

The Art of Nasyid And Its Issues

Sholeh Fikri

E-mail: sholehfikri@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Choosing a musical entertainment either that on the radio or watching it live should not be for the purpose of mental and physical amusement alone. For a meaningful objective and life, musical entertainment should contain important messages and lessons of values and goodness. The impact of music on human life can be enormous as music can greatly influence a human life. The question of how convenient and readily available this type of music is remains. This study found that nasyid music is a part of life to some communities of North Sumatera who chose it as a form of entertainment. With recorded tapes, CD's and VCD's being the major available means of accessing it, an issue about nasyids is that this genre of music is hardly found either on radio or television. Not having a tape or CD/VCD player means that nasyid music, which is beneficial, can be listened to or watched during limited times only. This scenario occurred because supports from the government and the society in strengthening the art of nasyid music are still low.

Keywords: Nasyid, entertainment, government, private institution

Date of Submission: 26-09-2017

Date of acceptance: 14-10-2017

I. INTRODUCTION

Listening to songs or watching them on television (TV) is a common thing to do whether one is at home, at work or in a vehicle. This entertainment is easily available nowadays as today is the era of ICT (Information and Communication Technology). In Indonesia, there are 11 national TV stations, 522 transmission stations, 832 radio stations plus a government radio station, Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) (Rudi Lumanto dkk, 2012:49). The sorts of entertainment broadcast on the media are various and one of them is music. Music of all sorts is aired either on the radio or television to suit the taste of all audience. It is easy to tune into radio or television channels which broadcast songs such as pop, *dangdut*, rock and Malay songs as almost each and every radio and TV station plays the song around the clock. Listeners to pop, jazz, rock, *dangdut* or even Malay music tend to be more than those of music of religious theme which hardly finds a place on the radio or TV. Even if it does find a place, it is limited to certain times only, like during the month of Ramadan or just before the call to prayer *orazan*, let alone having a specific program dedicated to this kind of songs. This article will focus on the reasons why religion-themed music is rarely broadcasted on TV or the radio.

A survey conducted among Muslim communities of North Sumatera, Indonesia on their music preference found that they have a variety of musical taste. There is a saying among the society of North Sumatera which goes to the effect of "*when a matter cannot be resolved by crying over it, sing it*" (T.M. Sihombing 1986:128). The saying is an affirmation of how close music is to the daily life of North Sumatrans. It is a common sight to see farmers bring along radio sets to their farms as an entertainment companion while working. In the evening, the youth, males and females alike, would seat in relaxation in front of their homes while the ladies sing to the music played on guitar by the males. This beautiful scenario attracts the authors to study further the musical culture of the North Sumatrans.

In particular, the authors have studied the art of nasyid activities and proposed that nasyid music be made music of choice due to several reasons. This is because nasyids are songs which contain words of wisdom, advices, and praises to God while both their lyrics and rhythm are not secondary in quality to other types of music. The beauty in the selection of nasyid words lies in the poetic lyrical content of nasyid songs which are good-natured and pleasant to hear, containing moral values coherent with religious teachings. According to Islam, arts cannot be for the sake of arts alone. It must be accompanied with Islamic moral values, state ideology, Islamic creed, religious aim and the philosophy of life (Budiman Radi 1972:53). In tune with such idea, there are also other views which state that "even though the arts do not teach morality, true arts should contain morals and values" (Sidi Ghazalba 1977:55). Therefore, nasyids can be music of choice to the Muslims in North Sumatera and to communities at other places.

Undoubtedly, nasyid music, with its beautiful lyrics and melodious rhythm, can effectively move its listeners. Nevertheless, what is the problem that nasyid songs are not played in a large quantity? This is the question the researcher attempts to figure out and find its solution.

II. METHOD AND MATERIALS

This article is a product of research using two methods, qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative methods used were observation on the field, interviews with nasyid performers, leaders of nasyid groups and community leaders and library research. The quantitative method used a survey with the aid of computer program to analyze the results of the survey.

Sample of this survey was randomly selected from the Muslim communities of North Sumatera, Indonesia consisting of various age group and different educational background. The number of sample population was 308. In this survey, ten questions were asked and the answers are presented in the following section of results.

III. RESULTS

As mentioned earlier on, data in this research were obtained by commissioning a survey using questionnaires set by the authors. To give the data more validity, the author also interviewed significant individuals of importance to this study such as high level executives of radio and TV stations and leaders of the community. A sum of 308 respondents was asked to answer the questionnaires. To analyze their answers, computer software was used to get the data of results. Results of the ten questions are presented below.

1. On listening to nasyids on radio

Muslims residing in North Sumatera liked to listen to nasyids on radio as clearly evident in their answers to this question. Some 37 people or 12.0% of total respondents strongly agreed that they listened to nasyid songs on the radio while those who agreed were 209 people (67.9%). This is by far a large amount as compared to the 34 people (11.0%) who agreed less or did not normally listen to nasyids on the radio. Only 28 people or 9.1% of total respondents said they did not listen to nasyids on the radio at all.

Furthermore, several questions were asked to leaders of private and government radio stations operating in the city of Medan namely Radio Prapanca Buana Suara, Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) Medan and Stesen Radio Suara Medan which were visited by the researcher. The purpose of the visits to the three radio stations was to find out any program broadcasting nasyid songs on their radio stations. As informed by its Head of Broadcasting, Stesen Radio Suara Medan did not air nasyid songs in a specific program. However, nasyids have been on air to accompany religious talk or sermon (*ceramah*) every morning during dawn, before and after the talk. In addition, nasyids also supplement *aceramah* program every Friday at 5.30 p.m. Specific to Ramadan only, nasyids have always been played during *suhoor* (early dawn time before the start of fasting) and *iftar* (breaking of fast).¹ He added that, even though the station was non-Islamic, the station did play on a regular basis nasyids or Islamic-themed songs. Nasyid groups usually featured were Raihan, Brothers, Snada, El-Surayya, Al-Madani and others.

Also interviewed was a leading executive at the Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI), a radio station owned by the Government of Indonesia. According to its management, the radio station regularly played nasyids on a daily basis, normally before and after the *azan of Maghrib*. A special program every Friday night featured nasyids for 30 minutes followed by a recital of *barzanji* and *marhaban* (a collection of poems about the birth and early childhood of the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W.). Apart from the above-mentioned program, RRI also did recording of well-known nasyid groups whose recording are later repeatedly played at specific times.² Among those famous nasyid groups whose songs were frequently aired were Raihan, Opick and Ungu.

A similar finding was observed in the case of Stesen Radio Prapanca Suara whereby nasyids were aired only during the holy month of Ramadan, in particular during *iftar* and *suhoor*. For the rest of the time, the station did not broadcast any nasyid as it was meant for other types of music. Even so, the airing of nasyids during Ramadan only accounted for 10 % of airtime, with 3% being taken up by classical pure nasyids and the other 7% by religious pop (*pop religi*).³ It seemed that *pop religi* songs were better received by the community as compared to pure nasyids. For example, songs by Raihan, Snada and the likes were better accepted by the Muslim community.

From these data, it can be stated that the Muslim community listened very few nasyids daily as radio stations do not broadcast nasyids daily on a large proportion but little of the airtime. Should a radio station have a specifically-dedicated daily nasyid program which is aired at certain times, the Muslim community of North Sumatera would be certain to have a continuous access to such a broadcast.

¹Ahmad Tri Hermawan 2011, Head of Broadcasting, *Suara Medan Radio Station, interview*, Medan 18th February 2011.

²Tuti Martopo 2011, Broadcaster, Program 1, RRI Medan, *interview*, Medan, 18th February 2011.

³Rini Aprianty 2011, Program & Music Director, PT. Radio Prapanca Buana Suara, *interview*, Medan, 16th February 2011.

2. Watching nasyids on television

Watching TV nowadays is a habit of many people including the people of North Sumatera. Of all the programs available on TV, which program do people watch? From the questionnaires distributed to a sample of North Sumatran Muslim population, it was proven that people do like nasyid songs when they are aired on TV programs. This proves that their perception of nasyid songs is something nasyid activists should be proud of and it dispels the notion that nasyids are less liked by the Muslims of North Sumatera. Watching nasyid on TV is among a favorite pastime of North Sumatran Muslims as shown in the following figures. 46 respondents or 14.9% frequently watched nasyid programs on TV while a number of 234 respondents (76%) usually followed the program. Some 18 people (5.8%) admitted that they occasionally watch it and only a dismal 10 people (3.2%) did not watch it at all.

Observation on privately owned TV networks revealed that it is a rare occasion that the TV stations broadcast nasyids except during the holy month of Ramadan. This is in contrast with government-owned networks which air nasyids on a daily basis before and after the *azan* of Maghrib (dusk prayer). Apart from that, Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI) also broadcasted fortnightly every Thursday evening an especially dedicated nasyid program⁴.

According to Priatno, TVRI broadcasted a live nasyid show every two weeks.⁵ According to him also nasyid groups featured live on TVRI were those who applied for it and had to go through a selection process. If selected, their performance would be shown live on TVRI with no pre-recording. It has been understood that the expense to record the program was costly and therefore recording activities were usually done away with and the program was shown live. The program was shown every Thursday evening from 6 p.m. – 6.30 p.m.

According to her also, some audience would query whenever the program was not aired. She added that the rest was not concerned with nasyid programs on the TV station as there were other entertainment on privately owned TV networks which were provided free of charge.

3. On watching live nasyid

Nasyid nowadays is very much performed during an Islamic marriage ceremony and celebration of important events in Islamic calendar such as *Maulidur Rasul*, *Isra' Mi'raj*, beginning of the month of *Muharram*, just to name a few. The Muslims of North Sumatera said they would watch nasyid shows whenever it is performed live during such ceremonies. An amount of 110 people or 35.7% of total respondents strongly agreed to that statement. A further 168 respondents (54.5%) also agreed to the statement. This means that a huge number of them would definitely watch live nasyid shows. Only about 9.2% disagreed, which was much fewer than those who agreed.

4. On government support to nasyid groups

The ruling government of North Sumatera has been giving, though limited in amount, financial aids to nasyid groups. The researcher was made to understand by Hj. Safaruddin Lubis that the government financial aid to nasyid groups in North Sumatera was around Malaysian Ringgit 3500 per annum, given to 5 selected groups. The financial aid had been running annually from 2008 until 2010 while for the year 2011 it was still outstanding at the time of the interview⁶. *Lembaga Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Seni Nasyid* [Nasyid Art Growth and Development Authority] (LPPSN) which was the authority body in nasyid administration did not have its own budget to develop nasyid music as it functions only to develop the technical administration of nasyids. It had to wait for the release of the fund for nasyid activities by the Social Division of the Office of the North Sumatera Governor.

To get clearer information about government support for nasyid groups, respondents of the survey were asked whether they agreed or not that the government gave much support to nasyid groups. Some 18 people or 5.8% of total respondents strongly agreed that the government gave much support to nasyid groups while another 73 respondents (23.7%) agreed. Meanwhile, 148 respondents (48.1%) agreed to a lesser extent to the statement and a further 69 respondents (22.4%) did not agree. These data showed that indeed the government assistance to nasyid groups was still lacking. A similar concern was also voiced by Soritua Harahap (Director of

⁴Priatno 2011, Head of Program and Work Development, TVRI Medan, *interview*, Medan 18th February 2011.

⁵Priatno 2011, Head of Program and Work Development, TVRI Medan, *interview*, Medan 18th February 2011.

⁶Hj. Safaruddin Lubis 2011, Director, Broadcasting and Civilization, Division of *Pekapontren and Penamas*, Provincial Office of the Ministry of Religion, North Sumatera, *interview*, Medan, 11th February 2011.

Division of Kapontren and Penamas, the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, Regency of Deli Serdang) who said that the government did not have a specific fund to assist existing nasyid groups.

5. On society's support for nasyid groups

Based on previous findings, it was understood that the existing nasyids are products of the community's contribution and 'sacrifice' in support of the government agenda to preserve the culture and entertainment of nasyid which is full of teachings and guidance for those who profess Islam. Nasyid has contributed much to the society in the field of teaching and providing guidance of religious values which have raised the awareness of the society about doing good useful deeds for people's lives. If this matter is empowered by the collective support from all parties, be they rulers, non-governmental organizations, social organizations or the society, then nasyids would be more successful in the future.

Looking at the response from the survey, a sum of 17 respondents or 5.5% of the total respondents strongly agreed that the society gave support to nasyid music while 108 respondents (35.1%) also agreed. Whereas, 133 people (43.2%) disagreed while a further 49 respondents (15.9%) strongly disagreed. One respondent (0.3%) did not give any answer. It can be understood from these data that the society also gave little support to nasyid. It appeared that the existing nasyids are truly self-reliant, left alone to sustain itself with little support from others. Currently, nasyid groups in the villages of North Sumatera operate on funds obtained from either the group's own members themselves or the village chiefs. Nasyid group members are commonly unsalaried, being paid honorarium whenever there is a show which has to be divided among nasyid members. Their uniforms and nasyid musical instruments are usually obtained using contribution money from village leaders or assistance from the community. Such is the life of nasyid groups in villages which is very much different from that of well-known nasyid groups. Those well-known groups can normally sustain themselves using proceeds from their shows and their records in the form of CD's, VCD's and DVD's.

6. On nasyids aired on private radio stations

There were two private radio stations visited by the researcher where interviews with chairmen of the radio network were done. The radio stations were Radio Suara Medan and Radio Prapanca Buana Suara Medan. Radio Suara Medan did not have a special program to air nasyid songs as the station was especially catered for *dangdut Melayu* songs. However, the station did air nasyid songs at the start and the end of a *ceramah* talk early dawn every morning. Nasyids also accompanied *ceramah* program every Thursday night. Radio Prapanca Buana Suara meanwhile did not have nasyid broadcast except in the month of Ramadan at *suhoor* and *iftar* times.

A different scenario was stated by respondents of the survey as they lived in six different *kabupatens* (regency), bringing about different results of the survey. Respondents who strongly agreed that private radio networks frequently aired nasyid songs were 9 people or 2.9% of total respondents while those who agreed were 123 respondents (39.9%). A sum of 134 respondents (43.5%) agreed less to the statement while 42 respondents (13.6%) disagreed.

Results of the survey showed that indeed nasyids were not frequently played on private radio stations as evident in the programs of private radio stations.

7. Nasyids on Televisi Republik Indonesia (government-owned TV station)

As mentioned earlier on, government TV station namely Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI) had scheduled nasyid programs. TVRI Medan aired the program every fortnight in the first and third week of the month. Being government-owned, TVRI was however limited in terms of its funding to broadcast nasyid *live* in each of its program. Occasionally, repeats of the shows were played instead of *live* programs during the scheduled program time slot.

The survey found that TVRI frequently broadcast nasyid songs as strongly agreed by 29 respondents and a further 169 respondents or 54.9% who also agreed. Some 84 people or 27.3% did not fully agree with it and those who stated total disagreement that TVRI often play nasyid songs were 26 people or 8.4% of total respondents.

These data showed that it was actually not that often that TVRI aired nasyid songs and this was in agreement with the frequency of the TVRI program which was every fortnight.

8. Nasyids on privately-owned TV stations

Data on nasyid broadcasts on privately owned TV networks obtained by the researcher over a period of two months showed that there was no airing of nasyids over private TV stations like RCTI, SCTV, Indosiar, Metro TV and Trans TV. These stations broadcasted nasyid song only in the month of Ramadan and the type of nasyids were not the traditional ones played with *reban* but more of *pop religis* songs.

According to respondents of the survey, only 17 or 5.5% said they strongly agreed to the statement that nasyids were often aired on private TV networks while a further 105 people or 34.1% also agreed. Stating their less agreement to the statement were 132 respondents or 42.9%. Some 54 respondents or 17.5% registered their disagreement. This statistic is in line with the findings of the researcher where TV stations indeed did not play nasyids frequently.

9. On frequency of nasyidson government-owned Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI).

In an interview with Tuti Martono, it was found that RRI broadcasted nasyid songs in a specifically dedicated slot every Thursday night for 30 minutes. Songs aired are those by nasyid groups in Medan which have been recorded previously. Apart from Thursday nights, RRI also play nasyid songs before and after the *azan* of the *Maghrib* prayer. Nasyids usually aired were nasyid songs by Raihan, Opickor the group Ungu.

Nasyid groups which were favorites of respondents in the questionnaires were Raihan, Snada, Madani, Nurul Hasanah (led by Nur Asiyah Jamil), El-Surayya (under the musical direction of Ahmad Syauqi, son of Ahmad Baqi Allah Yarham), Haddad Alwi, Hijaz, Debu, Qatrunnada, Saufa and Ashabul Kahfi.

Results of the survey showed that RRI often aired nasyid songs. Respondents who stated strong agreement to that amounted to 16 people or 5.2%, while those who agreed amounted to 129 people or 41.9%. Some 122 respondents or 39.6% agreed to a lesser degree with the statement while a further 40 respondents or 13.0% did not agree. One respondent or 0.3% did not register any view on this matter.

IV. DISCUSSION

The nasyid performing arts has a place in the hearts of Muslims in North Sumatera. To maintain this place, the existing nasyid bands ought to prepare themselves and improve their quality of voice and presentation as well as, more importantly, better their management and administration of activities. Nasyid leaders must be more active in guiding members of nasyid groups and taking care of their welfare. Words of wisdom by Ali R.A. stated that organized falsehood will defeat disorganized truth. This issue is common in all nasyid groups, let alone those who are new in the industry. However, the business of nasyid needs an updated approach so that success becomes achievable.

A classic but determining issue for nasyid groups is the problem of funding. It is difficult to find sponsors, unlike other types of music which advocate devil worship, sexual freedom or drug abuse which readily attract sponsors (Ibnuyaacob: 2013:09). It is a point to ponder why degenerative music which brings ill influence to the community can attract many financial sponsors but not that which can bring good. Is this a sign of the end times? Even if it is so, good will triumph over evil in the end.

Therefore, the following is a summary of the challenges the art of nasyid is currently facing:

A. Internal issues:

1. Management and administration of nasyid groups are still traditional lacking transparency and efficiency.
2. Appearance of nasyid groups, as to their costumes and musical instruments used must be constantly renewed and improved.
3. Nasyid vocalists and performers lack sufficient training and exposure.
4. Small and limited funding hinders the advancement of nasyid.

B. External Issues:

1. Supports from the Muslim community, morally or materially, are still lacking. Moral encouragement is in the form of events which showcase nasyid such as inter-village nasyid tournament and festival celebrations, and in the form of having nasyid shows in marriage, circumcision and other ceremonies. Materially, support can be shown in the form of funds to cater for the needs of nasyid groups such as their uniforms, nasyid instruments as well as expenses for their rehearsals. Another form of support is to buy original cassette and CD/VCD recordings and not to purchase pirated copies.
2. Radio stations should allot a specific and scheduled time to feature nasyid groups as many as possible.
3. TV networks should also broadcast nasyids songs more frequently and in scheduled programs.
4. The best nasyids and nasyid performance around must be featured by daily or weekly newspapers and magazines in support of nasyid activities.
5. Backing from leaders and people of authority is necessary to make nasyids not only as entertainment but also as a medium of instruction to relay leaders' message to the society. Nasyid can be prepared so as to be a medium for educating the masses about social, economic and political development. This is viable as nasyids, in their as-is form and style, have the capacity to deliver such messages and education.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Results of this survey have shown to those involved in the activity of nasyid that, for a secured future of the art of nasyids, they must work hard to make it a mainstream musical entertainment and education particularly for Muslim communities of North Sumatera, Indonesia and the rest of the area, generally. Backing from the society, rulers, nasyid activists, sponsors, and leaders of the printed and electronic media industry are very much welcomed. The authors propose that, to encourage the art of nasyid, LPPSN be empowered in the management of matters concerning the nasyid art.

REFERENCES

- [1] Budiman Radi 1972. *Falsafah Seni dalam Islam [Philosophy of the Arts in Islam]*, Kelantan: Penerbit PAP
- [2] Ibnuyaacob 2013. *Teori Konspirasi Rahsia Yahudi dalam Filem Hollywood [The Theory of Secrets of the Jews Conspiracy in Hollywood Films]*, Pulau Pinang: Moon Media Enterprise.
- [3] Sidi Gazalba 1977. *Pandangan Islam tentang Kesenian [Islamic Views on Artistry]*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara.
- [4] Sihombing, T.M. 1986. *Filsafat Batak, Tentang Kebiasaan-Kebiasaan Adat Istiadat [Batak Philosophy, On the Norms of the Customs and Traditions]*, Jakarta: Balai Pustaka
- [5] Masduki, Muzayin Nazaruddin (editor) 2008. *Media, Jurnalisme dan Budaya Populer [The Media, Journalism and Popular Culture]*, Jogjakarta: Prodi Komunikasi UII dan UII Press.
- [6] Rudi Lumanto, 2012. *Buku Putih 2012 [2012 White Book]*, Jakarta: Human Resource Analysis and Development Body, the Ministry of Communication and Information, Indonesia.

Authors' Biodata

Sholeh Fikri (Ph.D.) He is a lecturer at Faculty Of Dakwah And Communication Science IAIN Padangsidempuan, North Sumatera, Indonesia.

Sholeh Fikri . "The Art of Nasyid And Its Issues." *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* , vol. 22, no. 10, 2017, pp. 58–63