

Pattern of Sufis Thoughts in the Kingdoms of Aceh and Banjar

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Abstract

This article discusses the similarities in the pattern of Sufis thought in two classical Malay kingdoms, namely Aceh and Banjar. The relationship that took place between them had made it possible for exchange of mystical ideas. This article elaborates the history of Sufism in the two kingdoms to indicate the relationship that existed, though perhaps in different time frame. In the end, this article finds that there is a similar pattern in the development of the accepted Sufis doctrine in both kingdoms, that is the rejection of the doctrine of *waḥdah al-wujūd* for the doctrine of *waḥdah al-shuhūd*.

Keywords: Sufism (*Taşawwuf*), Kingdom of Aceh, Kingdom of Banjar, mystical doctrines, Sufis streams

Corak Pemikiran Tasawuf dalam Kerajaan Aceh dan Banjar

Abstrak

Artikel ini membincangkan persamaan dalam corak pemikiran tasawuf di dua kerajaan Melayu klasik iaitu kerajaan Aceh dan Banjar. Didapati hubungan yang ada antara kedua kerajaan ini telah membolehkan saling pertukaran pemikiran tasawuf berlaku antara kedua-duanya. Makalah ini memperincikan sejarah perkembangan pemikiran sufi di Aceh dan Banjar yang menunjukkan hubungan yang wujud, biarpun perkembangan itu berlaku dalam tempoh masa yang berbeza. Akhirnya, makalah ini mendapati ada persamaan bentuk perkembangan pemikiran sufi di kedua-dua kerajaan silam ini, iaitu secara khususnya pada penolakan doktrin waḥdah al-wujūd dan penerimaan doktrin waḥdah al-shuhūd.

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Kata kunci: *tasawuf, kerajaan Aceh, kerajaan Banjar, doktrin tasawuf, aliran sufi*

Introduction

The kingdoms of Aceh and Banjar were among the classical kingdoms that had developed rapidly in the Malays Archipelago once upon a time. Their development was in no small measure the result of accepting Islam as national and community religion, which included the teaching of Sufism or *taşawwuf*. However, past researchers have mostly been concerned with Sufism in Aceh, while the situation in Banjar has yet to receive its due attention. This calls for a more discovery since Sufism is one of the fundamentals of Islamic teachings, especially with regards to being the underlying basis in the formation of a Malay Muslim society. Base on this background, this article elucidates the state of Sufism in Aceh and Banjar. It analyses the similarities shared between both kingdoms in terms of Sufis thoughts which were the result of mutual influence between them.

Sufism in the Kingdom of Aceh

The kingdom of Aceh was one of the Malay Islamic kingdoms after the decline of Pasai and Malacca. It is situated in the Sumatra Island of Indonesia. Aceh had developed rapidly not only in the intellectual sphere, but also economically and politically. From the intellectual aspect, Aceh had emerged as the Islamic intellectual centre especially in the 16th century. The development of Islam had directly brought with it Sufism, a branch of knowledge and practice which is also part of the Islamic teachings. Sufism in Aceh can in fact be traced in the literary work *Hikayat Aceh*. This is for the fact that generally, the scholars of Islam are quoted as *syekh, imam, khatib, haji, sayyid, maulana, mursyid, syed, alim, lebai, guru, qari* and *kiai*.³ These terms are usually synonymous with Sufis, mystics and religionists and often mentioned in *Hikayat Aceh*. This lends the picture that Islamic intellectual development has been established in Aceh, specifically the branch of Sufism.

³ Tatiana A. Denisova, *Refleksi Historiografi Alam Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 2011), 66.

The development of Sufism in Aceh can be observed from the emergence of such great scholars as Hamzah Fansūrī (d.1607) and Shams al-Dīn bin ‘Abd Allāh al-Sumatrānī (d.1630). In the beginning, they were the advisors to the king in matters of religion, and were known as “Shaykh al-Islām”. Their pattern of Sufis thoughts could be categorised as subscribing to the doctrine of what is usually termed the *waḥdah al-wujūd* (the unity of Being). This pattern followed in the tradition of and is quite similar to the thoughts of Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad bin ‘Alī ibn ‘Arābī (d.1240). From the intellectual aspect, they succeeded in expanding Islamic scholarship and greatly influenced that particular period. With regards to Sufism specifically, they produced several eminent works, such as *Asrār al-‘Arifīn* by Hamzah Fansūrī and *Jawhar al-Ḥaqā’iq* by Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrānī.

More than this, the pattern of Sufis thought in Aceh had also been influenced by, somewhat a contrasting thought to the *waḥdah al-wujūd*, namely the doctrine of *waḥdah al-shuhūd*, which has been brought by Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad bin ‘Alī al-Ranīrī (d.1658). This gave raise to various intense debates between the two patterns of Sufism. Al-Ranīrī particularly, had been very critical towards Fansūrī and his writings. However, looking from a different perspective, these debates should also serve to illustrate Aceh as the intellectual centre at the time, especially in Sufism.

Sufism in the Kingdom of Banjar

The Kingdom of Banjar was one of the Malay Islamic kingdoms situated in South Kalimantan and centred at Banjarmasin. The development of Sufism in the kingdom of Banjar paralleled to the introduction of Islam into the region. Similar to most other areas in the Malay world before the advent of Islam, South Kalimantan was influenced by animism, which is better known as Kaharingan by the Banjar people, and also by the mythology of Hinduism-Buddhism. Compared to Aceh, South Kalimantan accepted the religion of Islam much later in the 16th century.

Before the coming of Islam to South Kalimantan, there had been the kingdom of Dipa, situated in Amuntai, and later moved to Daha. The capital of the kingdom then moved again afterwards to Banjar, which is located in Banjarmasin, where it received the

Islamic missionary call. South Kalimantan received Islam gradually, a fact which could be learned from *Hikayat Banjar*. This historical record narrates how Islam officially entered South Kalimantan when its king at the time, Pangeran Samudra,⁴ accepted Islam, with an Islamic name Sultan Surjanu'llh (Suriansyah) or Surian Allah. Prior to embracing Islam Pangeran Samudra had also hold other designations such as Penembahan Batu Putih, Penembahan Batu Habang and Penembahan Marhum. This acceptance of Islam was actually a part of a chronicle of events in which Pangeran Samudra promised the kingdom of Damak that he would embrace Islam if the latter were to support him in his crisis with his brother. The following is an extract from *Hikayat Banjar* with regards to the agreement,

*Maka kata Sultan Damak, "Mau aku itu membantu lamun anakku raja Bandjarmasih itu masuk agama Islam itu. Lamun tiada mau Islam tiada aku mau bertolong."*⁵

The answer and promise of Pangeran Samudra was sent through a representative to Sultan Damak as follows,

*Maka sembah Patih Balit, "Sembah putera andika mau masuk Islam itu, manalah perintah sampian andika." Maka kata sultan, "Syukur lamun demikian." Maka ditolong orang seribu serta senjatanya. Serta penghulu disuruh lompat itu akan mengislamkan itu."*⁶

Islam then entered South Kalimantan officially with the conversion of its ruler. Together with this, Sufism was also indirectly introduced to South Kalimantan. Based on *Hikayat Banjar*, there was an ulama of Arab descent who came to South Kalimantan and gave the title Suriansyah to the newly converted ruler. It was chronicled in *Hikayat Banjar* as such,

Maka Pangeran Samudra itu, sudah tetap kerajaannya di Bandjarmasih itu, maka masuk Islam. Diislamkan oleh penghulu Damak itu. Maka waktu itu ada orang negeri Arab

⁴ *Pangeran* is a designation for children of royal birth from both parents. The wife of the king is called *Ratu* if both her parents are also of royal birth.

⁵ Siti Hawa Salleh, *Hikayat Banjar* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka, 1990), 328-329.

⁶ Hawa, *Hikayat Banjar*, 328.

*datang, maka dinamainya Pangeran Samudra itu Sultan Surjanu'llh. Banyak tiada tersebut.*⁷

It is very likely that the Arab was a Sufis who came to spread Islam as well as having other purposes and activities in mind. This supposition could be held because generally ulama in the early decades were also Sufis, either directly or not. However, what is certain is that there is no report or information with regards to the personal and specific identity of the Arab ulama. Based on the writing of H. Abdurrahman, it was said that the Arab did not come from Java but instead came directly from the Arab land and had a good relationship with the sultan that he was capable of bestowing a title to the sultan, known as Suriansyah.⁸

Meanwhile, the *Penghulu Damak* or the chieftain of Damak mentioned above has been identified in several opinions offered through different sources. According to H. Abdurrahman, the chieftain was known as Khatib Dayyan whilst his real name was Sayyid 'Abd al-Rahmān.⁹ There is also other opinion that states he was Penghulu Rahmatullah (1521-1224), who was an officer at Damak Chieftain Department. This opinion is based on *Sejarah Banjar*, in which there was no report of a chieftain by the name of Khatib Dayyan, who hold a position at the department. In contrast however, by considering the time of Sultan Suriansyah's conversion, Penghulu Rahmatullah was reported as the chieftain of that time.¹⁰

Here, it could be supposed that the event stated in *Hikayat Banjar* regarding the Islamisation of Sultan Suriansyah by the chieftain of Damak, was carried out by Khatib Dayyan who acted as the representative of the chieftain of Damak at that time, for the conversion of Pangeran Samudra and expansion of Islam in South Kalimantan. Although the conversion was carried out by his representative, the role of the chieftain of Demak cannot be denied. Moreover, Khatib Dayyan was one of the Sufis who played the initial role in the coming of Islam in South Kalimantan.

⁷ Hawa, *Hikayat Banjar*, 328.

⁸ H. Abdurrahman, *Menguak Tabir Sisi-sisi Gelap dari Sejarah Perkembangan Agama Islam di Kalimantan Selatan* (Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Fathaniah, 1996), 12.

⁹ Abdurrahman, *Menguak Tabir Sisi-sisi Gelap*, 10.

¹⁰ M. Suriansya Ideham *et al.*, *Sejarah Banjar* (Banjar: Badan Penelitian Dan Pengembang Daerah Propinsi Kalimantan Selatan, 2003), 35.

Since that time, Sufism started to expand greatly in South Kalimantan. Its peak period can be seen in 19th century with the emergence of many Sufis in Banjar. Amongst such Sufis figures were Muḥammad Nafīs al-Banjarī, Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjarī, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Abulung, Datu Sanggul, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ṣiddīq and many others.

The Relationship between Both Kingdoms in Sufism

Aceh was a magnificent empire and played a major role as the centre of intellectualism and education in the early decade of the coming of Islam to Malay Archipelago. Therefore, it is not surprising that Aceh had a big influence towards the development of the pattern of Sufis thought in other parts of the region including in the kingdom of Banjar. Although the distance between the two places was quite far, where Aceh is situated in Sumatra Island, whereas Banjar is in South Kalimantan within the Borneo Island, it was not a preventing factor in building a religious and mystical relationship. However what is definite is that both regions had their own part to play in this relationship that greatly influenced the development of Sufism in the archipelago.

With regards to this relationship, there were several points which could be highlighted to indicate Aceh and Banjar roles in Sufism. The relationship between Banjar and Aceh can also be seen from the delivery of Sufis writings by the ulama of Banjar to the kingdom of Aceh. This event was recorded in *Sejarah Banjar*, in which there was a story in the 17th century, an ulama by the name Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn al-Banjarī had written a Sufis book titled *Asal Kejadian Nur Muhammad*.¹¹ This book apparently written based on the doctrine of *waḥdah al-wujūd* stream and many of its content agree with the thoughts of Ibn ‘Arabī. This book was later sent to the Queen of Aceh who was ruling at that time. This event describes the relationship of the two kingdoms in Sufism during the early century of Islamic expansion.

According to R.O. Windstedt, the oldest known *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* was found in Jakarta, written in the year 1668. It was written by an ulama of Banjar by the name Shams al-Dīn for

¹¹ Ahmad, “Pengajian Tasawuf SIRR di Kalimantan Selatan,” (Disertasi, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Antasari, Banjarmasin, 2008), 19.

Sultan Tajul Alam Syafiatuddin, the ruler of Aceh.¹² Indeed in the beginning of the expansion of Islam, Aceh had officially accepted the doctrine of *wahdah al-wujūd* as the kingdom's strand of Sufis belief and view during the 16th century. Therefore, it cannot be denied that this had given tremendous impact on the development of Sufis thought in the areas surrounding it, including South Kalimantan.

The relationship between the two kingdoms in the development of Sufism did not end there. For its geographical location, Aceh had become the stopover to wait the changing of monsoon wind. For this reason, people from Banjar who were intending to perform the pilgrimage or hajj to Mecca, or go to study in the Arab land will use Aceh as the transit location. Due to the quite considerable period of waiting time, there is a possibility that the people of Banjar who stopped over at Aceh, to be influenced by Sufis thought that was rapidly developing there, since the pilgrims were also seeking to experience the mystical dimension of Islam for they were in a spiritual journey towards God.

South Kalimantan was indeed a strategic place for sea voyage because it situated by the sea and this had made the Banjar people's expertise in sailing as further motivator in their effort to seek knowledge. According to H. Ramli Nawawi, there was envoy from the kingdom of Banjar to China and Java. Moreover, since the 17th century, Banjar had been famous as the producer of trading ships, and had given birth to sea captains who can sail to Mecca even in *perahu* or proa that is a small boat.¹³ There was also acknowledgement from the West that there were travellers who were known as the people of Banjar from Kalimantan to the Philippines, Ceylon, Egypt and Mecca were.¹⁴ This had only catalysed the relationship between Banjar and Aceh.

Moreover, the relationship between Aceh dan Banjar was due to trade that made it possible for the two places to be connected. After the fall of Malacca to the colonialist Portuguese in 1511,

¹² Suriansya *et al.*, *Sejarah Banjar*, 124.

¹³ H. Ramli Nawawi *et al.*, *Sejarah Pendidikan Daerah Kalimantan Selatan* (Banjarmasin: Jabatan Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan, 1992), 11.

¹⁴ Artum Artha, *Beberapa Masalah Kebudayaan Banjar* (Surabaya: P.T. Bina Ilmu, 1974), 104.

many traders had shifted to Aceh and other ports in Borneo such as Brunei and Banjarmasin.¹⁵ It is well acknowledged that many of the Muslim traders were also practitioners of Sufism. It cannot be denied that there had been exchange of thoughts between the visiting Sufis and local communities with regards to teaching and understanding of Sufism. The traders who came from Middle East had most definitely different streams of thoughts especially in Sufism. They had spread the understanding in Aceh and later expanded to South Kalimantan after learning that the area was rich in valuable natural resources. Amongst the natural resources that were highly in demand from South Kalimantan was black pepper, camphor, animal hides and many others. It had been confirmed that the 17th century was the time of great economic development in Banjar, especially in the trade of pepper.¹⁶ It is then not impossible if this trading activity had also aided in the development of Sufism in South Kalimantan.

This had resulted in the exchange of thoughts between the two regions, especially in Sufism. This can be seen clearly from the similarities of Sufis thought between the two kingdoms.

Similarities of Sufis Thoughts in the Kingdom of Aceh and Banjar

The two-way relationship between Banjar and Aceh had mutually influenced both kingdoms, including in Sufism. Two streams of Sufism that had greatly influenced Malay Archipelago during the early years of Islam in the region were those which have been influenced mainly by the doctrine of *wahdah al-wujūd* and *wahdah al-shuhūd* respectively. Therefore it was these two streams that had coloured the pattern of Sufis thoughts in Aceh and Banjar.

Amongst the similarities with regards to Sufis development in these two kingdoms was the recognition of the doctrine of *wahdah al-wujūd* in the kingdoms' official religious ideology. As early as

¹⁵ Farid Mat Zain, "Peranan Ulama dalam Penyebaran Islam di Nusantara Abad ke-19M: Kajian Ulama Kalimantan," (Makalah Seminar Antarabangsa Pengajian Dakwah Malaysia-Indonesia, di Medan, Indonesia, pada 18 Mei 2002), 4.

¹⁶ Nor Wahidah, "Islam di Kalimantan Selatan Dilihat dari Perspektif Politik dan Pemerintahan," *al-Banjari: Jurnal Studi Islam Kalimantan* 8, no. 1 (2009), 93-114.

the arrival of Islam to Aceh, the doctrine of *waḥdah al-wujūd* had become the main principle in the belief and practice of Sufism in the kingdom and had been generally accepted by the administration, particularly during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda. However this ideology changed towards the doctrine of *waḥdah al-shuhūd* during the time of Sultan Iskandar Thani in the 16th century with the emergence of several ulama who rejected the former doctrine whilst carried the latter ideology.¹⁷

The same change occurred in Banjar when the doctrine of *waḥdah al-wūjud* reigned as the main Sufis ideology and was generally recognised within the administration since the 16th century until 19th century.¹⁸ However, after the emergence of Sufis ulama in Banjar with belief and practice of *waḥdah al-shuhūd*, the official religious ideology changed to the latter. This similar development indicates some form of relations and influences in Sufism between the kingdom of Aceh and Banjar, including in both kingdoms' administration of religious ideology.

Another similarity shared between the two kingdoms was the emergence of prominent figures with the same stream of thought in Sufism. The rise of figures who subscribed to the doctrine of *waḥdah al-wujūd* could be seen in Aceh as early as 12th century, such as 'Abd Allāh 'Ārif through the production of the oldest known Sufis writing in Malay Archipelago, namely *Baḥr al-Lāhūt*.¹⁹ The Sufis thought of this stream then kept on expanding with the rise of many other Sufis ulama of Aceh until the 16th century, which was also the golden age of intellectualism in Aceh. The emergence of figures such as Hamzah Fansūrī and Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrānī from within the stream of *waḥdah al-wujūd* had also enriched the Sufis intellectualism in Aceh particularly and the Malay Archipelago generally. This belief was later opposed by Sufis ulama from the stream of *waḥdah al-shuhūd*, such as Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī.

¹⁷ A. Chunaini Saleh, *Penyelenggaraan Haji Era Reformasi: Analisis Internal Kebijakan Publik Departmen Agama* (Jakarta: Pustaka Alvabet, 2008), 12.

¹⁸ H. Asmaran A.S. et al., *Perkembangan Pemikiran Tasawuf di Kalimantan Selatan* (Banjarmasin: Institut Agama Islam Negeri Antasari, 2007), 3.

¹⁹ Hawash Abdullah, *Perkembangan Ilmu Tasawuf dan Tokoh-tokohnya di Nusantara* (Surabaya: Al-Ikhlās, 1980), 10.

The same development and change also occurred in the kingdom of Banjar, where many Sufis who subscribed to this latter doctrine were born. The belief and practice of Sufism in Banjar started with the allegiance to the doctrine of *wujūdiyyah*, which amongst others was written first by Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn al-Banjarī in the 17th century. However, Sufism in Banjar expanded rapidly later on in the 19th century with the emergence of many more Sufis ulama from various streams of doctrines, which was fairly comparable to that which happened in Aceh, though the timeframe was somewhat different. Later than Aceh, the 19th century was the peak of Sufism in the kingdom of Banjar when many ulama produced various Sufis writings. Among Sufis ulama of Banjar who subscribed to the doctrine of *wujūdiyyah* were Muḥammad Nafis al-Banjarī, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Abulung, Datu Sanggul, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ṣiddīq and many more, while the other stream had produced Sufis ulama such as Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjarī. Many of them studied in Middle East, which could explained the different influences on their pattern of Sufis thought.

Apart from the above similarities, another similarity existed in the form of controversial events that took place in both of these kingdoms. Although it is undeniable that such conflict may have also happened in other parts of Islamic world, this article focuses on the event that took place in Aceh and Banjar. The controversial event which was in relation to Sufism took place during the 16th century when Aceh was ruled by Sultan Iskandar Thani. Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī who had a considerable influence and was holding the office of mufti at the Shaykh al-Islām Department had produced various scholarly works regarding Sufism. He managed to influence the ruler at that time resulting in a royal decree which prohibit the belief in and practice of the doctrine of *wujūdiyyah*. Moreover, Sultan Iskandar Thani had ordered those who subscribe to the doctrine of *wujūdiyyah* to be hunted down if they refused to repent. Consequently, writings containing the teaching of *wujūdiyyah*, including those authored by Hamzah Fansūrī, were burnt in front of Bayt al-Raḥmān Mosque.²⁰

This event was comparable to the happening in the kingdom of Banjar. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Abulung or known as Datu Abulung or

²⁰ Tim Redaksi, *Ensiklopedia Tematis Dunia Islam* (Jakarta: Ichtisar Baru Van Hoeve, 2008), 146.

Datu Habulung or Datu Ambulung was amongst the controversial Sufis ulama in Banjar, since he subscribed to the doctrine of *wujūdiyyah*. As a consequent, he was ordered to be executed by Sultan Tahmidullah II (1785-1808).²¹ ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Abulung had once held the important office as the advisor to the sultan. However, after the return of Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjaṛī from the Middle East, he managed to change the administration of mystical religious ideology of the kingdom. He had produced various scholarly works to correct the previous faith that embrace the doctrine of *wujūdiyyah*.²² Like Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī, Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjaṛī who was also the mufti of the kingdom of Banjar had influenced the ruler of the time to take action on ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Abulung. As a result he was captured by the ruler and kept in a narrow caged area with enough space merely for standing up. The cage was then sunk in Luk Bandar River. It was said that he did not die, but each time the time for prayer arrives, the cage would emerge to the water’s surface and ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Abulung would perform his prayer. The news that he was still alive eventually reached the sultan who ordered him to be beheaded. It was alleged that the blood which sprung out slowly formed the words *Lā ilāha illā Allāh Muḥammad Rasūlullāh* (There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger).²³

Based on the preceding discussion, it is apparent that there is diplomatic relations in terms of religious practices, educations, transportations, harbours and trading matters which had enabled the influence and exchange of Sufis thought between these two kingdoms. In the beginning both kingdoms accepted the doctrine of *waḥdah al-wujūd* in the teachings and practices of Sufism, but later switched to the doctrine of *waḥdah al-shuhūd*. This switch also related to the emergence of prominent figures in respected streams and of works in Sufism, and based on various tendencies which had led to controversial historical events. This article thus

²¹ Tim Peneliti, *Risalah Tasawuf Syekh Abdul Hamid Abulung* (Banjarmasin: Institut Agama Islam Negeri Antasari, 2003), 8.

²² Bayani Dahlan, *Ulama Banjar dan Karya-karyanya* (Banjarmasin: Antasari Press, 2009), 166.

²³ Tim Sahabat, *Datu-datu Terkenal Kalimantan Selatan* (Banjarmasin: Sahabat, 2010), 56.

indicates proof of a link between the two kingdoms which had revealed the exchange of Sufis thought to the extent that the events which took place in both places were also similar.

Conclusion

The two kingdoms of Aceh and Banjar were two kingdoms with similarities in terms of Sufis development. Although these two regions were situated far from each other, their respective Sufis development shares similarities from the relationship that has been forged between the two kingdoms. The relationship that has resulted was based on religious, education, transportation, trading activities and exchange of scholarly works, which had made it possible for the exchange of Sufis knowledge to the point that Sufis thoughts and events in the two kingdoms had also been very similar. It is safe to conclude that the doctrines of *wahdah al-wujūd* and *wahdah al-shuhūd* that had influenced both kingdoms highlighted the intellectual activities especially in Sufism in the Malay Archipelago.

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