

The Development of Tasawuf in Indonesia: History, Figures, and the Relevance of Sufism from the Classical Period to the Modern Era

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ABSTRACT

Islamization in the Nusantara since the thirteenth century, which occurred through trade, politics, education, and cultural acculturation. This study aims to analyze the role of religious scholars and Sufi figures in shaping the tradition of Sufism in Indonesia, as well as its relevance in responding to the challenges of modern society. The research employs a qualitative descriptive approach based on library research, examining relevant historical sources, books, and scholarly journals. The findings indicate that Sufism played a significant role in the success of Islamization, as Sufi figures adopted strategic, contextual, ethical, and culturally accommodative approaches to preach. This is reflected in the thought and practices of figures such as Hamzah Fansuri, Syamsuddin of Sumatra, Nuruddin ar-Raniri, Abdurrauf of Singkel, Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani, and Hamka. Subsequently, Sufism in Indonesia developed as an adaptive and moderate spiritual tradition and remains relevant as a foundation for mental, character, moral, and spiritual formation within society, particularly in confronting material crises, capitalism, and modernity.

Keywords: Sufism, Islam, Indonesia.

Keywords: mental health, adolescent students, Sufism psychotherapy, Islamic boarding school.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of Tasawuf in Indonesia is closely related to the Islamization process in the Nusantara region since the 13th

century. The spread of Islam in the early period was not only conducted through formal preaching pathways but also through trade activities, education, social relations, and cultural approaches adaptive to local society. In this context, Sufi scholars played a significant role as primary actors in introducing Islamic values to the Nusantara community peacefully and accommodatively. Their presence not only brought Islamic spiritual teachings but also introduced patterns of religious life emphasizing ethics, simplicity, morality, and closeness to God. According to Yuslafita and Efendi (2023), the Islamization process in the Nusantara occurred gradually through cultural approaches and acculturation

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with local traditions, so Islam was accepted without causing significant social conflicts. This approach made Tasawuf one of the important elements in the success of Islam's spread in Indonesia.

In its historical development, Tasawuf in Indonesia grew into a distinctive religious tradition with moderate characteristics. Tasawuf is not only understood as an individual spiritual teaching but has also developed into a social and cultural system that shapes the identity of the Nusantara Muslim community. Furoidah and Mawardi (2023) explained that the success of Islamization in Indonesia and Malaysia was influenced by the ability of scholars and Sufis to adjust da'wah to local culture. This condition shows that Tasawuf functions as a medium of integration between Islamic values and Nusantara traditions. Furthermore, Suherman (2019) emphasized that the development of Tasawuf contributes significantly to the formation of religious moderation, strengthening community spirituality, and harmonizing relations between Islam and local culture. Therefore, the study of Tasawuf's development in Indonesia is important to understand the historical and social dynamics of Indonesian Islamic identity formation.

Nevertheless, the development of Tasawuf in Indonesia cannot be separated from various intellectual dynamics and differing perspectives among Sufi figures. Debates regarding the concept of divinity, human relations with God, to da'wah methods became an important part of the history of Nusantara Tasawuf development. Figures such as Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani are known as developers of the *wahdatul wujud* (unity of existence) concept influenced by Ibn Arabi's thought, while Nuruddin ar-Raniri emerged as a figure who criticized these teachings because they were considered potentially causing *aqidah*

deviations (Rohmah, 2021). These differing intellectual orientations show that the development of Tasawuf in Indonesia occurred dynamically and involved complex intellectual dialogue processes. On the other hand, modernization and contemporary societal developments have also posed new challenges for the continuity of Tasawuf values amid modern life that tends to be materialistic.

Another issue that has emerged is how Tasawuf remains relevant in addressing the spiritual crisis of modern society. The development of capitalism, consumerism, and materialistic orientation in modern life has caused humans to experience inner anxiety, social alienation, and moral degradation. Hudaeri (2007) explained that modernity has born a crisis of meaning in life due to the dominance of rationality and materialism that ignores the human spiritual dimension. In these conditions, Tasawuf is viewed as a spiritual approach capable of providing inner balance, strengthening morality, and building divine consciousness. Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding of Tasawuf's development in Indonesia is needed to understand how Tasawuf teachings develop and adapt to face social changes from the classical period to the modern era.

Various previous studies have discussed the development of Tasawuf from historical, philosophical, and socio-religious perspectives. Rifai (2010) stated that Tasawuf is a spiritual philosophical system that integrates the dimensions of metaphysics, ethics, and human inner experiences in achieving moral perfection and divine consciousness. Meanwhile, Hamka (1992) explained that Tasawuf experienced historical development from ascetic practices toward more rational, moderate, and contextual spiritual thought systems in community life. These concepts show that Tasawuf is not only related to individual worship practices but also

has a social function in forming the character and moral responsibility of the Muslim community. Furthermore, Al Kumayi (2004) highlighted the shift in Islamic spiritual practices in Indonesia from intellectual-ethical patterns toward popular spirituality influenced by modern media and cultural developments.

Other studies also indicate that the success of Tasawuf in Indonesia was influenced by the ability of Sufis to apply persuasive and contextual da'wah methods. Qomar (2014) explained that Sufi da'wah strategies successfully attracted community attention because they were delivered through ethical approaches, role modeling, and respect for local culture. This approach differs from rigid and confrontational da'wah methods. In this context, Hamka (1990) emphasized that Islamic da'wah must be based on wisdom, respect for human dignity, and use rational and ethical approaches. This thought shows that Tasawuf has flexibility in responding to diverse community conditions. Thus, Tasawuf in Indonesia developed as a spiritual tradition that not only emphasizes human relations with God but also builds harmonious social relations amid plural society.

Although various studies have discussed the history and development of Tasawuf in Indonesia, most research still focuses on specific aspects, such as theological concepts, individual figures, or Tasawuf's influence on Nusantara Islamization. Research that integrates the historical development of Tasawuf, the roles of Sufi figures, da'wah methods, and their relevance to modern challenges remains relatively limited. Furthermore, not many studies have examined the development of Tasawuf in Indonesia comprehensively from the classical period to the modern era by placing Sufi figures as the primary actors in forming the Nusantara Sufi tradition. However, understanding the contribution of Sufis is very important to see

how Tasawuf developed as an adaptive and moderate spiritual system in Indonesian socio-cultural context.

Based on the aforementioned description, this research aims to analyze the development of Tasawuf in Indonesia through literature review regarding the history of Sufi figures and their roles in the Islamization process and formation of the Nusantara community spiritual tradition. This research also aims to identify the relevance of Tasawuf in facing modern societal challenges, particularly related to moral crisis, materialism, and spiritual degradation. The novelty of this research lies in integrating the historical discussion of Tasawuf development with analysis of Sufi figures' contributions from the classical to the modern period comprehensively in one study. Thus, this research is expected to contribute academically to the development of Tasawuf studies in Indonesia while enriching understanding of Tasawuf as a spiritual, moral, and social foundation in the life of Indonesian Muslim community.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, oriented toward the process of interpreting and presenting data based on theories used as conceptual frameworks (Yusril, 2021). This research falls under library research, conducted by examining various reference sources from books and journals relevant and interrelated with the research topic.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Results from Book, Journal, and Article Research

| Researcher /Autor and Year | Source | Research Findings |
|----------------------------|--------|-------------------|
|----------------------------|--------|-------------------|

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|------------------------------|--|---|
| Al Kumayi, S. (2004) | Book: Spiritual Wisdom from Hamka to Aa Gym | There has been a shift in the authority and practice of Islamic spirituality in Indonesia, from an intellectual-ethical orientation toward a form of popular spirituality mediated by the media, symbolic in nature, and tending toward commodification. | | | contextual spiritual-ethical system of thought that contributes to the formation of morality and the social responsibility of Muslims. |
| Hamka (1990) | Book: Principles and Wisdom in Islamic Preaching | Islamic preaching should be grounded in wisdom, ethics, and respect for human dignity by emphasizing persuasive, rational, and contextual approaches, while rejecting harsh, degrading, or objectifying methods of preaching. | Rifai, B (2010) | Book: The Philosophy of Sufism | Sufism is a system of spiritual philosophy that integrates metaphysical, ethical, and inner experiential dimensions in the pursuit of moral perfection, divine consciousness, and existential balance. |
| Hamka (1992) | Book: The Development of Sufism Through the Ages | Sufism has undergone continuous historical development, evolving from personal ascetic practices into a rational, moderate, and | Yusilafita and Efendi (2023) | Journal: The Process of Islamization and Its Spread in the Archipelago. Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai, Vol. 7 No. 3 | Islamization in the Indonesian archipelago occurred gradually, peacefully, and adaptively through trade, education, cultural preaching, and acculturation with local traditions, enabling Islam to be accepted without significant social conflict. |
| | | | Furoidah and | Journal: Islamization | The process of Islamization in |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Mawardi (2023)</p> | <p>of the Archipelago: A Study of the Arrival and Spread of Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia. Al-Munqidz: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman, Vol. 11 No. 1</p> | <p>Indonesia and Malaysia took place gradually through trade networks, religious scholars, and social institutions, us peaceful, adaptive, accommodative approaches toward the Nusantara which occurred peacefully, cultures in adaptively, and contextually. Tasawuf became an effective approach in the spread of Islam</p> | <p>Keislaman, Vol. 28</p> | <p>and crises of meaning, by emphasizing inner balance, morality, and awareness of divinity in modern life.</p> |
| <p>Suherman (2019)</p> | <p>Journal: The Development of Sufism and Its Contributions in Indonesia. Jurnal Ilmiah Research Sains, Vol. 5</p> | <p>Sufism developed alongside Islamization process in Indonesia contributed significantly to the formation of morality, religious moderation, strengthening community spirituality, to the character of Indonesian society which is the harmonioplural and multicultural. Hamka's thoughts integration (1990; 1992) also show that Tasawuf has Islamic valdeveloped from individual spiritual practices with lotoward more rational, moderate, and culture. contextual thought systems, thus remaining</p> | <p>Based on the results of the literature study above, the author analyzes that the development of Tasawuf in Indonesia cannot be separated from the Islamization process in the Nusantara which occurred peacefully, adaptively, and contextually. Tasawuf became an effective approach in the spread of Islam because it was able to adapt Islamic teachings to local cultures and traditions through persuasive, tolerant, and humanistic spiritual and cultural approaches. In addition to its role in the da'wah process, Tasawuf also has an important contribution in shaping the character of the Indonesian Muslim community. Research by Suherman (2019) shows that Tasawuf is not only oriented toward human relations with God but also plays a role in character formation, religious moderation, and strengthening social spirituality. The author assesses that Tasawuf values such as tolerance, community simplicity, and life balance are highly relevant to the character of Indonesian society which is the harmonioplural and multicultural. Hamka's thoughts integration (1990; 1992) also show that Tasawuf has Islamic valdeveloped from individual spiritual practices with lotoward more rational, moderate, and culture. contextual thought systems, thus remaining</p> | <p>Based on the results of the literature study above, the author analyzes that the development of Tasawuf in Indonesia cannot be separated from the Islamization process in the Nusantara which occurred peacefully, adaptively, and contextually. Tasawuf became an effective approach in the spread of Islam because it was able to adapt Islamic teachings to local cultures and traditions through persuasive, tolerant, and humanistic spiritual and cultural approaches. In addition to its role in the da'wah process, Tasawuf also has an important contribution in shaping the character of the Indonesian Muslim community. Research by Suherman (2019) shows that Tasawuf is not only oriented toward human relations with God but also plays a role in character formation, religious moderation, and strengthening social spirituality. The author assesses that Tasawuf values such as tolerance, community simplicity, and life balance are highly relevant to the character of Indonesian society which is the harmonioplural and multicultural. Hamka's thoughts integration (1990; 1992) also show that Tasawuf has Islamic valdeveloped from individual spiritual practices with lotoward more rational, moderate, and culture. contextual thought systems, thus remaining</p> |
| <p>Hudaeri, M. (2017)</p> | <p>Journal: Sufism and the Challenges of Modern Life. Al-Qalam: Jurnal Kajian</p> | <p>Sufism serves capable of answering the spiritual and social a relevneeds of modern society without losing its spiritual-ethicafundamental values. approach Furthermore, the author sees that responding to Tasawuf has a profound philosophical challenges dimension as explained by Rifai (2010), modernity, sibecause it not only emphasizes aspects of as materialireligious ritual but also integrates the</p> | | |

dimensions of metaphysics, ethics, and human inner experiences. In the modern era, the relevance of Tasawuf is increasing as society faces spiritual crises, materialism, and loss of meaning in life. Hudaeri (2007) shows that Tasawuf can become a spiritual solution through moral cultivation, inner balance, and increased divine consciousness. However, the author also observes changes in modern Tasawuf practices as explained by Al Kumayi (2004), namely the shift toward popular spirituality influenced by media and modern culture.

Although there are tendencies toward commercialization and popularization of spirituality, the fundamental values of Tasawuf such as soul purification, moral cultivation, and closeness to God remain the core essence of its teachings. Based on the overall analysis, the author concludes that Tasawuf in Indonesia has developed as an adaptive, moderate, and timeless spiritual tradition because it not only plays a role in the Islamization process but also in community moral formation, strengthening of Nusantara Islamic identity, and solving modern community spiritual problems.

DISCUSSION

To understand the development of Tasawuf in Indonesia, it would be best for someone to trace it from the beginning of Islam's arrival, through a spread process that accommodates culture to form an Islam tradition with Nusantara nuances. According to Ayzumardi Azra, historians have differing opinions about Islam's arrival in Indonesia because it is interconnected with three main things: the place of origin of Islam, the preachers, and the time of arrival (Maulidya, 2022). There are several theories regarding Islam's arrival in Indonesia, namely: Gujarat Theory, Arab Theory, Persian Theory, and Chinese Theory.

Gujarat Theory

A Dutch Professor at Leiden University named J.Pijnappel was the first to articulate this theory—that Islam's arrival in Indonesia did not come from Arabia, but rather Islam came from the western coast of the Malabar region and Gujarat in India. Before Islam arrived in Indonesia, the Arab followers of the Shafi'i school had first migrated to India. Subsequently, they moved and migrated to Indonesia, simultaneously spreading the Islamic religion (Yuslafita et al., 2023). Another potential aspect of this statement, Pijnappel stated that the first people to spread Islam in Indonesia were Arabs from Malabar and Gujarat, not Indians (Furoidah et al., 2023).

This theory received support from the Dutch orientalist Snouck Hurgronje. He stated that Islam's arrival in the early 13th century AD in Indonesia came through Muslim traders from Gujarat, India, and not directly from Arabia. This theory is reinforced by evidence of trade relations between India and the Nusantara communities, as well as the discovery of Gujarat-styled tombstones in Samudra Pasai and Java. However, this theory received several criticisms for ignoring pre-13th century sailing routes, earlier Islamic archaeological evidence in Java, and local historical traditions. Therefore, although Snouck's theory has an important contribution to Indonesian Islamization studies, its validity needs to be understood critically and complementarily with other theories. According to Buya Hamka, Snouck's view that rejects Arab origins in Islam's arrival to Indonesia is more of a political stance driven by colonial interests, not an academic and scientific conclusion. This view is more directed at weakening the unity bonds of the Muslim Nusantara and Malay communities with the early center of Islam in the Arab world. (Shofura et al., 2024).

Arab Theory

According to the Arab theory, the spread of Islam came from the city of Hadramaut in Arabia. This theory was proposed by Crawford (1820), Keyzer (1859), Niemann (1861), de Hollander (1861), and Veth (1878). Among their opinions, Crawford stated that Islam came from Arabia and maintained relations with Mohammedans in Eastern India. Keyzer stated that Islam entered Indonesia from Egypt through followers of the Shafi'i school, in line with the school followed by the majority of Indonesian Muslims. This view aligns with Niemann and de Hollander, although both considered Hadramaut as the source of Islamic da'wah due to their school affiliation. Meanwhile, Veth only emphasized the role of Arabs without determining their region of origin. (Pulungan, 2019).

This theory was also proposed by Hamka in his seminar in 1962. He was of the opinion that Islam arrived in Indonesia directly from Arabia (Mecca), not from India. Meanwhile, according to Arnold, there is a possibility that Islam was brought to Indonesia by Arab traders at the beginning of the Hijri century, long before there were historical writings about Islam's development at that time. (Kusnadi et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Hamka in his seminar stated that Islam arrived in Indonesia directly from Arabia, not from India (Asroni, 2022).

It is estimated that these peoples occupied these areas for a very long time and had established trade posts at several points on Indonesian islands. Although narratives about these islands were less highlighted by Arab scientists before the 9th century AD. One influential Arab figure in Indonesia who served as head of the Arab population area on the West Coast of Sumatra, this account is according to Chinese records in 674 AD. The majority of Arab traders sailing to Indonesia came from Yemen and Hadramaut in the Arabian Peninsula. Yemen had embraced

Islam since the early 7th century AD, so sailors and traders from that region played a significant role in the Islamization process of Southeast Asia through inter-port trade activities (Pulungan, 2019).

Persian Theory

The spread of Islam to Indonesia with the Persian theory was proposed by Hoesin Djajadiningrat. He stated that since the 7th century AD, Islam had entered Nusantara from Persia. This theory emphasizes the socio-cultural similarities between Indonesian Muslim communities and Persian Islamic traditions, including the existence of Persian communities in Aceh since the 15th century, holding Asyura commemorations through local rituals such as Tabut or Bahtera in West Sumatra and Bengkulu, similarities in the mystical teachings of Sheikh Siti Jenar with Sufism of al-Hallaj, and the use of the royal title Syah by some rulers in Indonesia. This theory was also reinforced by Umar Amin Husein who highlighted Persian influence in the use of Pegon script, adoption of Persian terms for naming Arabic harakat (Jabar, Jer, Pes are Fathah, Kasrah, Dhammah in Arabic), and Muharram traditions related to the martyrdom of Husain bin Ali, which has similarities with Shia practices in Persia (Yuslafita et al., 2023).

However, this theory received several objections from scholar scientists, such as Dahlan Mansur, Abu Bakar Atjeh, Saifuddin Zuhri, and Hamka, who doubted its historical validity. They argued that if Islam had entered Indonesia in the 7th century, that event occurred during the Umayyad Caliphate (Arab), when the political and religious center of Islam was still in the Arab region, while Persia had not yet become the center of world Islamic leadership. Furthermore, this theory has methodological limitations because it contains internal inconsistencies, as some of its arguments refer more to Gujarat and Malabar,

not Persia. Therefore, although the Persian theory shows cultural interaction, this theory is considered to lack coherent theoretical justification and relevance for explaining the origins of Islam's arrival to Indonesia with theoretical consistency (Shofura et al., 2024).

Chinese Theory

This theory asserts that Islam's arrival in Indonesia shares a similar perspective with the Persian Theory, namely the strong influence of Chinese cultural elements in the development of Islam in Indonesia. H.J. de Graaf, through his study of classical Javanese literature and Malay annual records, demonstrated that the Chinese community played a significant role in the Islamization process, including the involvement of prominent scholar figures such as Sunan Ampel (Raden Rahmat/Bong Swi Hoo) and the founder of the Sultanate of Demak, Raden Fatah (Jin Bun), who are identified as having Chinese descent. This argument is reinforced by Slamet Muljana in his controversial work (*The Fall of Javanese Hindu Kingdoms and the Emergence of Nusantara Islamic States*), as well as by Denys Lombard, who noted the emergence of Chinese cultural acculturation in various aspects of Indonesian societal life, ranging from food, clothing, language, art, to architecture. In this context, the theory asserting that Islam originated solely from Arabia or Egypt is deemed inadequate, because the Chinese route—through Chinese Islamic interactions and diplomatic relations between Arabia and China on the Silk Road—also facilitated access for Islam to enter Indonesia. The existence of Chinese-styled mosques and the role of Chinese descent preachers, particularly during the Sultanate of Demak as the first Islamic kingdom in Java, further corroborates that Chinese contribution to the Islamization process of the Nusantara cannot be disregarded (Amin et al., 2019).

After examining various theories regarding the region of origin of Islam's arrival in Indonesia, the subsequent examination concerns the process of spread and internalization of Islamic teachings among local communities. According to Ira M. Lapidus, there are three theories explaining the Islamization process in Indonesia. First, it lies in the central role of Muslim traders from coastal regions through trading activities, intermarriage, and involvement in international diplomacy and trade networks. This positioning rendered their role significant in strengthening Islam's position among the rulers of Nusantara coastal regions. Second, this theory emphasizes Islam's attractiveness at the community level as a value system providing ideological foundation, strengthening cooperation between farmers and traders, and integrating local communities into broader social structures. Third, this theory asserts that Islamization activities in Indonesia were highly determined by the strategic role of propagating scholars, particularly Sufi circles. Sufi groups originating from various regions such as Gujarat, Bengal, and the Arabian Peninsula—categorized by some orientalist circles as missionaries, namely peaceful and neutral religious propagators—were not merely spiritual teachers but also functioned as traders and politicians. This positioning facilitated Sufis to interact broadly with society, from local elites and politicians to traders and inland communities. The da'wah strategy they employed was accommodative and contextual, allowing Islamic teachings to be accepted gradually through harmonious acculturation with local culture (Pulungan, 2019).

From the theories mentioned above, it can be concluded that the Islamization process in Indonesia cannot be separated from the significant role of local scholars and Sufis. Sufis who utilized da'wah approaches with

ethics, spirituality, simplicity, and acculturation with local culture as media for spreading Islam similarly employed Tasawuf teachings. This da'wah strategy gave birth to Sufi figures who played important roles in spreading Islam and Tasawuf teachings. Therefore, the subsequent discussion will focus on Sufi figures in Indonesia who not only spread Islamic teachings but also contributed to developing Tasawuf as the spiritual foundation of indigenous communities.

Sufi Figures in Indonesia

Hamzah Fansuri (1588-1604 CE)

Since the 16th century, besides being known as a Sufi scholar, Hamzah al-Fansuri was also recognized as a poetic writer from the Barus region, North Sumatra. This Sufi scholar had a unique hobby—traveling (Rohmah, 2021). He utilized his travels as a means for da'wah in spreading Tasawuf knowledge to the surrounding community. He was also titled as the Pioneer of Poetry and the first poet in Indonesia who incorporated Sufi poetry into Malay literature (Teeuw, 1994). Not a few Muslim historians assert that Sheikh Hamzah Fansuri was a legendary Sufi figure famed among the community at that time, and his student Sheikh Samsuddin Sumatrani was similarly recognized, following in his teacher's footsteps. To this day, Hamzah al-Fansuri's name remains inscribed in the pages of Malay and Indonesian literary history (Rifai, 2010).

He articulated the essence of divinity and divine unity, that Allah SWT is the Absolutely Transcendent (Mutlak) and Eternal (Qadim) Essence (Zat), as the origin of all creation. He is Closer than the human jugular vein, yet not bound by place, although said to be omnipresent. This figure's thought was heavily influenced by Ibn Arabi through the concept of Wahdatul Wujud (Unity of Existence), while his poetry was inspired by Fakhruddin Attar, Jalaluddin Rumi, and

Abdurrahman al-Jami. He depicted the experience of seeing "the face of Allah" in all things as unico-mystica. Sufis interpret "the face of Allah" as manifestations of His attributes, such as love, grandeur, and beauty. According to his perspective, the reality of existence is but one, though appearing diverse; reality consists of outer and inner layers. All that exists in the universe is a radiance from the True Existence, namely al-Haqq. Humans represent the most perfect form of manifestation, yet are often forgetful to the point of not realizing that the visible universe is merely a shadow and not real (Habiburrahman, 2024).

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Nuruddin ar-Raniri (1621-1637 CE)

He originated from Ranir, an ancient port city in Gujarat, India, estimated to be in the late 15th century. He pursued religious education in Hadramaut, under the guidance of his primary teacher, Abu Nafss Sayyid Imam bin Abdullah bin Syaiban, a Rifaiyah Order

scholar of Hadramaut descent who was Nuruddin ar-Raniri's teacher of the Rifaiyah Order. Nuruddin ar-Raniri was a figure who opposed Wahdatul Wujud, because his primary objective was to eradicate the Wahdatul Wujud movement considered heretical. He was also known as a scholar with authority to issue fatwa opposing the Wujudiyah (existentialist) doctrine. In *Nuzhah al-Khattotain*, written by Abdul Hajj Fakhrudin al-Hasani, Nuruddin died in his hometown around 1068 AH.

Nuruddin ar-Raniri attempted to harmonize the thoughts of theological scholars (*mutakallimun*) with Sufi teachings influenced by Ibn Arabi. He interpreted the unity of Allah's existence and the universe as that the universe is merely the outer aspect of the inner essence, namely Allah. However, for him, this does not mean the universe is united with Allah, because what truly exists is only His Existence. His viewpoint resembles Ibn Arabi's *Tajalli* (theophany) concept, but his interpretation distinguishes him and does not entirely follow Arabi's concept (Fajri, *The Development of Tasawuf in the Nusantara*, 2023).

Syamsuddin Sumatrani (1607-1636 CE)

During the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda, he was a prominent and renowned Sufi scholar among the community. His real name was Sheikh Samsuddin ibnu Abdullah Sumatrani. He is suspected to have been a student of Hamzah Fansuri, as they were known at that time as two spiritual leaders. His teachings consisted of articles of faith (*aqidah*) in line with *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*, which were actually the teachings of the Wujudiyah (existentialist) group. He was known as a Sufi adherent of Wahdatul Wujud aligned with Ibn Arabi's thought. Samsuddin clarified the *Tajalli* concept that Hamzah Fansuri had not elaborated in detail through the teaching of the seven stations (*martabat*). He was also known

as a figure who developed these teachings, which had previously developed in India in the 16th century through Sheikh Muhammad Isa Sindhi al-Burhanpuri (Rohmah, 2021).

Syamsuddin Sumatrani's Sufi teachings and doctrines, though both he and Hamzah Fansuri were adherents of Wahdatul Wujud, actually differed. Samsuddin Sumatrani was a Sufi who sought to know hidden things and all that exists, while Hamzah Fansuri was a Sufi seeking God. The highest goal in the spiritual journey is to achieve *Ma'rifat* (gnosis), namely comprehensive knowledge of the essence of all things. To achieve this, one requires guidance from a teacher to avoid deviation or blameworthy acts (Parpatih, 2015).

Abdurrauf as-Singkel (1593-1693 CE)

Abd al-Rauf bin Ali al-Jawiy al-Fansuri al-Singkili, or Abdurrauf Singkel, was a Malay scholar from Fansur, Singkel, on the northwest coast of Aceh. He is estimated to have arrived in Samudra Pasai at the end of the 13th century of Persian descent, before subsequently settling in Barus.

From Tasawuf teachings, Abdurrauf Singkel's Shattariyah Order functioned as a mediator in the sharp conflict between the Wahdatul Wujud and Shuhudiyah doctrines. Through this teaching, Abdurrauf Singkel's viewpoint aligned with Samsuddin Sumatrani and Nuruddin ar-Raniri—namely, that the only true existence is Allah. While all His creations are shadows of the Real, not true existence. Because according to him, Allah is different from the universe and all His creations. As-Singkel had a perspective regarding *Dhikr* (remembrance of God). According to his view, *Dhikr* is an effort to free oneself from forgetfulness, because through *Dhikr* the heart is always connected in remembrance to Allah. The purpose of *Dhikr* is that the heart performing *Dhikr* continually draws close to His Existence. The essence of his Tasawuf

teachings always relates to the states of manifestation.

He also studied inner sciences such as Tasawuf and others from scholars in Madinah (Rohmah, 2021), who were also his most influential scholars—namely, Abdurrauf studied with al-Kusyasyi and al-Kurani. From al-Kusyasyi he delved into Tasawuf and various inner sciences until eventually being appointed as imam of the Shattariyah and Qadiriya Orders. Meanwhile, through al-Kurani he studied disciplines outside of Tasawuf. Thus, al-Kusyasyi can be considered his spiritual guide, while al-Kurani served as his intellectual teacher.

Abdurrauf Singkel in his various writings emphasized that Allah is fully transcendent and different from creatures. He rejected the Wujudiyah view that equates God's existence with creation. In *Kifāyat al-Muhtājīn*, he explained that before creating the universe, Allah first manifested Nur Muhammad (the Light of Muhammad), which then became the origin of the creation of the entire universe. The universe, according to him, has the attribute of Mumkinat (contingent), so it remains separate from al-Haqq and does not have true unity with Him (Fajri, *The Development of Tasawuf in Indonesia*, 2023).

Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani (1814-1879 CE)

Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani, full name Abu 'Abdillah al-Mu'thi Muhammad Nawawi bin 'Umar, was born in Tanara, Tirtayasa, North Banten in 1230 AH/1814 CE. He was the eldest child of seven siblings, from the couple 'Umar bin 'Arabi al-Bantani and Zubaedah. Sheikh Nawawi was known as a descendant of the first Sultan of Banten, Maulana Hasanuddin, and then grew as one of the most influential Nusantara scholars in the 19th century. He passed away in 1314 AH/1879 CE in Mecca and was buried in the

Ma'la cemetery, close to the tomb of Sayyidah Khadijah.

Sheikh Nawawi was a Sufi figure of the Qadiriya Order, attributed to Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jailani. Sheikh Nawawi also authored many works, one being the book *Salalim Al-Fudhola* which referenced the work by Zain Ad-din al-Malibari. His work is well-known in almost all pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools) in Java. Additionally, he wrote another Tasawuf work titled *Mishbah al-Dhull 'ala Manhaj al-Atan fi Tawil al-Hukm*. Through his various works, Sheikh Nawawi played a major role in introducing Ash'ari theology to the Nusantara Muslim community, particularly in the pesantrens environment. He also emphasized the importance of using both textual (naqli) and rational (aqli) evidences together, with the provision that textual evidence must be prioritized when differences, disputes, or conflicts arise.

His understanding in Tasawuf conveyed through his books stemmed from his inner journey. He provided the analogy that Shariah (Islamic law) is like a ship, Tariqah (Sufi order) as the sea, and Haqiqah (reality) as a diamond in the vast ocean. Shariah is the initial journey of a Sufi, while Haqiqah is the result that must be traversed using Tariqah. He concluded that Tariqah bridging to Haqiqah must not be separated from Shariah.

His thoughts differ from other Sufi scholars, such as Hamzah Fansuri, Nuruddin ar-Raniri, and others—Sheikh Nawawi was more aligned with Imam al-Ghazali in viewing Tariqah and Haqiqah. Because according to him, all of these are ladders for improving behavior, etiquette (adab), and human morals. From this perspective, outward sciences without inward sciences will plunge humans into immorality, and conversely, inward sciences without outward sciences will trap humans in blameworthy behavior.

Hamka (1908-1981 CE)

Hamka was born in Sungai Batang, Maninjau, West Sumatra on February 17, 1908 (14 Muharram 1326 AH). He was the son of a Minangkabau Renewal scholar, Dr. Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (Haji Rasul). In 1924, Hamka went to Yogyakarta and began to know the dynamics of the modern Islamic movement. His career reached its peak when he was appointed as Chairman of the Indonesian Scholars Assembly (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) on July 26, 1975.

Hamka viewed the presence of Tasawuf as comfort for modern society, or what can be termed *Syifa'ul Qalbi*—heart-cleansing medicine, heart arrangement, mind calming, character building, and self-control from blameworthy and unpraiseworthy actions. After becoming aware of sins within oneself, one should then introspect and adorn oneself with praiseworthy actions (Hamka, *Principles and Wisdom in Islamic Da'wah*, 1990). According to him, Tasawuf encompasses the process of *Takhalli*, namely emptying oneself of bad qualities such as *riya'* (showoff), pride, envy, anger, and miserliness; as well as *Tahalli*, namely the effort to adorn oneself with praiseworthy qualities such as *ikhlas* (sincerity), *tawadhu'* (humility), love, and generosity.

Hamka viewed that amid the hustle and bustle of modern Islamic society, they need Tasawuf knowledge to obtain inner peace, social harmony, and avoid stress and moral decadence. This heart-cleansing and character strengthening produces spiritual piety—close relationship with Allah—and social concern—concern for others that makes life more meaningful and simple (Muvid, 2022).

Challenges of Tasawuf Development in Modern Era Indonesia

One of the dominant main characteristics of modern society is capitalistic and materialistic, where orientation toward material interests begins to shift human needs

to achieve higher, spiritual meaning in life. This condition emerges because modern worldviews rely solely on rationality and limit reality only to material aspects, so that spiritual dimensions are ignored or considered irrelevant (Hamka, *Akhlaqul Karimah*, 1992).

This capitalist living paradigm eventually gives birth to various humanitarian crises, such as weakening social empathy, increasing poverty, consumerism, environmental cultural damage, moral degradation, and life meaning confusion (alienation). As a result, material progress in modern society is not proportional to improving quality of life, so humans instead feel empty. This condition encourages the re-emergence of interest in exploring spiritual wealth in various religious traditions. Although formal religion is often questioned for its effectiveness in addressing modernity problems, the spiritual values hidden in religious perennial traditions are again viewed as important as a means of fulfilling community inner needs (Hudaeri, 2007).

Buya Hamka elaborated in detail the concept of modern Tasawuf. According to him, Tasawuf functions to purify the soul, build and improve moral quality, suppress greedy and grasping natures, and control excessive human desires (Yasin, 1992). All forms of excessive impulses can hinder someone's spiritual journey toward God and snatch their bodily and spiritual tranquility. Therefore, modern society needs to fix the heart, calm the soul, cleanse the mind, and control their ego and desires from material pressures and worldly impulses, to more easily draw closer to Allah SWT (Hamka, *The Development of Tasawuf from Century to Century*, 1992). Thus, Hamka introduced Modern Tasawuf so that the spiritual crisis befalling modern society—which causes anxiety, worry, and fear—can be overcome by cleansing the heart and mind from everything

besides Allah SWT. By placing Allah as the center of awareness, one can affirm His presence in every action, so that their life is always accompanied by tranquility, confidence, and peace.

Moderate Tasawuf in Buya Hamka's view is rooted in Islamic renewal thought, emphasizing the integration of spiritual and social dimensions. His Tasawuf approach strengthens the spiritual journey of seekers through a solid foundation of Shariah and Aqidah, so that they avoid deviations in the spiritual process. Hamka suggested that spiritual and social aspects can be peacefully integrated to produce individuals who are pious (*muttaqi*) while also doing good (*ihsan*). Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of remaining attentive to worldly affairs, making modern Tasawuf a distinctive characteristic of modern Muslim society's knowledge and a foundation for the spiritual movement he proposed (Muvid, 2022).

Critical Analysis of Hamzah Fansuri's Thought in the Malay Intellectual Tradition

Hamzah Fansuri's thought was not only influential in the field of spirituality but also served as an important foundation for the development of the Malay-Islamic intellectual tradition in the Nusantara. Through his Sufi poetry and prose works, Hamzah successfully transformed Malay into an Islamic intellectual medium capable of expressing metaphysical and Tasawuf ideas in depth. Prior to Hamzah Fansuri's period, Malay was primarily used for trade and social communication purposes. However, through the use of Islamic philosophical Symbolism and terminology, Hamzah expanded the function of Malay into a language of Islamic knowledge and spirituality. This indicates that the development of Tasawuf in the Nusantara not only influenced the religious aspect of society but also shaped the intellectual and cultural identity of Malay Islam.

The concept of *Wahdatul Wujud* (Unity of Existence) developed by Hamzah Fansuri also had significant implications for the religious patterns of the Nusantara community. This thought emphasized human closeness to God through inner dimensions and individual spiritual experiences. In the context of the Nusantara community which had previously recognized local mystical and spiritual traditions, this approach made Islam more acceptable because it was able to dialogue with local culture without eliminating the substance of *Tauhid* teachings. Thus, Hamzah's Sufi *da'wah* success was not only located in theological aspects but also in his ability to build a peaceful and adaptive cultural acculturation process.

However, Hamzah Fansuri's *Wahdatul Wujud* teachings also generated significant theological controversy. Some scholars assessed that this thought potentially led to pantheistic interpretations that could obscure the boundary between God and creatures. This debate shows that the development of Tasawuf in the Nusantara from the beginning was colored by dynamics between esoteric approaches and Shariah orthodoxy. Therefore, Hamzah Fansuri's thought can be understood not merely as a spiritual teaching but also as the starting point for the emergence of broader Islamic intellectual dialectic in Aceh and the Nusantara.

Analysis of the Wujudiyah Conflict and Its Influence on Acehese Islamic Orthodoxy

The conflict between the *Wujudiyah* group led by Hamzah Fansuri and Samsuddin Sumatrani with Nuruddin ar-Raniri had a significant influence on the formation of Islamic orthodoxy in Aceh. This debate was not only related to Tasawuf theological issues but also concerned religious authority and the political legitimacy of the Sultanate of Aceh at that time. When Nuruddin ar-Raniri obtained support from Sultan Iskandar Tsani, the

Wahdatul Wujud teachings began to be considered deviant from the Aqidah of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah. As a result, various works of Hamzah Fansuri and his followers were burned and prohibited from being taught in the royal environment.

This event shows that the development of Islamic thought in the Nusantara did not proceed entirely harmoniously but was also colored by ideological struggles between Sufi-philosophical groups and Shariah-orthodox groups. In this context, Nuruddin ar-Raniri played an important role in strengthening the orthodox character of Acehese Islam by emphasizing the balance between Shariah and Tasawuf. He endeavored to return Tasawuf practices to remain within the framework of Sunni theology and not develop toward excessive metaphysical speculation.

On the other hand, this conflict actually demonstrated the high dynamism of Islamic intellectual discourse in Aceh during the 16th and 17th centuries. Aceh was not only an international trade center but also became a center for Islamic scholarly discourse that brought together various thoughts from Arabia, Persia, India, and the Nusantara. Thus, the debate between Wujudiyah and orthodoxy cannot be understood solely as a religious conflict but also as a process of forming the intellectual identity of Nusantara Islam.

Analysis of Samsuddin Sumatrani's Thought and the Systematization of Nusantara Tasawuf

Unlike Hamzah Fansuri who emphasized Sufi literary expression, Samsuddin Sumatrani contributed to the systematization of philosophical Tasawuf teachings in Aceh. Through the concept of seven stations (Martabat Tujuh), Samsuddin endeavored to explain the relationship between God and the universe in a more structured manner. This thought had significant influence on the development of the Tariqah (Sufi order)

tradition and Islamic mysticism in the Nusantara, particularly in understanding the stages of God's manifestation.

The concept of seven stations also showed an intellectual adaptation process to local community needs. Samsuddin simplified complex metaphysical ideas from Ibn Arabi to be more easily understood by the Malay community. This demonstrates that Nusantara scholars did not merely copy Middle Eastern thought but also conducted reinterpretation according to the cultural and social context of the local community.

However, this teaching generated criticism because it was considered to open too speculative space for interpretation. Some scholars assessed that laypeople could potentially misunderstanding the concept of Unity of Existence and ignoring the boundary between the Creator (Khalik) and creatures. Therefore, the polemic against Samsuddin's teachings shows the concern of orthodox scholars regarding the spread of philosophical Tasawuf not accompanied by strong Shariah understanding.

Analysis of Abdurrauf As-Singkel's Thought as a Path of Tasawuf Moderation

Abdurrauf As-Singkel held an important position as a figure of moderation in the Tasawuf conflict in Aceh. If Hamzah Fansuri and Samsuddin Sumatrani tended to emphasize the metaphysical aspects of Tasawuf, while Nuruddin ar-Raniri emphasized Shariah orthodoxy, then Abdurrauf attempted to integrate both more harmoniously. Through the Shattariyah Tariqah approach, he positioned Tasawuf as a means of spiritual cultivation without abandoning the principles of Islamic Shariah.

This moderate approach had significant influence on the development of traditional Islam in the Nusantara, particularly in the worlds of pesantir (Islamic boarding schools) and Tariqah (Sufi orders). Abdurrauf

successfully built a model of religious practice that balanced spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions. Therefore, his influence was not limited to Aceh but also spread to various Nusantara regions through student and Tariqah networks.

Furthermore, his rejection of extreme Wujudiyah views demonstrates efforts to maintain socio-religious stability in society. In this context, Tasawuf is no longer understood as an exclusive metaphysical teaching but as an instrument for moral formation and strengthening of Akhlak (character) among Muslim communities.

Analysis of Hamka's Modern Tasawuf in the Context of Modernity

Hamka's modern Tasawuf thought demonstrates an important transformation in the development of Tasawuf in Indonesia. Unlike classical Tasawuf which emphasized withdrawal (Uzlah) and individual mystical experiences, Hamka presented Tasawuf that is active, rational, and relevant to modern life. He rejected the assumption that Tasawuf is identical to a passive attitude toward the world. According to him, Tasawuf should rather serve as a means of Akhlak formation, self-control, and strengthening of social morality in modern society.

In the context of modernity characterized by materialism and spiritual crisis, Hamka viewed Tasawuf as a solution to restore the balance between human physical and spiritual needs. His ideas regarding modern Tasawuf demonstrate efforts to reinterpret Sufi teachings to remain relevant to contemporary developments. Thus, Tasawuf is not only positioned as a spiritual ritual practice but also as a social ethics capable of building a humane and civilized society.

Furthermore, Hamka's thoughts demonstrate the continuity between the classical Nusantara Tasawuf tradition and the modern Islamic renewal movement. He

maintained the spiritual substance of Tasawuf while rejecting practices considered irrational and distant from Shariah values. This approach indicates that the development of Tasawuf in Indonesia is dynamic and continuously undergoing reinterpretation in accordance with social challenges in each era.

CONCLUSION

The development of Tasawuf in Indonesia demonstrates that Sufi teachings have played an important role in the formation process of the Nusantara Islamic tradition. Tasawuf has not only developed as a spiritual practice but also as a medium of adaptive da'wah (propagation) through cultural approaches, education, and moral exemplification. The results of this study show that Sufi figures such as Hamzah Fansuri, Samsuddin Sumatrani, Nuruddin ar-Raniri, Abdurrauf As-Singkel, Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani, and Hamka have made significant contributions to forming the dynamic, moderate, and contextual character of Indonesian Tasawuf. Their thoughts have not only influenced the spiritual aspects of society but also formed the Malay-Islamic intellectual tradition, strengthened religious orthodoxy, and built the integration between Shariah, Tariqah, and Haqiqah.

This research also found that the dynamics of Tasawuf development in the Nusantara cannot be separated from theological debates and the process of reinterpretation of Islamic teachings according to social needs in each era. The conflict between Wujudiyah views and Islamic orthodoxy in Aceh demonstrates an intellectual dialectic that enriches the treasury of Indonesian Islamic thought. In the modern era, the modern Tasawuf concept developed by Hamka shows that Tasawuf remains relevant as a solution to the spiritual crisis, materialism,

and moral degradation of contemporary society.

This research's contribution lies in strengthening the historical and intellectual studies regarding the development of Nusantara Tasawuf more comprehensively and critically. Future research is suggested to examine the influence of Tariqah and Tasawuf thought on the socio-political life of contemporary Indonesian Muslim communities and the transformation of Tasawuf in the digital era and social media.

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