher at a Muhammadiyah Elementary School in Wonogiri and had served at a Muhammadiyah-run school in East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. Toward the end of his life, Buya Syafii remained busy managing the construction of the integrated Madrasah Muallimin campus located in Sedayu, Bantul, Special Region of Yogyakarta. It was for this Madrasah that he spent immeasurable amount of energy, thoughts, and time.

Aside from Muhammadiyah, Buya Syafii Maarif was actively involved in Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), and he was one of the vice presidents of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) from 2000 until his death in 2022. This international organization actively promotes religion for global peace missions. Additionally, the organization also works at the national level promoting religion-based peace. Long before he was actively involved in this international organization, Buya Syafii Maarif founded the Maarif Institute for Culture and Humanity in South Jakarta in 2003. This institution is engaged in the field of Islamic civilizations, humanity, and Indonesian-ness. This institution is also a forum for Indonesians to study and disseminate Islamic thoughts that are open, tolerant, moderate, progressive, and humanist through various activities such as research, publications, as well as other discussion forums, which people from diverse religious, ethnic, and other backgrounds participate in.

Buya Syafii was also very active in delivering speeches, talking in seminars, and writing topics promoting religious models that are inclusive, tolerant, moderate, and progressive. Some of his writings in mass media reaped extremely strong responses on account of his disagreement with the advent of religious groups who acted as if they were the most righteous and the most entitled to be given God's attention for the activities they conduct in the society. His article titled *"Preman Berjubah"* (meaning Islamic robe-wearing thugs) received numerous responses from groups that disagreed with Buya Syafii Maarif's progressive thoughts. Nonetheless, he remained consistent in constantly promoting ideas of peace, inclusivity and religious moderation, particularly Islam, despite of the many contemptuous remarks and statements made against him.

While many shy away from defending the truth and civilized political practices, Buya Syafii had been at the very forefront instead. He suggested the need for "salt politics" instead of "lipstick politics", which is merely on the surface and visible but has no lasting impact on society. Lipstick politics is nothing more than symbolic politics that has no substantial roots from Islam. The Islamic community will only become froths if symbols instead of substance is prioritized. Accordingly, civilized politics with ethics is necessary, politics with substance and not just symbolic. Buya Syafii was considered at odds with many Indonesian politicians due to his thoughts that went against the current.

Buya Syafii also differed in interpreting how religious truth is presented to the public so that the Islamic community can be of benefit to the nation and the ummah. He suggested that Muslims become cadres of the nation, cadres of the ummah, and cadres of religious civil society organizations. In this case, Muhammadiyah members should not only confine themselves to being cadres of the organization or the ummah, but they should also become cadres of the nation so they can provide even more maximum contributions and greater benefit for others in life. He often made an analogy by saying that "humans should be like gold instead of pans". This is because people will seek out gold whenever and where ever it may be, while pans only sound loud but have no quality.

Buya Syafii was a role model to many. He was a very modest man in every way. While praying for Buya Syafii Maarif during a *Tahlilan Virtual* event (a virtual event reciting dhikr praising Allah), Gus Mus (Kyai Mustofa Bisri) stated that “the indications of a *waliyullah* (God’s representative on earth) are found in Buya Syafii Maarif”. Such a statement is, undoubtedly, justified. This is because Buya Syafii, in his position as a figure with extremely extensive networks and reputation, did not leverage his stature for his own interest. All the things that he could have done on his own, he would do them directly without waiting for others to help. Even in matters concerning the “kitchen” Buya Syafii Maarif would tend to them himself, such as riding his bicycle to the store to buy household necessities. Nonetheless, Buya Syafii was not a figure without any fault. It can be said that what Buya Syafii Maarif lacked was his exceedingly profound sense of modesty and truth. He not only had a deep understanding of modesty and truth; he also practiced them in a lot of things.

As shared by Hajriyanto Y Thohari, when Buya Syafii was the General Chairperson of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah, Buya told him that he was unable to get any sleep from 10 pm to 4:30 am because he had a stomachache. He withstood the pain and did not go to the nearest hospital because he was unable to go on his own. At the time, he was not alone in Muhammadiyah’s office. The driver and officers on duty were sound asleep. Buya Syafii did not wake them up because they were resting. While actually, as the organization’s General Chairperson, he could have woken the driver or anyone else up to take him to the nearest hospital so he could receive proper medical care. However, Buya Syafii did no such thing despite of the fact that he was the most important person in Muhammadiyah’s organizational structure.

Hajriyanto then asked why did Buya not wake the driver or officers on duty up to take him to the hospital? Buya Syafii replied by saying that they needed their rest. He continued by saying that the driver and officers on duty were not at fault for his stomachache. The conversation went on and Hajriyanto said, “If anything had happened to Buya while at the office we would have been at fault.” Buya Syafii responded by stating, “No one was to blame, the problem was why did I eat something that resulted in my having a stomachache.” In the morning, once the driver had woken up, Buya Syafii requested to be taken to the hospital for medical care. The driver looked terrified for not taking Buya Syafii to the hospital sooner that night. Having realized this, Buya Syafii kindly asked the driver, were you able to rest well last night? A most reassuring question and gesture. He was not a person who wanted to be served, but he strived to serve others regardless of their background and identity.

Another good example that we can learn from Buya Syafii is his subtle rejection of an offer presented to him to hold a high-ranking position. Again, this story occurred while he was in office as the General Chairperson of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah and continued after he no longer led the Islamic organization. Buya Syafii was offered to be a member of the board of directors of a huge State-Owned Enterprise (SOE). He was asked to sit in one of the strategic positions in the company with a rather large, fantastic salary. He did not have to come to the company every day. He could have been present just once a week or twice a month. He also did not have to attend scheduled meetings and the like. In short, Buya Syafii Maarif just had to be willing to become one of the members of the board of directors and all of his work would have been handled by the staff. He very politely and wisely said, “I don’t understand those matters, I will be a burden to the company instead. Thank you for your trust and your request. I cannot fulfill it.”

As a scholar, Buya Syafii taught a way of life that is not confined to the Indonesian nation and the Islamic community. The path of life he chose was always founded upon a firm principle of faith. Buya Syafii said, “If the devil were willing to work together in virtue, then we should be willing to work with him. We should be willing to work together with anyone whether they are religious or atheists.” This is a statement that not only reflects how open Buya Syafii Maarif’s mind was on the importance of networks, but it also demonstrates to a lot of people that there is no room for partiality or prejudice in making acquaintances, what should be prioritized are the benefits that can be acquired through these acquaintances.

In midmorning at approximately 10.15 am, on Friday the 27th of May 2022, the Teacher of the Nation, Buya Syafii Maarif has passed away at PKU Muhammadiyah Hospital in Gamping, Sleman, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. News of Buya Syafii's death had spread to all corners of the land. Millions of condolences to the Indonesian nation accompanied his passing. Buya Syafii's demise had left a deep sense of sorrow not only for the Muhammadiyah community, but for the Indonesian nation. Although Buya Syafii met the requirements for burial at the Kalibata Heroes Cemetery in Jakarta, on account of having received the Star of Service (*Bintang Jasa*) from the state, per his request, he was buried at the Husnul Khatimah cemetery, a Muhammadiyah-owned cemetery located in Kulonprogo, Yogyakarta. This, again, proves that Buya Syafii had no appetite for respect and honor. Farewell Buya, may God bestow upon you the best of place that is closest to His side. Al-Fatihah.