

**The Power of Buya: *Pengajian* Networks in Traditional Society**

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**Abstract**

This research stems from the fact of weak Islamic insights among the community in Pulau Tengah, Kerinci, and simultaneously observes the crucial role of Buya (religious leaders) in addressing this issue. The aim of this study is to understand the formation and utilization of Buya's authority in strengthening the community's Islamic insights through a network of study groups. The research method used is qualitative with a descriptive approach. Data collection in this study employed observation, interviews, and documentation methods. The results show that the form of authority possessed by Buya that attracts people to learn about religious knowledge is partly due to their charisma and demeanor. In Pulau Tengah village, there are five study group networks: Riyadhus Shalihin led by Buya Sumarlin, Miftahul Jannah led by Buya Muksin, Uswatul led by Buya Hudri Hamzah, Qowaidul Iman led by Buya Sabbanuddin, and Biyadatul Hidayah led by Buya Ronaldi Asy'ari. Generally, these Buya do not have traditional or legal authority but rely on charismatic authority in carrying out their preaching activities.

**Keywords:** *Buya Authority, Pulau Tengah, Kerinci, Islamic Teachings*

In every social order, an authority is needed to guide a group towards organization, whether in the form of an institution or the character of an individual, including in matters of religion. To further understand the concept of authority, we cannot overlook Max Weber's concept. According to Weber, authority is a form of power to influence others. Authority can also be understood as the right to act in order to create rules (Maisya and Nur, 2021). Weber (2009) categorizes authority into three types: traditional, legal, and charismatic authority.

Traditional authority refers to the authority held by a leader in traditional societies who interprets and enforces prevailing rules. In Weber's view, with modernization, traditional authority will be replaced by legal authority, which arises and develops within bureaucratic institutions as seen in rational Western societies. While traditional authority is associated with a belief in the sacredness of traditional values and obedience to the leader due to their connection to previous leaders, legal authority is based on modern rational principles. Meanwhile, charismatic authority refers to the recognition that a leader possesses charisma, or what is often called "karomah." According to Weber, charismatic authority brings about social change in the public sphere or society, whereas the other two types of authority create social stability as they are designed to maintain and preserve the social system.

Furthermore, Zulkifli Abdillah's (2014) research titled "Ulama Between Charismatic Authority and Legal-Rational Authority: A Case Study of Ustaz Haji Muhammad Zaini Djalaluddin" shows that even if an ulama does not have authority derived from intellectual and kinship networks, there are other sources of authority such as genealogy, education (Islamic knowledge), and a strong personal character, which constitute charismatic authority according to Weber.

In the context of religion, religious authority can be defined as the power or influence held by religious leaders or figures in determining doctrines, norms, and actions followed by adherents or followers of the religion (Randani et al., 2022; Arrobi & Nadzifah, 2020). Wahid (2012) explains that religious authority is seen as the right to enforce rules, as it is believed that the rules created are in accordance with the will of God. In the context of Islam, religious authority often lies with ulama, kiai, or religious figures recognized by the community as spiritual and authoritative leaders (Alanuari, 2022). In Islam, it is believed that Allah, Prophet Muhammad, and the Quran hold the highest authority. These three are viewed as the most fundamental authority holders (Jannah, 2019). Furthermore, according to Jannah (2019:81), Indonesia does not recognize a

single authority. Azyumardi states that in Indonesia, Islamic authority is dispersed among individual ulama, groups, or religious institutions.

Regarding religious authority in Indonesia, Rumadi's (2012) research titled "Islam and Religious Authority" finds that Islamic religious authority in Indonesia is quite problematic. Although theoretically, authority is spread across various layers, the authority of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) has recently strengthened. This strengthening is due to increasing government support and MUI's growing socio-political position. Abdul and Sulistiyono (2014) explain that individuals with intellectual capabilities in the field of religion can attain the status of religious authority, provided they also receive recognition from others. Thus, the holder of Islamic authority can refer to the figure of an ulama. In Indonesia, ulama are known by various names in different regions, such as Kiai (Java), Ajengan (Sunda), Syeikh (North Sumatra/Tapanuli), and others.

This research is focused on Pulau Tengah Village, a village located in Kerinci Regency, Jambi. In this area, the local religious leaders are commonly referred to as Buya or Abuya. These titles are used for ulama in Minangkabau who are experts in religious matters. The title Buya originates from the Arabic word "abi" or "abuya," meaning "my father" or a term of respect (Raziqin, 2009).

In Pulau Tengah, Buya plays a crucial role in enhancing the Islamic knowledge of the community. Buya holds a significant position not only in religious behavior but also in the social life of the community, which relies on Buya's authority. Buya serves as a unifying force in religious rituals and fosters collective religious spirit, thereby uniting social elements. Buya's authority is manifested in the enhancement of the community's Islamic knowledge, primarily through networks of religious study groups (*pengajian*).

In Pulau Tengah, there are several religious study groups led by Buya. These groups serve as platforms for the community to enhance their Islamic knowledge in various aspects, including *fiqh*, the Quran, worship practices, and other Islamic understandings. The Buyas leading these study groups include Buya Drs. Hudri Hamzah, Buya Ronaldi Asyari, Lc, Buya Sabanuddin, Buya Muhsin, S.Ag, and Buya Sumarlin, S.Pd.I., MA.

The networks of religious study groups managed by the Buyas are motivated by the generally limited Islamic knowledge among the community, particularly in areas of monotheism, morality, and worship practices. Buya Ronaldi Asyari, Lc, for instance, mentions that the understanding of Islamic knowledge among the residents of Pulau Tengah Village is still relatively low. This is evident in their worship practices and daily religious problem-solving. These issues can be attributed to various factors, including the community's educational level and the lack of interest in formal religious education such as

madrastas. Additionally, the limited number of Buyas as religious authority figures teaching the community also contributes to this problem.

## Methods

This research is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is a method used to study objects in their natural conditions, where the researcher serves as the key instrument. Data collection techniques are performed through triangulation, data analysis is inductive, and the results of qualitative research emphasize meaning over generalization (Abdussamad, 2021). According to Saebani (2008: 89), qualitative research does not rely on statistical formulas and numerical decision-making and conclusions but instead relies on logic and the coherence of theoretical reasoning with the observed reality without efforts at generalization. This study employs a descriptive qualitative research approach, as it describes and illustrates actual conditions as they are. Kirk and Miller, as cited in Margono (2009), define qualitative research as a specific tradition in social sciences that fundamentally relies on observations of humans, both in their monitoring and in their terminology.

This research was conducted over two months, from February 14, 2023, to April 14, 2023, in Pulau Tengah Village, Keliling Danau District, Kerinci Regency, Jambi Province. The study utilizes primary data obtained by directly engaging with sources or informants (Mukrimaa et al., 2006). Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. Informants in this study include religious leaders (Buya), village government officials, and residents of Pulau Tengah Village. Data analysis was conducted systematically through three simultaneous steps:

1. Data Reduction: This involves the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the raw data that emerges from written field notes.
2. Data Display: This refers to presenting a set of systematically organized information that allows for drawing conclusions and taking action.
3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: This involves interpreting the data and verifying the findings (Saebani, 2008).

## Discussion

### *Authority of Buya*

Based on interviews conducted with several Buya in Pulau Tengah Village, it is evident that Buya holds authority that allows them to spread religious teachings and strengthen the Islamic knowledge of the community in Pulau Tengah. Regarding the authority held by Buya in Pulau Tengah, Buya Ronaldi Asy'ari, Lc, explained further in an interview:

"Buya has the rights, duties, and roles in educating the community, especially in matters related to Islamic knowledge such as tauhid (monotheism), worship, and morality. Additionally, Buya is responsible for educating the youth in eradicating Quran illiteracy and in proper worship practices. Buya must also be a role model and example for the community in both religious practices and daily life." (Interview, February 22, 2023).

This sentiment is echoed by Buya Sumarlin:

"The title of Buya comes with the trust and obligation to lead a study group and disseminate religious teachings to the community. In doing so, Buya can become a role model and has the charisma to encourage the community to follow the teachings and practices demonstrated by Buya." (Interview, February 22, 2023).

One form of authority that Buya possesses, which attracts people to learn from them, is their charisma and behavior. The community views Buya's demeanor as exemplary. This is supported by an interview with Yudi, a member of a study group led by one of the Buya:

"The reason why people follow Buya in the study groups and listen to the religious teachings is that we see Buya's conduct and behavior in daily life as very good and wise. Additionally, Buya can resolve community issues fairly, whether they are related to religion or social matters. Buya's dedication to worship also makes us view them as devout individuals who can serve as good role models." (Interview, February 25, 2023).

This view is further supported by an interview with M. Kadri, another member of the study group in Pulau Tengah, who commented on why the community recognizes and admires Buya:

"In Pulau Tengah, Buya is highly respected and regarded in the community. This is because individuals with deep religious knowledge and dedication to worship are considered righteous both in character and speech. The community admires Buya not only for their piety and knowledge but also for their exemplary traits and behavior. Additionally, the way Buya lives their life and handles life's challenges garners admiration from the community." (Interview, March 10, 2023).

Regarding Buya's legal authority, an interview with Diki Zulmiyadi, the Head of Pulau Tengah Village, revealed:

"In general, the Buyas leading the study groups in Pulau Tengah do not have formal legal authority, as they are not officially appointed by the Village Government. The study groups and their leaders are independent organizations managed autonomously. However, institutionally, since they are within the village, these study groups remain under the auspices of PERMATA (Village Majelis Ta'lim Association) and BKMT (Coordination Board of Village Majelis Ta'lim). The village also highly appreciates the efforts made by Buya in enhancing the Islamic knowledge of the community." (Interview, March 10, 2023).

### *Islamic Knowledge of the Community*

Based on interviews with several Buya in Pulau Tengah Village, it is evident that the community's Islamic knowledge varies widely, with a significant portion of the population having minimal religious understanding in terms of tauhid (monotheism), morals, and worship. This is consistent with the remarks from Buya Sabanuddin:

"The state of the community's Islamic knowledge in Pulau Tengah Village is largely deficient in tauhid, morals, and worship. In terms of tauhid, many still lack a proper understanding and belief in God. Regarding morals, there are numerous behavioral shortcomings, and in terms of worship, many struggle with reading the Quran and performing prayers correctly." (Interview, January 3, 2023).

Buya Ronaldi Asy'ari, Lc, added that the community's understanding of Islam is still relatively low:

"The Islamic knowledge of the community in Pulau Tengah Village is generally low to moderate. This can be observed in their deficient worship practices and their inadequate resolution of religious issues." (Interview, January 3, 2023).

In agreement, Buya Drs. Hudri Hamzah stated:

"The community's Islamic knowledge is still lacking and needs significant improvement. We can see this in the weak tauhid, morals, and understanding of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) related to worship." (Interview, January 3, 2023).

From the above interviews, it is clear that the Islamic knowledge of the community in Pulau Tengah Village is generally low in terms of creed (with

behaviors tending towards shirk), morals (issues like criminality, theft, and fighting), and worship practices.

### *Islamic Study Networks in Pulau Tengah*

To enhance the community's Islamic knowledge, Buya have established networks of religious study groups. Buya Sabanuddin states, "Buya can utilize the study groups they lead to preach and propagate the religion, which helps improve the community's Islamic understanding. Through regular study sessions, the community's comprehension will naturally increase" (Interview, March 22, 2023).

Regarding the study networks in Pulau Tengah, the five Buya actively involved in religious education all share a common scholarly lineage from Buya Tengku Ji. Buya Tengku Ji has several students, including Buya H. Ismail bin Tengku Ji and Buya Abdul Latip. Buya H. Ismail bin Tengku Ji taught Buya Sumarlin and Buya Hudri Hamzah. Buya Abdul Latip taught Buya Muksin and Buya Sabbanuddin. Additionally, Buya Khudri Hamzah educated his son, Ronaldi Asy'ari. As for formal education, the five Buya in Pulau Tengah have different educational backgrounds, with only Buya Sumarlin and Buya Muksin having graduated from STAIN Kerinci with a Bachelor's degree (Observations, January 3 - March 8, 2023). The following outlines the study networks based on observations:

#### 1. Riyadhus Shalihin Study Group

Riyadhush Shalihin study group, located in Pulau Tengah, is led directly by Buya Sumarlin. Buya Sumarlin, aside from his formal education with a Bachelor's degree from STAIN Kerinci and a Master's from IAIN Imam Bonjol Padang, studied religion under Ustad Haji Ismail bin Tengku Ji, a local scholar, for 13 years. The focus of the study group includes deepening religious knowledge, teaching tauhid, worship practices, fiqh, and Quranic recitation from basic to advanced levels. The group is divided into sessions for children, teenagers, and adults, with the content tailored to each level. The methods used include lectures, memorization, and practical exercises (Observations, February 20 - March 8, 2023).

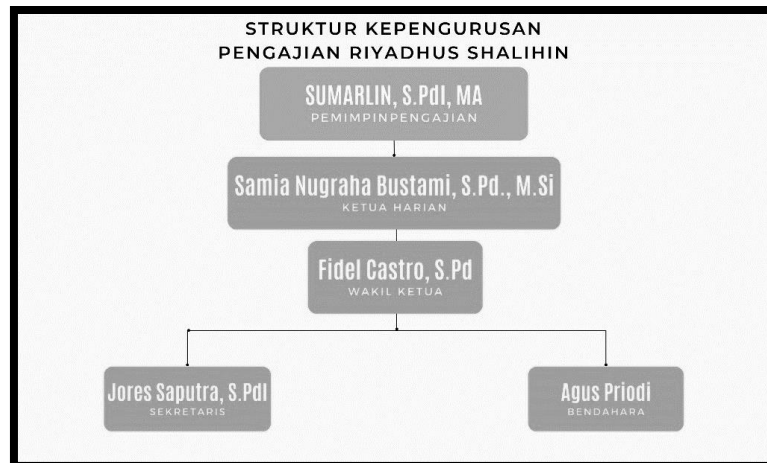


Fig. 1 Organizational Structure of Riyadhus Shalihin Study Group

## 2. Miftahul Jannah Study Group

The Miftahul Jannah study group is led by Buya Muksin with assistance from a daily management team. Buya Muksin has a Bachelor's degree in Sharia from STAIN Kerinci and also studied directly under local scholars like Buya Abdul Latip. The focus of this group is on tauhid, fiqh, and worship without age restrictions for participants. The methods used include lectures, memorization, and practical exercises (Observations, February 20 - March 8, 2023).



Fig. 2 Organizational Structure of Miftahul Jannah Study Group



The Uswatun Hasanah study group is led by Buya Drs. Hudri Hamzah with assistance from a daily management team. Buya Drs. Hudri Hamzah holds a Bachelor's degree from IAIN Sulthan Thaha Saifudin Jambi and also studied under local scholars like Buya H. Ismail Bin Tengku Ji. The focus of this group is on tauhid and fiqh, and it is open to all community members (Observations, February 20 - March 8, 2023).

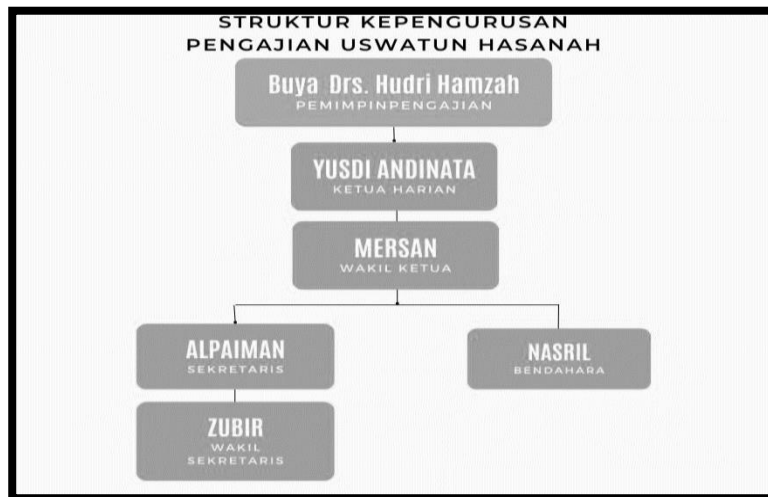


Fig. 3 Organizational Structure of Uswatun Hasanah Study Group

#### 4. Qowaidul Iman Study Group

The Qowaidul Iman study group is led by Buya Sabbanuddin with assistance from a daily management team. Buya Sabbanuddin studied directly under previous scholars of the group, as well as other local scholars like Buya Abdullah Latip. The focus of this group is on tauhid, worship, and morals without age restrictions for participants. The methods used include lectures and practical exercises (Observations, February 20 - March 8, 2023).



Fig. 4 Organizational Structure of Qawaidul Iman Study Group

#### 5. Biyadatul Hidayah Study Group

The Biyadatul Hidayah study group, located in Pulau Tengah, is led by Buya Ronaldi Asy'ari, Lc, with assistance from a daily management team. Buya Ronaldi Asy'ari holds a formal education from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, and also studied under his father, Buya Drs. Khudri Hamzah, a local scholar in Pulau Tengah. The focus of this group is on tauhid, worship, fiqh, morals, and Quranic recitation from basic to advanced levels. There are no age restrictions for participants, but the teaching methods are adjusted based on age categories (children, teenagers, adults). The methods used include lectures, discussions, and practical exercises (Observations, February 20 - March 8, 2023).



Fig. 5 Organizational Structure of Biyadatul Hidayah Study Group

### *Buya Authority: Formation and Utilisation*

Islamic insight is a servant's understanding of Islamic teachings and their implementation in life (Daulay and Septiani, 2020). Islamic insight also means a perspective that places Islamic teachings as the source of values in carrying out all actions and civilizational tasks (Sumadi 2016: 169). Therefore, the higher the understanding and religious insight of an individual or community, the stronger the application of Islamic values in a particular society. The role of scholars is crucial in strengthening Islamic insight, as they possess the competence and capacity to preach and teach the fundamentals of religion. One effort that Buya can undertake to enhance the Islamic insight of the Pulau Tengah community is to use his authority, including power, knowledge, and legitimacy, in preaching.

In Pulau Tengah Village and Kerinci Regency generally, scholars are referred to as Buya or Abuya, a term borrowed from Minangkabau. This term refers to the title given to religious experts in Minangkabau. The title Buya is a form of address for Minangkabau people, derived from the Arabic words *abi* or *abuya*, meaning "my father" or someone highly respected (Raziqin 2009). When discussing authority, we cannot overlook Max Weber's theory of authority. According to Weber (2009), there are three recognitions or legitimacies that form the basis of authority: firstly, the authority of "eternal past," which is the authority over sanctified customs; secondly, the authority of personal and extraordinary charisma; and thirdly, domination through "legality." Furthermore, Weber (1947) divides authority into three types: traditional authority, charismatic authority, and legal authority (Weber, 1947; Chairi, 2019).

#### 1. Traditional Authority

Traditional authority is inherited authority given directly to descendants based on community recognition. Traditional authority makes society comfortable with long-established power and reluctant to try different forms of power. This aligns with Weber's (2009) view that traditional authority is the authority over "eternal past" customs, sanctified through recognition, and practiced by patrimonial rulers of the past. Furthermore, Weber (1947) states that individuals or groups with this authority are respected because their power and authority have become institutionalized and ingrained in society. Traditional authority involves a claim that a leader's policies are trusted by followers, creating a leader-follower relationship (Chairi, 2019).

In Pulau Tengah, regarding inherited legitimacy, most Buyas do not possess traditional authority. This is evident as the title Buya is not passed down through lineage. In religious study groups, the title Buya is not given based on

lineage or direct inheritance from previous Buyas. Instead, the title is awarded because the community views the Buya as highly knowledgeable in religion. According to Weber's theory, traditional authority is marked by institutionalized and trusted power. However, observations and interviews reveal that generally, Buyas in Pulau Tengah do not receive traditional legitimacy, suggesting they lack traditional authority in enhancing Islamic insight within the community.

## 2. Charismatic Authority

Charismatic authority is the belief in someone's supernatural or intrinsic qualities. People respond to this authority because they perceive it as special. Charismatic authority endures as long as its benefits are felt by society, but diminishes if the holder makes mistakes that reduce trust. Charismatic authority, as defined by Weber (2009), involves personal charisma and exceptional qualities, leading to absolute personal loyalty and belief in the leader's revelations, heroism, or other extraordinary qualities.

In Pulau Tengah, Buyas gain legitimacy through charisma. This is demonstrated by the community's admiration for Buyas as religious role models. Charismatic legitimacy is also marked by the Buyas' personalities and daily lives, considered exemplary by the community. Weber's theory suggests that charismatic authority is characterized by followers' admiration for the leader. This legitimacy is not formalized, and leaders gain followers' loyalty through their success in fulfilling their authority's goals and their personal qualities. Generally, Buyas in Pulau Tengah derive authority from community admiration for their exemplary character, contributing to the enhancement of Islamic insight.

## 3. Legal-Rational Authority

Legitimacy is the authority given to individuals, institutions, or companies to make decisions (Dirlanudin, 2008). Legal authority is obtained by fulfilling specific requirements or through an established legal system. Holders of legal authority usually serve for limited periods to ensure they act in the community's interest. According to Weber (1947), legal authority involves official organizations bound by rules, with duties divided systematically. Legal authority, as defined by Weber (2009: 93), is based on "legality," with obedience required to perform duties according to the law.

In Pulau Tengah, most Buyas lack legal authority. This is evident as they do not receive official legitimacy from the village government or other authorities. Buyas and study groups operate independently without special institutional connections to the government or each other. However, the village government supports Buyas' efforts to enhance Islamic insight. While there is no formal institutional relationship, study groups and Buyas are under the

supervision of the Village Majelis Ta'lim Association. According to Weber's theory, legal authority is marked by institutional legitimacy. Observations and interviews indicate that generally, Buyas in Pulau Tengah do not receive legal legitimacy from the village government, suggesting they lack legal authority in enhancing Islamic insight within the community.

Based on Max Weber's three types of authority and the research findings, it is concluded that Buyas in Pulau Tengah possess only charismatic authority, lacking traditional and legal authority. Charismatic authority, as defined by Weber, involves followers' admiration for the leader's personal qualities, leading to loyalty and recognition. One way Buyas enhance Islamic insight in Pulau Tengah is through religious study networks, where they lead and preach to the community. Their charismatic authority helps them gain recognition and loyalty from followers, increasing enthusiasm and engagement in the study sessions, thereby enhancing Islamic insight.

In Pulau Tengah, several religious study groups are led by Buyas, serving as forums for improving Islamic knowledge in areas such as fiqh, worship, and other religious understandings. These study groups operate independently, without direct connections, as they are not inherited from previous generations. Instead, they are formed by community agreement, selecting a charismatic Buya to lead, or directly by the Buya, attracting followers through charisma. Institutionally, these study groups are under the Village Majelis Ta'lim Association but operate independently with their own organizational structures and focuses.

The charismatic authority of Buyas in leading these study groups plays a crucial role in enhancing Islamic insight. Through regular study sessions, community understanding of Islamic teachings improves. Additionally, Buyas can provide practical examples of proper worship and behavior, serving as role models for the community in faith, worship, and conduct. The appeal of Buyas' personalities and characters greatly influences community interest in religious study, as a charismatic Buya attracts more participants and facilitates better understanding of the teachings.

Observations and interviews indicate that a Buya's character significantly impacts the interest and comprehension of study group participants, aligning with Weber's theory that the personal qualities of charismatic leaders affect follower recognition and loyalty. Therefore, with their exemplary personal qualities, Buyas can enhance the Islamic insight of the community, who admire and view them as role models. Followers are more likely to attend study sessions led by charismatic Buyas, ultimately increasing their Islamic insight. Thus,

religious study groups led by charismatic Buyas play a vital role in improving the community's understanding of Islamic teachings.

### **Conclusion**

The authority of Buya in strengthening the Islamic insights of the community can be observed, among other things, in their ability to attract people to learn about religious knowledge due to their charisma and demeanor. Although Buya in Pulau Tengah do not possess traditional or legal authority, they have charismatic authority in their efforts to enhance the community's understanding of Islam.

Buya's authority in strengthening Islamic insights through the network of study groups in Pulau Tengah aligns with Weber's theory that personal qualities can elevate the Islamic understanding of those who admire and view Buya as exemplary figures with good character. Additionally, Buya enhance Islamic insights by leading various study groups. These include Riyadhus Shalihin led by Buya Sumarlin, S.PdI, M.A., Miftahul Jannah by Buya Muksin, S.Ag., Uswatul by Buya Drs. Hudri Hamzah, Qowaidul Iman by Buya Sabbanuddin, and Bidayatul Hidayah by Buya Ronaldi Asy'ari, Lc.

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