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## **CINEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP: A STUDY ON HADRATUS SHAYKH K.H. HASYIM ASY'ARI IN SANG KYAI**

Mutrofin<sup>1</sup>, Umi Nur Hanifah<sup>2</sup>, Latif Amrullah<sup>3</sup>

UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung<sup>1</sup>

UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung<sup>2</sup>

The University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom<sup>3</sup>

E-mail : [mutrofin@uinsatu.ac.id](mailto:mutrofin@uinsatu.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>,

[uminurhanifah025@gmail.com](mailto:uminurhanifah025@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>, [latif.amrullah@hud.ac.uk](mailto:latif.amrullah@hud.ac.uk)<sup>3</sup>

### **Abstract**

This research examines and analyzes the role and character of a prominent Islamic scholar in Indonesia, Hadratus Syekh Kyai Haji Hasyim Asy'ari, as portrayed in the film Sang Kiai. K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari is a figure of great influence in the history of Islam in Indonesia, particularly as the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Islamic organization in the country. The film Sang Kiai depicts his life journey and leadership role in advocating for religion, justice, and national independence. Through the analysis of the leadership characteristics portrayed in the film, this research investigates the leadership concepts embodied by Hadratus Syekh KH Hasyim Asy'ari, including spiritual leadership, wisdom-based governance, justice, and compassion for the community. The findings provide in-depth insights into the role of leadership character and the leadership concepts of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari as depicted in Sang Kiai, offering inspiration for contemporary leaders to lead with integrity, justice, empathy, and in accordance with Islamic principles. The methodology employed in this research is a qualitative method with narrative analysis, resulting in descriptive data.

*Keyword: Islamic Leadership, Hasyim Asy'ari, Religious Film Representation*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the dynamics of human life, leadership plays a central role as a key factor in shaping the direction and progress of a society. The concept of leadership has long been the subject of in-depth

studies across various disciplines, including political science, management, and religious studies. Amidst the complexity of this concept, local culture and values often serve as the foundational basis for the formation of a leader's character and role.

Leadership refers to an individual's capacity to influence others (followers) to act according to the leader's direction. A person's leadership qualities are reflected in their ability to manage situations effectively and maintain emotional balance while leading. A leader's skill in organizing and directing people within an organization is evident through their leadership approach. Not all individuals can manage and control their members effectively, as this requires strong interpersonal skills. Leadership is considered a divine gift, not possessed by everyone. It encompasses the ability to direct and organize individuals or groups in various settings such as schools, workplaces, or families (Kartono, 2009:13).

Leadership is a highly complex concept and has become a central focus in many academic disciplines, particularly in religious and cultural studies. In the religious context, leaders are often highly respected and serve as role models for their followers. One of the most prominent figures in the history of Islam in Indonesia is Hadratus Shaykh K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, a great Islamic scholar who played a crucial role in the development and defense of Islam in the country.

The film *Sang Kyai* is a cinematic work that portrays the life and struggle of Hadratus Shaykh K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari. This film not only presents a historical narrative but also highlights the leadership character of the main figure. This article provides a general overview of leadership concepts and analyzes the leadership roles and characteristics displayed by Hadratus Shaykh K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari as depicted in the film *Sang Kyai*. He is presented not only as a revered religious scholar but also as a wise and resolute leader who guided the Islamic movement with integrity and wisdom. From a social perspective, this study is relevant because leadership—especially within religious and cultural contexts—continues to play a vital role in shaping societal values and movements. The portrayal of Hasyim Asy'ari's leadership in popular media such as film reflects how historical leadership models are communicated to the public and influence contemporary perspectives on Islamic leadership.

From a literature perspective, while previous studies have explored Islamic leadership in Indonesia and the historical role of Hasyim Asy'ari, there is limited analysis focusing on his cinematic representation and how it conveys leadership traits. Most existing research concentrates on his biography, religious contributions, and political involvement, but rarely intersects with media studies or leadership character analysis through film. This presents a research gap that this study seeks to address. The aim of this article is to explore the representation of Hadratus Shaykh K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari's leadership in *Sang Kyai*, focusing on both the role he plays and the leadership traits that are emphasized. The central research question is: How does the film *Sang Kyai* depict the leadership characteristics and roles of Hasyim Asy'ari, and what values are communicated through this representation?

The working hypothesis of this study is that *Sang Kyai* presents Hasyim Asy'ari not only as a religious leader but also as a national and moral guide, emphasizing his charisma, wisdom, and strategic leadership during a time of national crisis. This hypothesis suggests that cinematic media can serve as a powerful tool in preserving and communicating historical leadership ideals in modern cultural narratives. By addressing this gap, the study contributes both theoretically and practically: theoretically, by enriching the discourse on religious leadership in media representation; and practically, by offering insights into how historical figures are translated into modern leadership models that continue to inspire Indonesian society today.

## METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to explore and interpret the phenomenon of leadership as portrayed in the film *Sang Kyai*. Rather than relying on numerical data, the research emphasizes verbal and observational insights, using descriptive data such as observed behavior, spoken dialogue, and visual elements. The primary analytical method employed is narrative analysis, which not only examines the content of messages within the film but also how these messages are conveyed through storytelling techniques. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the leadership roles and traits of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, placing them

within a broader cultural and historical context. The research design centers on interpreting symbolic and cultural meanings embedded in the film's narrative, making qualitative narrative analysis particularly appropriate.

The unit of analysis includes various narrative elements such as characters, dialogues, plot structures, and visual cues. A purposive sampling method is used to select specific scenes that clearly reflect leadership values and characteristics, ensuring that data gathered is rich in meaning and directly relevant to the research questions. The researcher serves as the main instrument for data collection, supported by analytical frameworks from film and narrative studies.

Data is collected through detailed observation, note-taking, and transcription of significant scenes, with credibility ensured through repeated viewing and cross-referencing with historical literature on Hasyim Asy'ari. Although traditional tools like surveys are not used, the study maintains reliability through systematic coding and thematic categorization. The research follows a structured procedure: beginning with planning and film selection, proceeding to intensive data collection, followed by thematic analysis, and ending with the formulation of interpretive findings.

Thematic analysis is chosen for its effectiveness in identifying recurring themes such as leadership, wisdom, charisma, religious authority, and resistance. These themes are interpreted using relevant leadership theories and cultural frameworks. This methodological structure not only provides in-depth insights into the leadership figure of Hasyim Asy'ari but also ensures academic rigor, coherence, and transparency throughout the research process.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari Biography**

K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari stands as a pivotal figure in the history of Islam in Indonesia, whose life and legacy reflect unwavering dedication to religious education, national struggle, and the propagation of Islamic values. Born on March 10, 1871, in Gedang Village, Rembang, Central Java, he came from a deeply religious family, with his father, Kyai Asy'ari, being a respected Islamic scholar in the region (Ahmad Muhibbin, 2010:24). From a young age, Hasyim Asy'ari

exhibited a profound interest in religious studies, beginning his education under his father's tutelage and continuing at various prominent pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) in Central Java. His scholarly journey eventually led him to the Pesantren Tebuireng in Jombang, where he further immersed himself in Islamic sciences such as tafsir, hadith, and fiqh. Known for his humility and intellectual brilliance, he gained the respect of both peers and scholars.

The research findings reveal that *Sang Kyai* successfully encapsulates the essential leadership traits of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari through a carefully constructed narrative. His portrayal in the film emphasizes his moral authority, spiritual depth, and unwavering commitment to education and national independence. The narrative presents him not only as a religious figure but as a national leader who mobilized Islamic communities against colonial oppression. This representation aligns with historical records of his key role in founding Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in 1926, a major Islamic organization in Indonesia (Ahmad Muhibbin, 2010:38). Through NU, Hasyim Asy'ari championed the cause of Islamic moderation, pluralism, and the preservation of national unity under the framework of the Republic of Indonesia.

In interpreting these findings, the film's representation contributes significantly to understanding the practical embodiment of moderate Islamic leadership. Thematically, the narrative reinforces key concepts such as religious tolerance, national identity, and charismatic leadership rooted in traditional pesantren culture. These themes directly answer the research question on how the film portrays Hasyim Asy'ari's leadership and underline the relevance of religious figures in shaping social and political movements in Indonesia.

When compared to previous studies on Islamic leadership in Indonesia, this study offers a unique contribution by integrating film analysis with historical interpretation. While earlier works have discussed Hasyim Asy'ari's theological thought and organizational role in NU, few have examined his cinematic portrayal as a medium of cultural memory and public pedagogy. This presents a theoretical expansion by linking leadership theory with narrative representation in popular media.



The implications of this study are twofold. Theoretically, it suggests that religious leadership can be effectively communicated and preserved through cinematic narratives, offering an alternative lens for interpreting the legacies of Islamic scholars. Practically, the findings highlight the potential of film as an educational tool to instill values of tolerance, integrity, and national unity among younger generations. Furthermore, the film functions as a bridge between historical scholarship and public understanding, making complex religious and political figures more accessible to broader audiences.

The results are systematically presented through key themes identified in the narrative: wisdom, resistance, devotion to education, and inclusive leadership. These findings are supported by narrative scenes, character interactions, and dialogue analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding of how Hasyim Asy'ari's leadership is conveyed cinematically. In sum, the study enhances the broader discourse on Islamic leadership by demonstrating how visual storytelling can enrich the appreciation of religious history and moral leadership in Indonesia.

### **Overview of the Film *Sang Kyai***

*Sang Kyai* is an Indonesian historical drama released in 2013, directed by Rako Prijanto and produced by Miles Films in collaboration with Falcon Pictures. The film narrates the life story of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, the esteemed founder of *Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)*, one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia (Khanif & Akhmad, 2019:21). Set in early 20th-century Java during the Dutch colonial period, the film captures a critical era in Indonesian history marked by religious awakening and anti-colonial resistance.

The narrative begins with the childhood of Hasyim Asy'ari in a devout Muslim family in a small Javanese village. From an early age, he demonstrated a strong interest in Islamic knowledge. His intellectual journey led him through various pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) where he studied under renowned scholars, including the character of Mbah Kakung, a wise elder who serves as his mentor and spiritual guide. Through these experiences, the film illustrates Hasyim Asy'ari's deep commitment to religious learning and moral integrity.

As the film progresses, it portrays the growing socio-political challenges faced by the Muslim community under Dutch colonial rule. Witnessing the oppression endured by his people, Hasyim Asy'ari feels a strong spiritual and moral calling to advocate for their rights and dignity. In response, he and other Islamic scholars establish *Nahdlatul Ulama*—a movement dedicated to safeguarding Islamic values, promoting education, and striving for social justice and national independence.

The formation of NU, however, is shown to be fraught with internal and external challenges. Resistance from colonial authorities and ideological disagreements within society test the resolve of Hasyim Asy'ari and his companions. Yet, through steadfast faith, perseverance, and leadership, they succeed in building NU into a major force in Indonesian Islamic life and a vital contributor to the nation's broader struggle for independence.

*Sang Kyai* is more than a biographical retelling—it is a cinematic tribute to the values of honesty, justice, and religious devotion. The film powerfully conveys the spirit of resistance and the ethical principles that guided Hasyim Asy'ari's mission. With compelling performances and visually rich cinematography, the film engages viewers not just emotionally but intellectually, encouraging reflection on the enduring significance of Islamic leadership, national identity, and spiritual resilience.

Importantly, the film serves as an educational medium that introduces younger generations to the pivotal role religious figures played in Indonesia's independence movement. It bridges historical reality and cinematic storytelling, making it both a cultural artifact and a source of inspiration. By highlighting the life of one of Indonesia's most influential religious leaders, *Sang Kyai* contributes to the preservation of national memory and the promotion of moderate Islamic thought in the modern era.

### **The Leadership Character of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari in the Film *Sang Kyai***

In Islamic thought, leadership is not merely a position of authority but a moral responsibility grounded in the values of faith, justice, and accountability. The Prophet Muhammad

(peace be upon him) is regarded as the ideal model of leadership in Islam, whose qualities such as integrity (*shiddiq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), eloquence (*tabligh*), and intelligence (*fathanah*) are essential benchmarks for Muslim leaders. The portrayal of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari in the film *Sang Kyai* closely mirrors these prophetic attributes, offering a compelling cinematic depiction of Islamic leadership contextualized within Indonesia's colonial past.

Through its narrative arc, *Sang Kyai* illustrates how Hasyim Asy'ari's leadership transcends institutional boundaries, merging religious authority with social activism. His role as the head of Pesantren Tebuireng not only involved educational leadership but also extended into the political and national spheres, especially in resisting both Dutch and Japanese colonial forces. The film captures his moral clarity and consistency, especially in moments where economic hardship, oppression, or ethical dilemmas arise. For example, the scene where he accepts a student from a poor family despite financial limitations exemplifies his compassionate justice, reflecting the *shiddiq* quality—truthfulness and fairness regardless of social status.

Further, his commitment to fulfilling promises and duties even after enduring physical torture under Japanese rule reveals his sense of *amanah*, or trustworthiness. The film shows him fulfilling his role as a wedding guardian, reinforcing the notion that leadership in Islam demands not only public courage but also personal reliability and integrity. His teaching style, laden with wisdom and moral instruction, reflects the *tabligh* trait—the duty of a leader to convey truth and educate others. His communication is not authoritarian but nurturing, grounded in scriptural references and life experiences that resonate with his community.

Another significant moment in the film occurs when Hasyim Asy'ari chooses to participate in agricultural labor despite his prestigious position. His explanation, that working with farmers allows him to better appreciate the value of food and human effort, illustrates not only humility but also *fathanah*—strategic intelligence and empathy that deepens his relationship with his followers. The decision to physically engage in the struggles of his people strengthens his moral legitimacy and reflects an understanding of leadership as service, not superiority.



In addition to these prophetic traits, the film vividly captures Hasyim Asy'ari's courage and resilience. His firm stance against colonial oppression, even under threat of imprisonment and violence, portrays a leader who places principles above personal safety. This bravery is not depicted as mere heroism, but as a deeply spiritual conviction rooted in the Islamic obligation to uphold truth and justice. The film shows him not only as a scholar but also as a reformer who mobilized religious communities to engage in the struggle for independence, making his leadership both spiritually grounded and politically significant.

From a broader perspective, the depiction of leadership in *Sang Kyai* aligns with the Islamic conceptual framework that views the leader (*imam*) as someone who guides others not merely through command but through moral example. Leadership, in this sense, is less about authority and more about influence, trust, and ethical stewardship. The film's narrative constructs a vision of Islamic leadership that is highly relevant to contemporary socio-political contexts, where ethical crisis and distrust in leadership are prevalent.

Moreover, the character of Hasyim Asy'ari in the film offers a reflective lens for the audience—particularly in a modern Indonesian society that continues to grapple with questions of moral leadership, religious identity, and national unity. His life story, as dramatized in the film, serves as both a historical account and a normative guide, reminding viewers that Islamic leadership is attainable and relevant not only to scholars or political figures but to every individual entrusted with responsibility, whether in family, community, or nation.

This cinematic representation also bridges historical scholarship with cultural transmission. While many studies address Hasyim Asy'ari's theological contributions and institutional legacy, *Sang Kyai* contributes uniquely by translating these qualities into a narrative that is both accessible and emotionally resonant. It functions as an educational tool and a medium of national memory, preserving and promoting the values of leadership grounded in Islamic ethics and Indonesian patriotism.

In conclusion, the leadership character of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, as portrayed in *Sang Kyai*, offers a multidimensional model of Islamic leadership that integrates religious devotion,

moral courage, and civic responsibility. His leadership is neither passive nor authoritarian but active, ethical, and compassionate. The film demonstrates that Islamic leadership is not a static concept but a dynamic moral practice, shaped by context, fortified by values, and lived through actions. As such, the figure of Hasyim Asy'ari in *Sang Kyai* becomes a timeless reference not only for political or religious leaders but for every individual striving to lead with integrity and faith

## CONCLUSION

The key finding of this study is that the leadership of Hadratus Syekh K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, as portrayed in the film *Sang Kiai*, reflects the ideal characteristics of Islamic leadership, which are rooted in prophetic values such as *shiddiq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (ability to convey the truth), and *fathanah* (wisdom). The film successfully conveys that strong spiritual leadership has an impact not only within the realm of the pesantren but also in guiding the broader community's struggle against colonialism. K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari is depicted as a transformative leader who not only upholds Islamic values but also takes firm action against social and political injustices.

From a scholarly perspective, this research contributes new insights into the representation of Islamic leadership in popular media, particularly within the context of Indonesian historical cinema. The analysis presents a renewal in leadership studies by integrating narrative and religious approaches, while also enriching the literature on how the leadership of traditional Islamic scholars is interpreted through film. This opens the door for a more integrated academic framework that connects Islamic studies, character education, and media studies. The findings emphasize the importance of film as an educational medium for conveying Islamic leadership values to a broader audience, especially younger generations.

However, this study is limited in scope as it focuses solely on one film as the primary data source, making the interpretation heavily reliant on the narrative and visual construction of *Sang Kiai*. This limitation highlights the need for further research that compares representations of leadership across other Islamic-themed films or adopts an interdisciplinary approach involving

history, sociology, and visual communication. Future studies could also broaden the scope by including audience responses or public perceptions of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari as portrayed in the film, in order to assess the impact of such representations on contemporary understandings of Islamic leadership.

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