

PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION IN ISLAMIC STUDIES

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Abstract

Religion is a fundamental aspect of human life that shapes beliefs, values, and social behavior. In Islamic studies, religion is often examined through normative, theological, historical, and sociological approaches. However, the phenomenological approach offers a different perspective by emphasizing the understanding of religious experiences from the viewpoint of believers themselves. This study aims to analyze the role of the phenomenology of religion in Islamic studies, particularly in understanding religious consciousness, spiritual experience, and the manifestation of Islamic teachings in the lives of Muslims. This research employs a qualitative approach using a systematic literature review method by examining books, scientific journals, and relevant academic sources related to phenomenology and Islamic studies. The findings reveal that the phenomenological approach contributes significantly to understanding religion as a lived experience rather than merely a doctrinal system. In Islamic studies, phenomenology helps scholars comprehend the meanings behind religious practices, rituals, symbols, and spiritual experiences of Muslims. Furthermore, this approach promotes a more inclusive, objective, and comprehensive understanding of Islam amidst contemporary religious diversity. The study concludes that phenomenology of religion serves as an important methodological framework in enriching Islamic studies by integrating subjective religious experiences with objective academic analysis.

Keywords: *Phenomenology of Religion, Islamic Studies, Religious Experience, Islam, Religious Consciousness.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Religion is a universal phenomenon that exists across almost all human civilizations. It is not merely understood as a system of normative teachings regulating the relationship between humans and God but also as an existential experience that provides meaning and purpose to human life. Consequently, religion has become an important subject of multidisciplinary inquiry involving theology, philosophy, history, anthropology, psychology, and sociology. Each discipline offers distinct perspectives for understanding religious phenomena.

Within Islamic studies, normative-theological approaches have long dominated scholarly discourse. These approaches primarily focus on the study of the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, and classical Islamic scholarship. While such approaches remain indispensable, they often provide limited space for understanding the subjective religious experiences of Muslims in their everyday lives. As a result, the experiential dimension of religiosity has frequently received less attention within contemporary Islamic scholarship.

The phenomenology of religion emerges as an alternative approach that seeks to understand religion as experienced by its adherents. Rooted in the philosophical tradition established by Edmund Husserl, phenomenology emphasizes the importance of returning “to the things themselves” (*zu den Sachen selbst*) by examining phenomena as they are consciously experienced. In religious studies, this approach aims to explore how individuals experience, interpret, and internalize sacred realities within their lives.

The development of phenomenology of religion has been significantly influenced by scholars such as Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Max Scheler, and Mircea Eliade. Their works positioned religious experience as a central element in understanding religion. Rudolf Otto, for instance, described religious experience through the concept of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, referring to encounters with the sacred that are simultaneously awe-inspiring, mysterious, and fascinating.

In Islamic contexts, phenomenology is particularly relevant because Islam functions not only as a doctrinal system but also as a lived reality manifested through worship, rituals, traditions, and social practices. Religious activities such as prayer (*ṣalāh*), fasting (*ṣawm*), pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), remembrance of God (*dhikr*), and other spiritual practices embody rich phenomenological dimensions worthy of scholarly investigation.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the theoretical foundations, methodological contributions, and contemporary relevance of the phenomenology of religion within Islamic studies.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. The SLR method was selected because it enables researchers to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of various scholarly sources relevant to the topics of the phenomenology of religion and Islamic studies.

The research data were collected from books on the phenomenology of religion, reputable national and international journal articles, conference proceedings, and academic documents discussing phenomenology and Islamic studies. The literature reviewed covered publications from 2010 to 2026 while also incorporating classical phenomenological works as the theoretical foundation of the study.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, source triangulation was employed by comparing different scholarly perspectives and previous research findings related to the phenomenology of religion within the field of Islamic studies.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The phenomenology of religion is one of the approaches in religious studies that seeks to understand religious phenomena as they are experienced and interpreted by religious adherents themselves. This approach emerged from the philosophical tradition of phenomenology developed by Edmund Husserl in the early twentieth century. Husserl emphasized that reality should be understood based on human conscious experience of an object or phenomenon. In the context of religion, phenomenology examines how individuals experience, internalize, and assign meaning to their religious experiences.

Unlike theological approaches that focus primarily on the truth claims of religious doctrines, the phenomenology of religion does not aim to evaluate whether a particular belief is true or false. Instead, it seeks to understand the meanings embedded in religious experiences objectively through the perspectives of the believers themselves. Consequently, phenomenology of religion is often regarded as an approach that places religious experience at the center of scholarly inquiry.

In the development of modern religious studies, phenomenology has become an important alternative approach for bridging normative and empirical perspectives. Religion is no longer understood merely as a collection of teachings contained in sacred texts but also as

a lived reality embedded in the consciousness of individuals and communities. Through this perspective, religion is viewed as an existential experience that shapes human identity, behavior, and worldview.

From an Islamic perspective, the phenomenology of religion holds significant relevance because Islamic teachings encompass not only normative dimensions but also emphasize spiritual experience and religious consciousness. The concept of *ihsan*, for example, contains a phenomenological dimension that highlights the experience of feeling the presence of Allah in everyday life. Therefore, phenomenology of religion provides an effective framework for gaining a deeper understanding of the religious experiences of Muslims.

Philosophically, the phenomenology of religion is rooted in Edmund Husserl's thought, particularly his concept of *epoche* or *bracketing*. This concept requires researchers to temporarily suspend their prejudices, assumptions, and subjective judgments when examining a phenomenon.

In religious studies, the application of *epoche* means that researchers do not evaluate a belief system according to the standards of their own religious convictions. Rather, they seek to understand how religious experiences are perceived and interpreted by the adherents themselves. This approach encourages a more objective academic attitude and promotes openness toward the diversity of religious experiences.

Another important concept is the *intentionality of consciousness*. Husserl argued that human consciousness is always directed toward something. In religious experience, consciousness is directed toward God, the sacred, or other transcendent realities. Consequently, religious experience is understood as a form of human awareness directed toward something perceived as possessing profound spiritual significance.

Husserl's ideas were further developed by prominent scholars of the phenomenology of religion, including Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, and Mircea Eliade. These scholars expanded phenomenology into a methodological framework for understanding the diverse forms of religious experience found across different religious traditions.

One of the primary concerns of the phenomenology of religion is the study of religious experience. In Islam, religious experience occupies a central position because it serves as a means through which individuals cultivate a sense of closeness to Allah (SWT).

Religious experience in Islam can be observed in various forms of worship, including prayer (*salah*), fasting (*sawm*), almsgiving (*zakat*), pilgrimage (*hajj*), remembrance of God (*dhikr*), recitation of the Qur'an, and social activities performed with sincere religious intentions. These experiences are not merely ritualistic in nature; they also encompass complex psychological, spiritual, and social dimensions.

For instance, when a Muslim performs prayer with deep concentration and devotion (*khushu'*), the act involves more than physical movements. It becomes a process of spiritual communication with Allah. During this experience, individuals may develop an awareness of their own limitations, recognize their dependence on divine assistance, and experience a sense of inner peace that is often difficult to explain through rational analysis alone.

The phenomenology of religion seeks to understand such experiences as meaningful realities for the individuals who experience them. Therefore, the focus of inquiry extends beyond the procedural aspects of prayer to include the inner experiences and meanings perceived by worshippers during the act of worship.

A similar interpretation can be applied to the practice of fasting. From a phenomenological perspective, fasting is not merely understood as abstaining from food and drink. Rather, it is viewed as a transformative experience involving self-discipline, the regulation of desires, the enhancement of social empathy, and the strengthening of spiritual

awareness. Through fasting, Muslims experience a process of personal and spiritual transformation that contributes to the development of religious consciousness and moral character.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study on the phenomenology of religion in Islamic studies, it can be concluded that the phenomenology of religion constitutes an important scholarly approach that significantly contributes to the development of contemporary Islamic studies. This approach seeks to understand religion through the lived experiences and religious consciousness of its adherents, thereby enabling religion to be understood not merely as a system of doctrines and norms but also as a lived reality that is experienced, internalized, and interpreted in everyday life. Through a phenomenological perspective, the subjective dimensions of religiosity, which often receive limited attention in normative studies, can be explored in a deeper and more comprehensive manner.

The phenomenology of religion within Islamic studies demonstrates that various religious practices, such as prayer (*salah*), fasting (*sawm*), almsgiving (*zakat*), pilgrimage (*hajj*), remembrance of God (*dhikr*), and other spiritual activities, contain meanings that extend far beyond the mere fulfillment of religious obligations. These practices represent forms of religious experience that cultivate awareness of the Divine, strengthen spirituality, and provide existential meaning in the lives of Muslims. In this regard, phenomenology helps reveal the inner dimensions of Islam that cannot always be fully explained through theological, juridical, or historical approaches alone.

This study also indicates that the phenomenology of religion possesses considerable relevance in addressing the challenges of increasingly complex and pluralistic modern societies. By emphasizing the understanding of religious experiences from the perspectives of those who experience them, phenomenology promotes an academic attitude characterized by objectivity, inclusivity, and dialogue. As such, this approach can serve as an important instrument for fostering religious moderation, strengthening tolerance, and encouraging interfaith dialogue without compromising the distinctive identities of different religious communities.

Nevertheless, the phenomenological approach has certain limitations, particularly its tendency to focus on individual subjective experiences, which may result in insufficient attention to the social, cultural, economic, and political factors that also shape religious practices. Therefore, the application of phenomenology in Islamic studies should be complemented by other approaches, including the sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, psychology of religion, and Islamic history, in order to produce a more comprehensive and holistic analysis.

In conclusion, this study affirms that the phenomenology of religion remains a relevant and strategic approach for enriching the methodology of Islamic studies. By bridging normative and empirical perspectives, phenomenology offers a deeper understanding of the religious experiences of Muslims. Future research on the phenomenology of religion in Islamic contexts should continue to be developed, particularly in examining the dynamics of Muslim spirituality in the digital era, the religiosity of younger generations, and the transformation of religious experiences within modern societies undergoing continuous social and cultural change.

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