

CLASSIFICATION OF SUFI GROUPS IN MALAY JAWI LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

In a recent paper Professor Hamid Algar had discussed (*Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 29, Issue 1, 1 January 2018) the classification of troublesome sufi groupings into antinomians and fraudsters based upon Sufi sources themselves. It is seen there that there is a reference as to how mainstream Sufi had exposed these frauds so as to enable true Sufi adherents to avoid following their ideas. The Sufi sources referred to by Prof. Algar was immense and displayed how both the Sunni and Shi'a Muslims had exposed the lies and antinomian tendencies brought by them. This paper would attempt to do something similar but with special emphasis on the Malay Sufis and their writings. It is indeed a misguided attempt to believe that the Malay Sufis were independent from their counterparts in the west. For the Malays or the Jawi as they are known in the west or the Hijjaz were a significant group of Muslims domiciled in the holy cities of Mekkah and Madina. This paper would investigate the various groupings or fraud ideologies within the Sufis themselves as seen by the Malays in their own words. As the many groupings that were mentioned by Prof. Algar are domiciled in the west, it would be interesting to see whether such ideas as propagated by them had reached the Far East. The period under investigation would be dependent upon the first text that can be seen to have such discussion within them which is roughly in the 16th century up until the late 19th or early 20th century. It will be seen that authors of the Sufi texts were aware of those misguided from within them and understood the environment of Nusantara then. Their many writings were instructive as much as they were prescriptive.

Keywords: Malay Sufi, Jawi, *wujudiyah*, *mulhid*, Patani

INTRODUCTION

The practice of Sufism has always been seen as a subjective in the sense that there are no valid criteria for us to evaluate Sufis and what they do. However the recent publication of the paper by Professor Hamid Algar demonstrates to us via a reliance on primary sources that Sufis did indeed try to control and provide a framework for such a field. In today's postmodern world and the availability of free for all spirituality in the market place, Sufism has always been seen as the go to "system" of connection with the Divine without the law. In the west the study on Sufism is considered a popular field and it elicits a kind of eclectic understanding of faith and a laissez faire attitude towards religion and most importantly law. Sufism has been seen as a kind of free for all as let's face it no one is gonna tell you what you have to do when there is no premise to do so in the first place ! However a close study of Sufism as it developed within the Muslim world reveals a different understanding that what have been held by these modern day Sufis. The paper written by Professor Hamid Algar in the *Journal of Islamic Studies* is a real contribution to the field of Sufism and Islamic studies in general. In this section here I intend to dissect that paper so as to bring out the nuance of such an analysis so as to provide a framework with which we can use to further investigate the issue of critical

studies on Sufism by Sufis themselves and how they are able to bring some sort of control in the practice of Sufism.

In the paper Professor Algar relied on primary sources on Sufism and had identified a few groupings which were labeled by these primary sources as indicating false Sufis. In general all the sources agree in the labelling of deviant Sufi groups as antinomians and frauds. The method that has been taken by these writers on Sufism is by classifying the different groups based upon their teachings and their masters (Hamid Algar,2017).

When you look at the history and development of Sufism in Malay language you would find that Sufism did not enter into the consciousness of the Malay without controversy. Various Sufi writers have discussed, criticized and reacted negatively at the writings of other Sufi authors in Malay. From the 17th century up until the contemporary time Sufis have also like their other counterparts in Islam such as the mutakallimun (theologians) criticised rather heavily those whose teachings they find inagreeable with them.

Beginning with the wujudiyah controversy, al-Raniri and his followers amongst the Sufi authors have all criticized the interpretation of the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabi as propagated by Shaykh Hamzah Fansuri and Shaykh Shams al-Din al-Sumatra’i.

The issue is not Ibn ‘Arabi per se but an interpretation of his teachings which are labelled by al-Raniri as wujudiyah mulhidah or the heretical wujudiyah. Al-Raniri had criticized their teachings in many of his own works which unfortunately make him a polemical author in regards to Sufism in Malay. He had criticized them in his Fathul Mubin ala al-Mulhidin (The victorious opening against the Heretics) (Nasrin Nasir,2017), al-Tibyan fi Ma’rifat al-Adyan (Clarity on knowledge of religions) and even in his only work on Fiqh, the Sirat al-Mustaqim (The straight path).

His criticism of the teachings have been analysed and it does appear polemical. In fact al-Attas regards al-Raniri’s criticisms on the teachings of Fansuri to have the aim of realpolitik rather than based upon proper knowledge (Al-Attas, 1970). However as I have shown in my own writings on the controversy, al-Raniri has a different interpretation on the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabi but at times he cannot control himself and falls into using certain adhominem argumentations(Nasrin Nasir, 2017).

His interpretation of the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabi is closer to the interpretation based upon the readings of the muhaddith and the traditional mufassir or exegetes. His is not the interpretation by the Sufis themselves but more of a traditionalist when reading Ibn ‘Arabi.

He does not deny Ibn ‘Arabi as a pure or proper Sufi but he does however read him like a traditionalist would. For example when dealing with ambiguous verses (mutashabbih) in the Qur’an he relies upon the interpretation given by the traditionalist like Ibn Hajjar al-Asqalani (Fathul Mubin, 2019) rather than any of the Sufi authors like Qushayri. This tendency to use traditionalist to explain Sufi concepts does not stop on the mutashabbih verses but he goes on to explain other Sufi terms. His method is to give a different interpretation on those given by Fansuri and Sumatra’I and then to accuse them as being heretical.

Coming back to Professor Algar's article above, the method used by al-Raniri does not list down the various groupings in Sufism but instead al-Raniri outlines the various important deviant teachings as he sees it and from there proceeds to conveniently label them as being outside of Islam. It was made simpler of course as he was the Shaykh al-Islam. Books were burnt and people were executed. His reign of terror lasted whilst the Sultan Iskandar Muda reign Aceh but once the Sultan had died, his reign came to an end in embarrassing fashion with him losing at a student of a student of al-Sumatra'I, Saiful Rijal. We do not have enough information for us to reconstruct the debate between them however it is correct to say that it was due to this debate and the lack of support from the Sultanah Tajul Alam and the Hulubalang that al-Raniri had to return to Ranir, India shortly thereafter (Ito,1978).

There was no proper classification of the heretical Sufis only a mention of some of the teachings via paraphrasing from their works into his own writings such as the Fathul Mubin ala al-Mulhidin. Is there a mention of the antinomians in the writings of al-Raniri here? The answer to this question is in the affirmative for al-Raniri in his zeal to go against the teachings of Hamzah Fansuri and Shams al-Din al-Sumatra'i does conclude that based upon the premises he had given.

The labels that al-Raniri had given to the writings of Hamzah Fansuri and Shams al-Din al-Sumatra'I are that of toilet paper in the Sirat al-Mustaqim ! Of course their followers are labelled as Kafir or infidels straight out and are told to repent or die through execution.

In other words, if they believed as Fansuri had taught them then they had become antinomians where the Shari'ah does not matter. I have found this accusation by al-Raniri upon the wujudiyah mulhidah in his Fathul Mubin (Fathul Mubin,2019).

To sum up our discussion on al-Raniri there is thus no reference or quotations from the main works which classify the Sufis as we had found in the learned article by Professor Hamid Algar. It seems that al-Raniri was either oblivious of them or he had ignored them altogether which is interesting. This however does not mean that he was not aware of other writings in Arabic or Persian as the quotations show in his Fathul Mubin and many other writings on deviant Sufis. It might just mean that he did not think they merited a discussion or it could mean as I had mentioned above that al-Raniri was a staunch traditionalist who had adorned the Sufi garb to make himself fashionable in an environment which is thick with Sufism that is Aceh in the 17th century. His Fathul Mubin served as the main polemical piece used then and we have evidence of the text being copied in Palembang in the 18th century(Nasrin Nasir,2017). Thus indicating the relevance of the text in combating the "deviant" wujudiyah as well as that the teachings of Hamzah Fansuri and Shamsuddin al-Sumatra'I was still alive during the 18th century.

Unlike al-Raniri the next Shaykh al-Islam of Aceh Shaykh Abdul Ra'uf was not very keen to label the deviant Sufis, if they are deviant as infidels. In one of his writings titled *Daqa'iq al-Huruf* (the subtleties of writings) he says:

"Bermula: yang mengkafirkan itu sangat bahayanya, karna jikalau ada ia kafir maka tiadalah perkataan dalamnya, dan jika tiada ia kafir neschaya kembali kata itu kepada

diri kita ...”(Johns,1955). (To call someone an infidel is so dangerous because if he is indeed an infidel then there should be no words within it, but if he is not an infidel surely the label will return to us !)

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