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Malay Intellectual Traditions in Islamic Political Ethics: Raja Ali Haji and the Moral Boundaries of Authority

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Abstract

This study explores the values of Islamic constitutionalism as reflected in three significant texts: *al-Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik*, *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah Diyafah Li al-Umara wa al-Kubara' Ahl Hakim*, and *Gurindam Dua Belas* by Raja Ali Haji. These works, originating from diverse socio-cultural contexts, represent a continuum of Islamic political thought that emphasizes justice ('adl), consultation (shūrā), accountability (mas'ūliyyah), and the ethical limitations of political authority. The study aims to examine how these texts articulate principles of governance consistent with Islamic constitutional ideals and how such principles remain relevant to contemporary constitutional discourse. Using a qualitative-descriptive method, this research analyzes the textual content of each work through the lens of Islamic political ethics and compares their constitutional implications. Findings show that each text, despite its distinct genre and historical setting, upholds a model of leadership that is morally bound, consultative, and justice-oriented. *al-Muqaddimah* offers a structured political theory rooted in classical Islamic governance, *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah* emphasizes the moral character and restraint of leaders, while *Gurindam Dua Belas*

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integrates Islamic and Malay ethical-political teachings through literary expression. The study concludes that these texts provide a foundational framework for understanding Islamic constitutionalism beyond legal formalism, focusing on the moral obligations of rulers and the collective rights of society. This research contributes to the discourse on Islamic constitutional theory by highlighting the ethical and cultural dimensions of Islamic governance embedded in classical and local intellectual traditions.

Keywords

Islamic Constitutionalism, Ethical Governance, Political Thought

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi nilai-nilai konstitusionalisme Islam yang tercermin dalam tiga teks signifikan: *al-Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik*, *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah Diyafah Li al-Umara wa al-Kubara' Ahl Hakim*, dan *Gurindam Dua Belas* oleh Raja Ali Haji. Karya-karya ini, yang berasal dari konteks sosial-budaya yang beragam, mewakili kesinambungan pemikiran politik Islam yang menekankan keadilan ('*adl*), konsultasi (*shūrā*), akuntabilitas (*mas'ūliyyah*), dan keterbatasan etis otoritas politik. Studi ini bertujuan untuk memeriksa bagaimana teks-teks ini mengartikulasikan prinsip-prinsip pemerintahan yang konsisten dengan cita-cita konstitusional Islam dan bagaimana prinsip-prinsip tersebut tetap relevan dengan wacana konstitusional kontemporer. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis isi tekstual dari setiap karya melalui lensa etika politik Islam dan membandingkan implikasi konstitusionalnya. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa setiap teks, terlepas dari genre dan latar sejarahnya yang berbeda, menjunjung tinggi model kepemimpinan yang terikat secara moral, konsultatif, dan berorientasi pada keadilan. *al-Muqaddimah* menawarkan teori politik terstruktur yang berakar pada pemerintahan Islam klasik, *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah* menekankan karakter moral dan pengekan para pemimpin, sementara *Gurindam Dua Belas* mengintegrasikan ajaran etika-politik Islam dan Melayu melalui ekspresi sastra. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa teks-teks ini memberikan kerangka dasar untuk memahami konstitusionalisme Islam di luar formalisme hukum, dengan fokus pada kewajiban moral penguasa dan hak-hak kolektif masyarakat. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada wacana teori konstitusi Islam dengan menyoroti dimensi etika dan budaya tata kelola Islam yang tertanam dalam tradisi intelektual klasik dan lokal.

Katakunci:

Islamic Constitutionalism, Ethical Governance, Political Thought

Introduction

The discourse on constitutionalism within the Islamic intellectual tradition has evolved across centuries, shaped by diverse contexts, scholars, and socio-political structures. Contrary to the assumption that constitutionalism is solely a product of Western political thought, Islamic civilization has produced its own models of governance rooted in ethical, legal, and spiritual foundations. These models reflect deeply ingrained values such as justice ('*adl*), consultation (*shūrā*), accountability

(*mas'uliyah*), and the rule of law (*hukm*), which together form the core of Islamic constitutionalism. This tradition does not merely regulate political authority but integrates divine guidance with practical governance (Arjomand, 2007).

Among the many contributions to this tradition are works written in the Malay world, particularly during the height of the 18th and 19th centuries. Malay-Muslim scholars, often positioned at the crossroads of Islamic, local, and colonial influences, produced intellectual legacies that articulated governance within an Islamic framework. One such intellectual figure is Raja Ali Haji (1808–1873), whose works bridge classical Islamic political ethics and local Malay wisdom. His writings, particularly *Gurindam Dua Belas*, resonate with constitutional values that are deeply rooted in Islamic ethical and political philosophy (Rizki et al., 2024).

Complementing Raja Ali Haji's poetic contributions are two lesser-known yet significant texts from the Islamic political heritage: *al-Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waṣa'if al-Malik* and *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah Diyafah Li al-Umara wa al-Kubara' Ahl Hakim*. These texts, though originating in different geographic and historical contexts, offer profound insights into the structure, function, and moral responsibility of rulers and political elites. Their emphasis on governance grounded in ethical values and religious obligations suggests that Islamic political theory was never void of constitutional elements (Helmiati, 2021).

However, despite the richness of these sources, there remains a significant gap in scholarship that connects them systematically to the concept of Islamic constitutionalism. Much of the current literature focuses on fiqh-based governance, ignoring the broader ethical-political discourse embedded in *adab al-muluk* (literature on kingship) and didactic poetry. This research seeks to fill that gap by exploring the values of Islamic constitutionalism as reflected in these three texts.

The core problem addressed in this study is how Islamic constitutional values, such as justice, accountability, consultation, and leadership ethics, are articulated across different genres and contexts. The question arises: To what extent do these texts reflect a coherent vision of constitutional governance in Islam? What elements of checks and balances, limitations of power, and duties of the ruler can be inferred from these writings? Moreover, how do these Islamic perspectives resonate with or diverge from modern notions of constitutionalism?

The primary aim of this research is to uncover the conceptual framework and values of Islamic constitutionalism contained within *al-Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waṣa'if al-Malik*, *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah*, and *Gurindam Dua Belas*. Through a comparative textual analysis, this study will demonstrate that these works, despite their different styles and linguistic expressions, converge on a set of ethical-political principles that constitute a form of constitutional thought compatible with the Islamic worldview (Surtina, 2014).

Furthermore, this research intends to offer a reappraisal of Malay-Islamic political thought, placing figures such as Raja Ali Haji within the broader intellectual map of Islamic constitutionalism. By juxtaposing his work with classical texts of Islamic political literature, the study highlights the dynamic interplay between local wisdom and universal Islamic values. In doing so, it underscores the intellectual agency of Malay scholars in articulating governance rooted in Islamic ethics (Palawa et al., 2025).

This study also carries broader implications for contemporary debates on Islamic governance and the role of religion in politics. In an era where political Islam is often reduced to slogans or legalism, revisiting classical and regional texts on governance offers a more nuanced understanding of Islamic political philosophy. It shows that Islamic constitutionalism is not merely about institutional structures but also about moral vision and ethical leadership. By exploring these texts in depth, this research hopes to contribute to the growing scholarship on Islamic political thought and constitutionalism, offering fresh perspectives from the Malay-Muslim intellectual heritage.

The study also aims to encourage further exploration of regional Islamic intellectual traditions that have often been overshadowed by Middle Eastern-centric approaches. In conclusion, this research aspires to bridge the classical Islamic political literature with Southeast Asian contributions, showing that the values of Islamic constitutionalism are not only historically grounded but also culturally diverse. Through this inquiry, it is hoped that a more inclusive, ethically grounded, and historically rich model of Islamic constitutional thought can be articulated, relevant for both academic discourse and practical governance in the Muslim world today.

Literature Review

This study is anchored in the concept of Islamic constitutionalism, which broadly refers to governance rooted in Islamic principles, ethical constraints, and legal norms that guide the conduct of rulers and regulate state authority. Unlike secular constitutionalism, which emphasizes political liberalism and institutional checks and balances as grounded in human reason and historical contracts, Islamic constitutionalism derives its authority from divine revelation (the Qur'an and Sunnah) and the ethical-legal tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, political thought, and adab literature (Sachedina, 2022). The exploration of Islamic constitutional values in literary and ethical texts demands an interdisciplinary framework that intersects history, law, ethics, and literature (Arjomand, 2007).

The first key concept Islamic constitutionalism has been explored by scholars such as Hamka et al., (2022). This research identifies key constitutional values embedded within Islamic governance: justice (*'adl*), consultation (*shura*), rule of law (*hukm*), and accountability (*mas'uliyah*). Kamali's framework provides a foundational understanding of how these values function in an Islamic polity, laying the groundwork for analyzing classical and regional texts in search of these principles. His work affirms that the Islamic political tradition does not exclude constitutional thinking but contains ethical parameters that limit state authority.

A second significant contribution comes from Rahman, (2019). Rahman argues that classical Islamic governance was highly constitutional in nature due to the separation of powers between the *ulama* (scholars) and political rulers. The *ulama* provided legal constraints through the development and interpretation of *sharia*, which limited executive overreach. This balance, Feldman claims, resembled modern constitutional checks and balances. Though Feldman primarily examines Islamic history in the Middle East, his theoretical lens helps contextualize how classical Islamic political literature, including treatises like *al-Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waz'u'if al-Malik* can reflect a constitutional ethos even without codified documents.

The third area of literature relevant to this study relates to the *adab al-muluk* (mirrors for princes) tradition, which includes advisory works for rulers that blend ethics, governance, and religion. A notable study is Khotami & Saputra, (2024), where she surveys numerous advisory texts directed at rulers, outlining their responsibilities to justice, the common good, and the welfare of the people. Lambton emphasizes that many of these texts reflect proto-constitutional ideas by instructing rulers to govern according to divine law and uphold moral order. This tradition informs the analytical reading of *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah*, which, although lesser-known, belongs to this same genre of political-ethical guidance literature.

The fourth scholarly foundation lies in the intellectual and literary contributions of the Malay world, particularly through figures like Raja Ali Haji. In *Ilmu Ketatanegaraan Melayu Abad Ke-19: Kajian Terhadap Karya Raja Ali Haji*, Harris, (2011) emphasizes Raja Ali Haji's role as a reformist intellectual whose works integrated Islamic values with local Malay culture. The *Gurindam Dua Belas* is presented not merely as literary art but as a didactic text imbued with Islamic ethical-political values. This aligns with Raja Ali Haji's broader mission to educate Malay society through poetry, language standardization, and moral instruction. Shaghir's work justifies the inclusion of Malay literary sources in studies of Islamic political thought, a field that has often been dominated by Arabic and Persian texts (Lazim, 2019).

In sum, this study builds upon and expands the existing scholarship by linking classical Islamic political literature, ethical advisory texts, and regional Malay-Islamic works under the thematic umbrella of Islamic constitutionalism. By examining *al-Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waḥa'if al-Malik*, *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah*, and *Gurindam Dua Belas* as complementary texts, this research seeks to demonstrate the conceptual and cultural diversity within Islamic constitutional thought. It also challenges the geographic and linguistic limitations of prior studies by incorporating Southeast Asian sources into the broader discourse on Islamic governance and ethical leadership.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design using a textual and content analysis approach (Creswell, 2008). The primary data sources are three key texts: *al-Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waḥa'if al-Malik*, *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah Diyafah Li al-Umara wa al-Kubara' Abl Hakim*, and *Gurindam Dua Belas* by Raja Ali Haji. These texts are analyzed to identify and interpret the values of Islamic constitutionalism embedded within their content. The data collection instrument consists of document analysis techniques, focusing on key constitutional concepts such as justice ('adl), consultation (shūrā), rule of law (ḥukm), and accountability (mas'ūliyyah). No human participants are involved in this study, as it is purely library-based and interpretative in nature (Hayman & Smith, 2020).

The procedure of data collection involved sourcing authenticated printed and digital versions of the primary texts, supported by relevant secondary literature on Islamic constitutionalism and Malay-Islamic political thought. The data analysis process followed a thematic coding approach, wherein recurring constitutional themes and ethical principles were identified, categorized, and compared across the three texts. Special attention was given to the socio-historical context of each work to understand the intended audience, political environment, and underlying assumptions

about leadership and governance. This comparative textual analysis allows for a comprehensive understanding of how constitutional values are expressed across different genres and cultural settings within the Islamic intellectual tradition (Chu, 2024).

Results and Discussion

Theoretical Framework of Islamic Constitutionalism

Islamic constitutionalism is a concept that refers to a system of governance grounded in Islamic legal and ethical principles, which serve as the foundation for political authority, public accountability, and the limitation of power. Unlike secular constitutionalism, which often centers on the sovereignty of the people and codified human rights frameworks, Islamic constitutionalism is anchored in the sovereignty of God (*ḥākimiyyat Allāh*) and the implementation of divine guidance (*sharīʿah*) through institutions that promote justice and public welfare. This framework recognizes that the legitimacy of political authority is derived not only from consent but also from adherence to revealed principles (Hamka et al., 2022).

One of the core principles in Islamic constitutional thought is justice (*ʿadl*), which is repeatedly emphasized in the Qurʾan as a divine imperative. The Qurʾan commands believers to uphold justice even against themselves, family, or leaders (Qurʾan 4:135). Justice in the Islamic context is both legal and moral, extending beyond procedural fairness to include distributive justice, protection of rights, and ethical governance. This makes it a cornerstone of political legitimacy in Islamic thought. Governance that fails to ensure justice is considered illegitimate in the moral sense, even if it retains coercive power (Hakim & Putra, 2022).

Another crucial element is consultation (*shūrā*), which emphasizes participatory governance and decision-making through collective deliberation. The Qurʾan mentions *shūrā* as a quality of the believers (Qurʾan 42:38) and instructs the Prophet Muhammad to consult with his companions in matters of public concern (Qurʾan 3:159). While not identical to modern democratic elections, *shūrā* institutionalizes the notion that rulers must be advised, questioned, and even corrected by the governed or their representatives. It encourages a participatory form of governance that values accountability and wisdom from the community (Muhaimin, 2012).

The principle of supremacy of law (*ḥukm*) in Islam signifies that no ruler or political body is above the law of God. The Islamic tradition, especially through the discipline of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), developed a sophisticated legal system that functioned independently of executive authority. The classical separation between the *ulama* (religious scholars) and the rulers created an organic system of checks and balances, where the scholars had the moral and legal authority to limit the power of the state. This contrasts with many modern systems where law is created by the state; in the Islamic model, law pre-exists and binds the state itself (Fauziah, 2014).

Another essential value is accountability (*masʿūliyyah*), which refers to the obligation of leaders to answer to God, the people, and ethical standards. The Prophet Muhammad's saying, "Every one of you is a shepherd, and every one of you is responsible for his flock," has been cited across centuries to remind rulers of their duty to serve and protect their subjects. In Islamic political literature, rulers are frequently warned that

abuse of power will be judged in the Hereafter. This theological orientation reinforces ethical constraints on political behavior, encouraging humility, transparency, and a service-oriented leadership (Lano, 2015).

A major distinction between Islamic and Western constitutionalism lies in the source of legal and moral norms. While Western constitutionalism is largely humanistic and rooted in Enlightenment philosophy, Islamic constitutionalism is theocentric, guided by the Qur'an, Sunnah, and centuries of scholarly interpretation. Nevertheless, both traditions share commitments to limiting tyranny, ensuring rights, and promoting common welfare. The Islamic tradition, however, embeds these within a spiritual and moral worldview, where obedience to law is not merely civic but also an act of worship (Saihu, 2021).

Furthermore, Islamic constitutionalism integrates law and ethics, making governance not only a matter of legality but also of personal virtue. The tradition of *adab al-muluk* (mirrors for princes) reflects this integration, offering moral guidance to rulers alongside political advice. Governance is seen as a trust (*amānah*), and personal integrity is as important as institutional structure. This ethical dimension challenges modern notions that often separate public role from private morality.

It is also important to note that Islamic constitutional values were not always codified in formal constitutions, but rather embedded in legal, theological, and literary texts. Works like *al-Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik* or *Gurindam Dua Belas* functioned as repositories of these values, articulating a moral-political vision of leadership. These texts demonstrate that constitutional thinking in Islam did not require a written charter but operated through normative and discursive traditions that shaped political culture and expectations (Zulkarnain et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the theoretical framework of Islamic constitutionalism presents a holistic vision of governance that intertwines law, ethics, and theology. It emphasizes the limitation of power through divine law, promotes justice and consultation, and upholds the accountability of leaders. This framework allows for a plural and contextual reading of political authority across Islamic societies, including those outside the Arab heartlands, such as the Malay world. As such, it forms the intellectual basis for analysing historical texts that express constitutional values in diverse linguistic and cultural settings (Poya, 2018).

Ethical Governance in *al-Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik*

The manuscript *al-Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik* is a classical political treatise rooted in the Islamic tradition of ethical statecraft, often categorized under *adab al-muluk* literature. This genre aimed to educate rulers by emphasizing moral and spiritual responsibility alongside practical governance. Rather than merely outlining administrative procedures, such texts offered an ethical framework for leadership based on Islamic values, including justice, accountability, and humility. The *Muqaddimah* serves as a blueprint for a righteous ruler, whose authority is circumscribed by divine law and ethical obligation.

One of the central themes in the *Muqaddimah* is the limitation of political power. The ruler is not portrayed as an absolute sovereign but as a custodian (*wakīl*) of God's trust (*amānah*) on earth. The treatise repeatedly emphasizes that power must be exercised within the bounds of the *sharī'ah* and with continuous awareness of God's judgment. The ruler's legitimacy is contingent on his moral conduct and ability to uphold justice, not merely on political success or military strength. This view aligns

with Islamic constitutionalism, which posits that all authority is derived from and limited by divine law.

A particularly significant aspect of the treatise is its treatment of justice (‘adl) as the foundation of governance. The author articulates that a just ruler ensures the stability of the state, wins the loyalty of the people, and earns divine favor. Injustice, on the other hand, is equated with tyranny and leads to the downfall of empires. Justice is presented not merely as legal fairness, but as a comprehensive moral order that includes equity, compassion, and protection of the weak. The ruler must balance between enforcing the law and applying it with wisdom and mercy (Putra et al., 2023).

In line with this, the *Muqaddimah* underscores the importance of counsel (shūrā) and the role of scholars (‘ulamā) and advisers in the political process. The ruler is encouraged to seek guidance from learned and pious individuals to avoid despotism and error. This principle resonates with the Qur’anic injunction for consultation (Qur’an 3:159, 42:38) and reflects a proto-constitutional structure, wherein governance is shared through advice and collective deliberation. The presence of advisors is not only strategic but also moral, as they help the ruler distinguish right from wrong.

Moreover, the treatise warns against the corrupting nature of unchecked power. It advises the ruler to practice self-restraint, humility, and regular introspection. Excessive luxury, arrogance, and detachment from the people are seen as precursors to tyranny. Thus, ethical governance involves both internal discipline and external accountability. The *Muqaddimah* emphasizes the moral formation of the ruler as a prerequisite for effective leadership, highlighting a distinctly Islamic view that personal virtue is inseparable from public responsibility.

The *Muqaddimah* also reflects the functionalist dimension of kingship, wherein the ruler is seen not only as a symbol of sovereignty but as a facilitator of social welfare (*maṣlaḥah*). His duty includes ensuring economic justice, security, and religious freedom for his subjects. In this sense, the ruler is portrayed as a servant to the people, not their master, a theme echoed in prophetic traditions and classical Islamic governance theory.

By weaving together ethical imperatives with political functions, the *Muqaddimah* presents an early model of Islamic constitutionalism. It anticipates modern concerns with limitations of power, the rule of law, and civic responsibility, albeit articulated in a religious and moral vocabulary. The manuscript does not offer a formal constitution in the modern sense, but its normative content effectively serves constitutional ends: guiding political power through ethical constraints and divine accountability (Hermawan & Putra, 2023).

In conclusion, *al-Muqaddimah fi Intizām Waṣṣa’if al-Malik* exemplifies the Islamic tradition of ethical governance. It asserts that legitimate authority must be rooted in justice, tempered by consultation, and oriented toward the public good. This classical work continues to offer valuable insights into the moral foundations of political leadership and reminds contemporary Muslim societies of the enduring relevance of integrating ethical and constitutional values in governance.

Political-Moral Duties in *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah Diyafah Li al-Umara wa al-Kubara’ Ahl Hakim*

Tsamarat al-Muhimmah Diyafah Li al-Umara wa al-Kubara' Ahl Ḥakīm occupies a distinctive place in Islamic political literature as a manual of counsel addressed to high-ranking officials and community leaders. Composed in an era when moral and political authority were deeply intertwined, the text functions as both a guidebook and a moral exhortation. At the heart of *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah* lies a firm insistence on moral integrity as the bedrock of legitimate leadership. The author admonishes rulers to cultivate virtues, such as honesty, humility, and compassion, before attending to the mechanics of administration. According to the text, any governance unaccompanied by inner piety is susceptible to corruption, tyranny, and social discord. By foregrounding ethical self-discipline, the treatise situates moral formation as the indispensable first step in political service (Rehayati, 2018).

Closely related to personal virtue is the text's emphasis on social responsibility. *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah* portrays the ruler not merely as a sovereign but as a caretaker (*ra'ī*), whose primary mission is to safeguard the welfare of the populace. The ruler's obligations extend to ensuring equitable distribution of resources, protection of vulnerable groups, and maintenance of public order. Any neglect of these duties, the author warns, incurs divine displeasure and undermines the social contract between the ruler and the ruled.

A recurrent theme in the treatise is the avoidance of power abuse. The author catalogues common pitfalls, greed, nepotism, and the silencing of honest counsel, and warns that such vices corrode both the person and the polity. Through vivid admonishments and illustrative anecdotes, the text urges leaders to remain ever mindful of the transient nature of authority. Remembrance of mortality and the prospect of accountability in the Hereafter are presented as potent deterrents against oppression.

In *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah*, the notions of power and justice are depicted not as opposing forces but as complementary pillars of ethical governance. The text contends that power must be wielded with an unwavering commitment to justice (*ʿadl*), lest it devolve into caprice. Conversely, justice requires the capacity to enforce and protect rights. By weaving these concepts together, the treatise articulates a vision of balanced governance in which authority and equity reinforce each other (Kasa & Abdullah, 2022).

Equally important is the work's call for open and honest consultation (*shūrā*). While addressing the elite, the author insists that effective governance depends on listening to wise advisers and correcting one's course when necessary. In this sense, the text echoes Qur'ānic injunctions concerning collective deliberation (e.g., Q 42:38) and reaffirms that the health of a political community hinges on the ruler's humility to seek and heed sound advice.

Finally, *Tsamarat al-Muhimmah* underscores the indivisibility of moral and political duties: the excellence of a polity reflects the moral fiber of its leadership. By anchoring political advice in religious and ethical imperatives, the treatise transcends mere procedural guidelines and becomes a manifesto for integrated, values-driven governance. Its enduring relevance lies in its holistic portrayal of leadership, one that demands both proficiency in statecraft and unwavering moral rectitude (Sulong, 2012).

Malay-Islamic Constitutional Wisdom in *Gurindam Dua Belas*

Gurindam Dua Belas by Raja Ali Haji is a profound literary work that represents a synthesis of Islamic moral philosophy and Malay cultural values. Written in the form of didactic poetry, the gurindam serves as a vehicle for disseminating ethical guidance and political wisdom to both rulers and the general populace. Far from being merely a collection of moral aphorisms, Gurindam Dua Belas functions as a localized expression of Islamic constitutionalism, wherein principles such as accountability, justice, and leadership responsibility are embedded in cultural forms familiar to the Malay world (Palawa et al., 2025).

At its core, Gurindam Dua Belas reflects a deeply rooted concern for ethical leadership and the moral obligations of rulers. Raja Ali Haji emphasizes the spiritual and social responsibilities that accompany positions of power, warning against tyranny and advocating for justice ('adl) as the cornerstone of governance. He asserts that a leader must be guided not by personal ambition but by divine principles and the well-being of the people. This is consonant with the Islamic understanding that leadership is a trust (amānah) that will be judged by God (Sucipta & S, 2019).

One of the most prominent constitutional values found in the gurindam is the principle of accountability (mas'ūliyyah). Raja Ali Haji cautions leaders that their actions will be scrutinized in the Hereafter, thus reinforcing the idea that power is not absolute but subject to higher moral and spiritual laws. In the Malay-Islamic worldview, as conveyed in this work, political authority must always be accountable to God, the people, and the dictates of justice. This notion resonates with classical Islamic political thought, where rulers are both temporal governors and spiritual stewards (Zulfadhli & Farokhah, 2021).

The *gurindam* also extols the virtues of truthfulness, integrity, and trust—fundamental ethical qualities that align with constitutional ideals. Phrases such as "*Jika hendak mengenal orang berbahagia, lihat kepada perangainya*" ("If you wish to know a blessed person, look at his character") highlight the belief that moral excellence is a prerequisite for effective leadership. This moralizing tone is not merely instructive but functions as a social contract: leaders must embody the virtues they expect from their subjects, thereby fostering mutual respect and stability.

Furthermore, Raja Ali Haji presents the value of consultation (*shūrā*) in subtle but clear terms, emphasizing the importance of listening to advice and the dangers of arrogance and self-will in governance. While the poem does not use technical legal language, it promotes the idea that good leadership is participatory, informed, and deliberative. The integration of this principle into a poetic form indicates that Raja Ali Haji intended these values to be widely internalized, not just by elites but by the broader community (Bintania et al., 2024).

What distinguishes *Gurindam Dua Belas* from other Islamic political treatises is its fusion of religious ethics with local Malay wisdom. Raja Ali Haji employs familiar literary and cultural expressions, such as rhyme, rhythm, and proverbial wisdom to communicate universal Islamic values. This fusion reflects a process of cultural indigenization of Islamic constitutional ideals, rendering them accessible and meaningful within the sociopolitical context of 19th-century Malay society (Zulfadhli & Farokhah, 2021).

Another important aspect is the *gurindam*'s critique of corrupt leadership and the misuse of power. In several verses, Raja Ali Haji subtly condemns rulers who are deceitful, unjust, or neglectful of their duties. Such criticism, though couched in poetic

form, is a powerful expression of political consciousness. By embedding these critiques within moral instruction, the *gurindam* simultaneously warns and educates, establishing a framework for ethical oversight that aligns with Islamic constitutionalism's aim to limit arbitrary power (Zulkarnain et al., 2021).

In conclusion, *Gurindam Dua Belas* is not only a literary masterpiece but also a repository of Malay-Islamic constitutional thought. Through the poetic articulation of ethical and political values, Raja Ali Haji creates a uniquely localized vision of just governance. His work underscores the compatibility of Islamic political ideals with Malay cultural expressions, illustrating how literature can function as both a mirror of society and a guide for righteous leadership. The *gurindam* thus stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of ethical governance and the integration of faith, culture, and political responsibility.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that al-Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik, Tsamarat al-Muhimmah Diyafah Li al-Umara wa al-Kubara' Ahl Hakim, and Gurindam Dua Belas each contribute distinct yet complementary insights into the values of Islamic constitutionalism. Though varied in form—ranging from political treatise, advisory prose, to poetic didacticism—they are unified in their commitment to ethical governance, justice, and the moral accountability of leadership. These texts articulate a form of constitutional thought rooted in Islamic epistemology, wherein power is morally constrained by divine law, public interest (*maṣlaḥah*), and consultative mechanisms. They emphasize not only legal norms but also moral dispositions such as humility, integrity, and social responsibility as essential attributes of legitimate rulers. Through their respective lenses, these works reflect a robust Islamic political philosophy that transcends time and remains relevant across contexts.

Moreover, the enduring values embedded in these texts resonate strongly with contemporary political challenges in the Muslim world, including the crisis of leadership ethics, the erosion of justice, and the absence of meaningful political participation. By revisiting the wisdom of these classical Islamic sources, this study affirms that Islamic constitutionalism is not a modern invention, but rather an intrinsic dimension of Islamic political heritage that emphasizes balance between authority and accountability. Their teachings invite both scholars and policymakers to recover and apply these principles in modern frameworks of governance, ensuring that leadership is exercised with justice, transparency, and moral consciousness. Thus, these texts offer a rich reservoir of ethical-political wisdom that remains vital for shaping governance grounded in both Islamic tradition and contemporary constitutional ideals.

Declaration of competing interest

There are no known conflicts of interest.

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