

THE INFLUENCE OF SUFI THOUGHT ON CONTEMPORARY NUSANTARA QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION: STUDY AND CRITICISM

Background

One of the greatest blessings of God to the *ummah* (muslimnation) is His Book, the Qur'an. It is His guidance and light for them and through it is their happiness. The charity of the *ummah* is manifested in their magnificence of the book of their Lord and taking care of it in many manifestations, including the care of '*ulamâ'* (scientists) by interpreting it, by explaining its meanings, and by stating of its provisions.

Interpretation is one of the efforts to understand, to explain the intent, and to know the contents of the verses of the Qur'an. This effort has been made since the time of the Prophet Muhammad as His messenger who was assigned to convey these verses while marking him as the first commentator (*al-mufasssiral-awwal*). After his death and until now, the interpretation of the Qur'an has experienced a very varied development without giving up its time category. Of course, as a result of human work, the interpretation of Qur'an has a diversity in both the methods (*manhaj /thariqah*), style (*naw'*), and approaches (*alwan*).

Various factors can lead to diversity that occurs in interpretations, such as differences in tendencies, interests, motivation of the exegete itself, differences in mission carried out, differences in depth and variety of knowledge mastered, differences in time and environment that surround or so called factors of social and political conditions where the exegete was. All of this is unavoidable and at its peak produces a variety of features, then develops into a variety of interpretive streams (al Syarbashi, 1962: 39-41) with their respective methods.

There have been many interpretations that varied and differed among them in methodology and presentation. This difference stems from some causes and motives, including the difference between the interpreters in their doctrines and various issues that have emerged in the history of Islam, such as Israeliness (*isrâîlîyât*), theology, and the appearance of different *firqah* (sects) who distorted the meanings of verses to support their doctrines and ideas, and other things. One of the things that had a strong influence in the interpretation especially, and the sciences of Sharia generally, is Sufism.

Even in today's modern-contemporary context, matters of understanding and meaning in interpretation—including Nusantara interpretation of the Qur'an—do not stop there, but also use various approaches (such as trends in the social sciences that have developed since the 18th century to the present).

This is what prompted me to write about the influence of Sufi Thought on Contemporary Nusantara Qur'anic Interpretation.

Formulation of the problem

The problems of this study can be formulated as below:

- (1) How is the development of Sufism thought in modern times in Indonesia?
- (2) How is the influence of Sufism on the views of the Qur'an commentators in modern times in Indonesia?

Objectives

This study will be held in order to know the roadmap of Sufism thought in Indonesia, especially in modern time. Besides, it will be explained in this study how far the interpretation of the Qur'an commentators in their works are influenced by such kind of thought.

Previous Relevant Researches

To enrich my insight, before doing this research, I briefly studied several works that, in my opinion, were very related and helpful.

Firdaus bin Sulaiman, *Tafsir Sufi: Kajian Analitikal terhadap Kitab Tafsir al-Bahr al-Madid fi Tafsir al-Quran al-Majid oleh Ibn 'Ajibah (1160-1224)* (Tesis di Universty Malaya, 2016). It has also been found through this research that Syeikh Ibn „Ajibah has interpreted the entire verses of the Holy Quran by combining both interpretational methodologies which are literal (external) and spiritual (internal) in nature. His literal interpretation follows the normal or routine approach generally adopted by most interpreters. Of notable interest was that Syeikh Ibn „Ajibah frequently issued narrations where its original source was ambiguous, particularly narrations related to tales of the Israelites. With regards to his spiritual interpretation, it was deemed to be based on the Isyari (symbolic) method. The interpretations are expressed in a symbolic manner where such symbols contain clarifications over verses of the Holy Quran from a Sufi perspective. These clarifications are linked to Sufism concepts and doctrines which have

been in the past expressed by leading Sufi figures, whether from amongst the Sufi practitioners as indeed Sufi philosophers. Syeikh Ibn „Ajibah“s book *al-Bahr al-Madid fi Tafsir al-Quran al-Majid* is therefore regarded as a compilation of the Holy Quran“s interpretation comprising both the viewpoints of Sufi practitioners and philosophers.

Arsyad Abrar, *Epistemologi Tafsir Sufi* (dissertation at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2016). This dissertation proves that the interpretation of the Qur'an by some Sufi groups has a basis derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah. Sufis in the Qur'anic interpretation also have their own epistemology which provides a legal standing in interpretation. The author also confirmed that the interpretation of al-Qur'an conducted by Sufi groups has a rational relationship, which basically does not conflict against the Qur'an itself.

Afrizal Nur, « Menguak Dimensi Sufistik dalam Interpretasi al-Qur'an » in the *Jurnal Ushuluddin* (Fakultas Ushuluddin Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau) Vol. XX, No. 2, July 2013, p. 185-198. The writer stated that at first Islam did not know mysticism or mystical movements. Along with the wide expansion and more and more adherents, there was outside influence, one of which was mysticism. According to this new stream of thought, behind the written text (verses of the Qur'an) there is a deeper substance of meaning, namely inner meaning. In addition, he continued, the dynamics of Sufism in the tradition of the study of the Qur'an experienced ups and downs. But its existence remains our joint vigilance because this stream seeks to find its foothold, namely the text of the Qur'an. Thus the Qur'an may avoid an interpretation with a deviant sufistic pattern.

This article review is general and does not specifically examine certain interpretations, while this research will specifically examine the sufistic view of contemporary Indonesian interpreters.

Ahmad Muslim, *Corak Penafsiran Tasawuf Hamka (Studi Penafsiran Ayat-ayat Tasawuf dalam Tafsir Al-Azhar)* (undergraduate thesis at the Faculty of Ushuluddin, IAIN Lampung, 2016). Hamka's sufistic interpretation style is *Isyari* patterned Sufism which is based on real and realistic scientific rules and his interpretation of the Qur'an verses is *isyari* that covers what is outer and inner. The outer meaning is the Qur'anic text while the inner meaning is the meaning of the cues behind the meaning, and is not based on mystical studies built on the basis of

riyadhah ruhiyyah, or spiritual practices with guidance through his conscience or better known as *mukasyafah*. The relevance of Hamka's Sufism with current life possesses harmony, where humans who live at this time do not have to leave today's life: if someone has a position does not have to leave his office, if he has the property does not have to leave it and go to cave; what must be abandoned is a bad and reprehensible character that brings people to be arrogant and immoral to His God.

Different from the previous article, this thesis examines Hamka's interpretation only. Even in this thesis, the discussion that is relevant to the theme gets a smaller portion than the discussion about Hamka himself. In addition, this article only discusses aspects of *zuhud* and *tawakkal* in Hamka's thinking.

Syukri dan Nor Salam, "Dimensi Sufistik dalam Pemikiran M. Quraish Shihab: Telaah tentang Konsep *Zuhud* dan *Tawakkal* dalam Tafsir al-Mishbah" in *Esoterik: Jurnal Akhlak dan Tasawuf* (STAIN Kudus) Vol. 2 No. 1, 2016, h. 129-145. The author states, the key concept in Sufism which is commonly referred to as *al-Maqamat wa al-Ahwal* especially in the concept of *zuhud* and *tawakkal* is given an interpretation with a different nuance from the old Sufism concept. *Zuhud* in the interpretation of al-Mishbah, is not necessarily used as a concept that "hates" the world, but by combining the two, in other words, the hereafter life (*ukhrawi*) is a goal while worldly life is a means that cannot be left to achieve the goal. Likewise with the concept of *tawakkal*, Shihab does not necessarily agree and contrast between the reasoning of *Jabariah* and *Qadariah* which is so far—as studied in the science of *kalam*—always diametrically opposed. In Shihab's sufistic concept, *tawakkal* cannot be separated from the maximum effort that must be done, on the contrary, *tawakkal* must remain a value in every effort made.

Relevant Concept/Theory

Interpretation of the Qur'an (*Tafsir*) is knowledge that takes up the purposes of Allah contained in the Qur'an in accordance with human abilities. Therefore, *Tafsir* is one of the most noble and high-level sciences, due to its object, namely the very noble and much needed Word of God (*kalamullah*).

Along with the development of the Sufi school, they also interpret the Qur'an in accordance with the Sufi ideology they profess. In general, the Sufis understand the verses of the Qur'an not only explicitly, but they understand it implicitly.

Among the reasons of the emergence of Sufism in Islam is because there are a group of Muslims who have not felt satisfied with their approach to God through worship, fasting, and pilgrimage (*hajj*). They want to feel closer to God by way of life toward God and free themselves from absolute attachment to worldly life, so that they are not enslaved to property, thrones, or other worldly pleasures. This tendency generally occurs among the first generation of Muslims. Al-Dhahabi confirmed that the practices of Sufism as above have been known since the early days of Islam. Some friends of the Prophet (*shahabah*) who practiced Sufism were living in asceticism (*zuhud*) and worship, but the term *tasawuf* was not known. (al-Dhahabi. 1976: 251)

The practices of *zuhud* carried out by first and second generation scholars continued until the Abbasid period, when Muslims experienced abundant prosperity, so that in the upper and middle classes there was a luxurious pattern of life. At that time the Sufism movement also developed, which was not limited to the practice of simple life, but began to be marked by the development of a method of theoretical explanation which would later become a discipline called Sufism. At this time Sufism had mixed with philosophy and theology, so that came what was known as *tasawuf nadzari* (theoretical Sufism) and *tasawuf 'amali* (practical Sufism). *Tasawuf nadzari* is what makes Sufism as a study and discussion

Starting from around the third century to the eighth century when Islamic civilization led the world, there was a shift in interpretation by revelation (*al-tafsir bi al-ma'tsur*) became the interpretation by ratio (*al-tafsir bi al-ra'yi*). The use of ratios is getting stronger, although ideological bias often occurs. As an implication, there are various books of interpretation colored by tendencies in accordance ideological schools of their exegetes and even rulers (Mustaqim. 2012: 90).

Seen from the map of interpretation science in general, Sufistic interpretations are divided into three: based on the form of interpretation (Baidan. 2011:13); interpretation method (Baidan. 2011:386); and the style of interpretation (Baidan. 2011:368-386). Based on

this division, it can be said that the form of Sufistic interpretation is *tafsir bi al-ra'yi*. The widely used method in presenting the interpretation results is the analytical (*tahlili*) method, while the pattern is the Sufi style.

As is well known, Sufism itself is divided into two: *tashawwuf nazhari* and *tashawwuf 'amali*. The first is based on the scientific study of tasawwuf, whereas the second is based on a life that leaves worldly pleasures and uses all the time to worship the God. Each of these has an influence on the interpretation of the Qur'an (al-Dhahabi, 1976:237).

The sufi nadzhari interpretation was built to promote and strengthen the mystical theories adopted by the interpretator. In interpreting the Qur'an the interpretator deviates far from its main goal, namely for the benefit of humans. Adz-Dzahabi said that the interpretation of Sufi nadhari in practice is the interpretation of the Qur'an which does not pay attention to the language and what is meant by Shara` (al-Dhahabi, 1976:238).

The method used in Sufism interpretation in general is the sign (*isyarah*) method). The sign (*isyarah*) means to reveal the outer meaning of a verse to know the wisdom in it. They use the word "sign" to distinguish it from *ta'wil* which is always attributed to bad goals. Whereas the sign method they used in practice is more the same as *ta'wil*. Sufi scholars also argue that the results of their interpretation of the Qur'an are not referred to as interpretations, because it is the same as limiting the meaning of the Qur'an by means of interpretation, and they call it "isyarah".

"Outer-Inner" is a concept used by the Sufis to underlie their thinking in interpreting the Qur'an especially and seeing the world in general. The pattern of their system of thinking is to depart from the outer one to the inner one. For them the inner (*bathin*, the mind) is the source of knowledge while the outer (*zhahir*, the text) is the shining. Abdullah al-Muhasibi gave an explanation that what is meant by the *zhahir* is the reading, and *bathin* (the inner one) is the *ta'wil*. While Abu Abdurrahman said that what is meant by *zhahir* is the reading while the inner one is the understanding.

Both the outer meaning and the inner meaning of the Qur'an is from Allah. *Zhahir* is the descent (*tanzil*) of the revelations from God to the prophets in the language of the people, while *Bathin* is the understanding in the hearts of some believers, which are from God.

Therefore, the interpretation about the dualism of the mind in the discourse of the Qur'an is not returned to humans, but to God. Because God makes everything (creatures) with outer and inner dimension and the Qur'an is also His creature.

Data Collection Method and Technique

Data collection techniques are the most important step in research, because the main purpose of the research is to obtain data. Without knowing data collection techniques, the researcher will not get data that meets the specified data standards (Sugiyono, 2007:308). This research is library research that is the data taken is in the form of text data.

The primary sources of data for this research are works on Sufism and works on contemporary Nusantara commentators. What is meant by contemporary here is the twentieth century and beyond. Secondary data sources include the other related works of experts. The sources above are supplemented with additional supporting sources that discuss tasawuf and interpretation and have relevance to the object of this research.

As a library research, this research can be categorized as qualitative research, where the data is collected by using documentation techniques, namely research data collection is conducted by collecting written sources in the form of documents in the form of books and other documents (Noeng Muhadjir, 1998:159-60; Imran Arifin (ed), 1996:4) which aims to develop understanding and concepts related to themes of tasawuf and interpretations.

To understand these data, certain techniques can be used, namely the most commonly used techniques "content analysis" or "content study". Here are some understandings about the concept of content analysis or content study, namely: 1) Barelson defines content study as a research technique for the purpose of describing objectively, systematically, and quantitatively about communication manifestations, 2) Weber states that content study is a research methodology that utilizes a set of procedures to draw valid conclusions from a book or documentation, 3) According to Krippendorff, content study is a research technique that is used to draw replicative and valid conclusions from the data on the basis of its context, and 4) Holsti states that content study is any technique used to draw conclusions through attempts to find message characteristics, and is carried out objectively and systematically. This study will use the last definition of content study or content analysis.

In content analysis collection techniques there are at least several procedures that must be carried out by a researcher, namely: Determination of an analysis unit for procurement of data from a work that is carried out through careful reading. Repetitive readings will help researchers to make data. Of all readings must be sorted into small units, so that they are easily analyzed. The data must be sought which is truly relevant with the object of research. These units are interesting phenomena that will become the research sample (Suwardi Endraswara, 2011:23).

Discussion Plan

To analyze the texts above, several steps will be carried out, among them, to examine as best as possible what was presented in those texts to find the dialectical development of the commentators' thoughts; to describe the explicit problems found in the data, namely providing an explanation about terminology, approaches, arguments and assumptions and thought orientation; to provide critical interpretation and evaluation, both text with text or dialogue text with reality outside the text, by showing the strengths and weaknesses of their views, and assessing accountability and all kinds of reasons; and then, in a complete and balanced way, based on that evaluation, creatively outlining and analyzing their thinking, and composing synthesis results that are new understandings.

The writing systematics of this research is based on the logical sequence of discussion, so that it is easy to understand and continuous between one chapter and another. The systematics are as follows: The first chapter is an introduction that contains the background of the problem, the formulation of the problem, the purpose and usefulness of the research, research methodology, literature review and systematics of writing.

Chapter two contains a discussion of the theoretical framework of Sufism thinking in order to map out, and as a knife to dissect, the thoughts of contemporary Nusantara interpreters. Here we discuss some things about Sufism, its purpose, object, and uses; the pattern of Sufism thought; as well as discussions about some of the streams that develop in it.

In chapter three, a life history of several contemporary Indonesian interpreters is explained in relation to the social, political and intellectual conditions surrounding them.

Furthermore, chapter four will analyze the views of these commentators and the influence of Sufism's views on their views in interpreting the Qur'an.

Finally, this study will be closed with the fifth chapter which contains conclusions and recommendations.

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