

## Sufism and the Future of Religion: A Reflection

**Faiz Ahmad Nugroho**

Paramadina Graduate School, Paramadina University, Indonesia

### Abstract

*Various Muslim scholars say that Sufism as "something by which we know the good and the bad of the soul, how to cleanse it of the blameworthy and fill it with commendable qualities, how to carry out mysticism and the journey to the pleasure of Allah and leave the prohibitions". Sufism among Muslims is seen as an element of the depth of religion in Islam which has the basic potential to restore the function of religion as a role model, the morals exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Teachings about Love, longing, a relationship with the Creator that makes humans feel close, and overcomes excessive love for the world. This article explains that Sufism is able to encourage humans to be fair to others and the environment as God teaches and wills. In this regard, Islam with a style that is dominated by Sufism or Mysticism is what preachers brought to the archipelago since tens of centuries ago, and because of that, as historians have noted, the Islamization of the archipelago in general took place peacefully, through trade, and not by military expansion*

### Keywords

sufism; muslim; God;  
religion; sufi; mysticism



## I. Introduction

Sufism is a science in Islam that focuses on staying away from worldly things. The term Sufism comes from Arabic from the word "*tashowwafa - yatashowwafu - tashowwuf*" which means (to be) a lot of hair, namely to become a Sufi or similar with the characteristic of his clothes made of fleece/wool.

Although in practice not all Sufis wear woolen clothes. According to various opinions, the name Sufi has the meaning and meaning of purity (shafa) of the heart and cleanliness of actions. So it can be concluded that Sufis are considered people who have a pure heart and are clean in their actions. Thus, Mysticism or Sufism is a term commonly used for mysticism in Islam with the main goal of obtaining a direct relationship with God (Badrudin, 2015).

Sufism is the breath of Ihsan, a trait that a Muslim must possess in order to perfect faith and Islam. By studying and implementing the teachings of Sufism, a servant is expected to manifest divine attributes on earth; humans who love all entities without distinguishing identities.

At least that's what we can get from the International Conference on Sufism (ICS) with the theme Building Love and Peace for Indonesian Society which was held on November 18, 2016 at the Faculty of Philosophy UGM, and was held in collaboration with the Sadra Islamic Philosophy College (STFI), Faculty of Philosophy, and Religious and Cross-Cultural Study Program (CRCS), UGM. This conference also re-examined the history that Sufism is the main approach of Islamic preachers in the archipelago. (Sudjatna, 2016)

Referring to the views of Dr. Arqom Kuswanjono (2016), a panelist at the conference, he said that Islam advanced due to four main pillars, namely science, philosophy, Sufism, and the power of sharia. Currently, according to him, philosophy is

starting to be abandoned a lot. In Indonesia itself, not a few philosophy lecturers experience rejection when they want to teach philosophy at Islamic boarding schools, for example, because of certain negative stigmas. In fact, according to Kuswanjono, philosophy can help people understand religious truth. "The word iqra', in our opinion, also means reading the universe, and that is philosophizing,".(Sudjatna,2016)

Along with philosophy, Sufism has also begun to be shunned by the people. Although in reality there are still practitioners, discussing Sufism academically is a rare thing. "Now we only have sharia pillars, which also often clash," he said. Now, not many people and even references talk about this Sufism issue, both in terms of praxis and concept, including the thoughts developed in Sufism that can be the antithesis of radicalism.

## II. Review of Literature

In this context, Jan Van Der Beken (2003) wrote an article entitled *The Future of Religion and the Religion of Future*, a scientific reflection that returns to Weber's thesis of secularization. A thesis on the decline of religion when science and technology advances in the future. The author himself conveys some interesting facts about the world today, which is not devoid of religious revitalization, both ritual, symbolic, and the emergence of Eastern Religion. He tried to update Weber's thesis that not all religious aspects were extinguished.

Furthermore, Beken conveyed several important points regarding the phenomenon of transcendence in religion: (i) there is a tendency in humans to place values that exceed human existence; (ii) the comparison between religion and spiritual humanism actually places the discovery of values that exceed human existence which appears in various forms, for example the declaration of Human Rights which philosophically tries to understand human existence itself; (iii) transcendence as a mysterious value has succeeded in maintaining human solidarity that has made its existence strong; (iv) transcendence contains a sacred value which legitimizes a sacrifice; (v) this sacred dimension brings us to the eternal contact that transcends the mortal human self. In other words, there is an interesting thesis that the form of secularization practically reduces the formal form of religiosity but the search for spiritual values remains eternal.

Beken's opinion seems to emphasize the function of transcendence in a religion. To be precise, a dimension of depth in a religion. Effendi (1991) illustrates that if in Islam we recognize the shari'a aspect as obedience to God, then the feeling of being connected to the Creator or the inner contact with God that is lived in the Spirit is an experience of the Spirit which makes religion not just a set of beliefs and ceremonies. If there is no depth aspect, then religion is only a body without a spirit. Islam recognizes this aspect as Sufism or Sufism which reflects aspects of appreciation or depth in Islam.

In this regard, Dr. Khalid Al-Walid from the Sadra Islamic Philosophy College who acted as the keynote speaker also emphasized that Sufism is the spirit of Islam. According to him, only through the way of Sufism will humans arrive at understanding and awareness of their nature, a condition that can lead humans to an understanding of their God. According to Al-Walid, the problem of modern humans today is the loss of their awareness of the nature of themselves. "Modern man," he said, "only puts man in the position of a material being." This condition makes humans trapped in things that are only external or empirical, including in matters of religion. "When man is religious only outwardly, he will

see other people as a different form of himself; another religion as a different religion from himself; so that what happens is hostility," said Al-Walid affirmed. (Sudjatna,2016)

Explaining the true nature of humans who should not be understood only as material beings, Al-Walid quotes Ibn 'Arabi who explained that humans actually have two scripts in themselves, namely the external script and the inner script. This means that humans are not only material beings, but also spiritual beings who, to quote Alexis Carrel, are imprisoned in the material world. Outwardly, humans can be called extracts from the universe, where not only the structure of their bodies physically is the essence of the elements of the universe, but the body parts can also be symbols of the universe.

From the inner side, according to Al-Walid, angels who are considered to be obedient to God alone cannot be equated with humans, because angels in themselves only represent one of the many names of God; occupy only partial positions for certain tasks. Meanwhile, humans encapsulate the attributes of God within themselves, so that humans can be said to be able to do anything. It can take lives, teach knowledge, provide sustenance, and so on.

In line with the above view, Abu al-Wafa (1985) considers that in general, Sufism is a philosophy of life and a certain way of human behavior, in its efforts to realize moral perfection, understanding of the nature of reality, and spiritual happiness. Various studies, studies, and studies on Sufism show that the term Sufism or mysticism has become an important element of religion, philosophy, and culture in various periods of time. In other words, the experience of the Sufis or mystics is the same. The difference lies in the unequal interpretation of the experience itself due to differences in the Sufi culture or the mystics take shelter.

### **III. Results and Discussion**

#### **The Future of Religion and Sufism**

Historically, Abu al-Wafa Sufism began to become a term especially after the first generation (friends) and after it (tabiin). In terms, Sufis have several explanations. Certain opinions only regard it as a title, while others argue that it comes from the word shafa (clear). Others argue that the word Sufi comes from shaff, because the Sufis are in the first row before Allah. However, scientific studies prove that the word Sufi comes from Shuf or fleece. In the early days of asceticism, the woolen garment was a symbol of the sincere and ascetic servants of God.

Of course there is a debate about this position of Sufism. Some see it as both a spirit and a substance of religion. While others see Sufism as an obstacle to the progress of Muslims because it tends to use an intuitive approach to acquire essential knowledge, unlike philosophy which uses a rational approach.

If we talk about the future of religion, it seems that Sufism will play a very important role, this paper will try to see how Sufism as an ascetic function can keep religious values from being trapped in dogmatic-orthodoxy forms that prevent it from growing and developing according to the message of religion itself.

Several religious scholars such as Durheim, Sigmund Freud, Max Weber have tried to map the position of religion with different theoretical perspectives. Durheim saw religion as a aggregator or has a social function to glue a community, Freud even saw religion as just a projection of human subconscious imagination.

As for us, it is necessary to understand religion, at least in two different layers. One is a doctrine or normative approach, while the other is at the historical level. A living document that will interact with the social and cultural environment. The first has a series

of rules governing beliefs and ordinances of Worship. As for the second religion as a social function that forms communal values in society. As a monotheistic religion, Islam has both of these aspects. The elements of Sufism or Sufism are no exception as a reflection of normative appreciation to be practiced in human history.

As a growing movement and Islamic thought, Sufism and Sufism are historical realities that developed in response to the socio-political conditions at that time. If we look further, Islam in the early generations put more emphasis on a deep sense of responsibility before God's court and mechanical obedience to Shari'a law. The key to piety is the fear of God. History continued, and with the emergence of worldly behaviors during the consolidation of the Umayyad empire began a reaction to the piety and modesty of the four main caliphs (Rahman, 1979).

As an essential approach to kebatinan, Sufism bases itself on the official normative sources, the Quran and Hadith. Abu Al-Wafa' (Op.cit, 1985) gives a view that the source of Sufism itself is based on its substance as religious morals. He saw the first and most important sources, namely the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the practices and sayings of the Companions. The Qur'an and Sunnah are the foundation and main pillars of moral guidance and conduct, as well as the various spiritual practices that accompany them.

Methodically, the analytical study of Sufism shows that various Sufi schools have a conception of the tariqah (path) to God. This path begins with various spiritual rituals which gradually go through various phases or stages and ends with the grace of Allah. The maqam (level) is the level of a servant of God before the creator in a series of worship rituals. This level is divided into repentance, asceticism, self-purification (wara'). Simple life (faqr), patient, willing, trusting. As for the situation (things) that is the condition of the clarity or clarity of the soul of a servant towards Allah in his heart. Examples of things are self-centeredness (muraqabah), closeness (qarb), love, fear, hope, longing, closeness, peace, witness (musyahadah), sure.

Meanwhile, the main principle of Islamic Sufism is morality based on Islam. Ibn Qayyim in Madarij al-Salikin argues that Sufism is moral. Obviously, Sufism is the essence and spirit of Islam, because all Islamic law has a moral foundation. The absence of morality in sharia laws, whether related to aqidah or fiqh, will make the law not have the essence or core of the soul.

As stated at the outset, some scholars are interested in seeing the future of religion. When talking about the relation of religion in social situations, various interesting analyzes emerge. A study conducted by Pew's Global Attitudes shows that there are a number of countries that place religion as an important element in everyday life. Furthermore, the data provides an assessment that a number of countries that have close attachment to religion parallel the economic and political conditions in that country. In other words, there is an opinion that countries with a strong belief in religion by their people are often in a bad economic condition.

Data shows that Ethiopia ranks first, followed by Indonesia, and India. Meanwhile, Americans are in the middle position with 53% considering religion as an important aspect in their lives. Interestingly, the Superpower countries included in the list are the United States, Russia and China. This in itself becomes an alternative opinion regarding the assumption that religious understanding is fertile in several countries with below-average economies.

Of course, there are several factors that affect the attachment of religion in a country. If we look at India and Indonesia, we see that non-economic factors are the dominant aspects, considering that Indonesia and several countries are included in the G-20 countries. The absence of Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Saudi Arabia is certainly

a special concern, considering that these countries also practice Islamic Sharia quite strictly.

As a complement, there is other data from <http://islamicity-index.org/wp/latest-indices-2019/> about the Islamic index of a country with indicators of the application of Islamic values in economic management, law, governance, political rights, human rights and international relations.

The result is non-Muslim countries that occupy the top place. The top 10 recorded that eight countries (Sweden, Netherland, and others) came from the European continent, the remaining two countries from Australia and New Zealand. If we try to look further, then the United Arab Emirates ranks 44th and at 45th, Malaysia represents representatives from Southeast Asia.

Both data configurations show interesting facts, which raise an important question. Is religion, especially in its formal form, really an important factor that we need to consider in the personal context or in the life of the nation and state. Or is religion something that should be eliminated and replaced with a secular humanist approach that is more adaptive to change. Of course, we know carefully that countries that apply Islamic values in the country according to the previous index, do not involve religion as the foundation of the state.

Other data from the Global Peace Index (2019 figures) record the impact of violence on global economic growth causing a loss of \$14.1 trillion in 2018. During 2018-2019 alone, there was a 3.3% increase in losses incurred. Unfortunately, the majority of contributors to the recorded conflict came from Middle Eastern Muslim countries.

This data reinforces the relevance of the important question we have previously asked. Is religion really still needed as a determining factor in a good personal or state life? Of course, these data do not mean that religion is a problematic root, a pathological cause of acts of terrorism. Instead, the data is a critical evaluation, an accurate study that we really need as part of the feedback on our religious practices. In other words, the data implicitly demonstrates the argument that our religious practices have not played their best role as an insight into human civilization. This does not mean that religion is an ideology that spreads hatred.

If we look at the phenomenon of various researches that carry the theme of religion as an ideal idea of goodness and humanity which is often not in line with the practice of religion itself, we find that there are essential aspects of depth such as Mysticism and Sufism that are forgotten.

The future of religion depends on the process of reviving our appreciation of the pillars of religion. It is not the rigid legal aspects that we put forward when assessing a fiqh law, it is the supremacy of justice that we need to deepen. A deep understanding of the occurrence of robbery, the economic inequality behind the riots are substances that need to be explored further before giving a fair judgment. A further pragmatic question is how we are able to maintain ideal religious ideas and practically apply Sufism values in our religious practice.

To answer this question, we need to have an important awareness that Sufism has the goal of creating a form of individual piety. Hadi (2020) said that Sufism has a core spiritual path based on monotheism. In other words, it is a way to realize monotheism.

The Sufis argue that the deepest meaning of monotheism is hidden from ordinary understanding or empirical experience and rational reasoning. To be able to capture the deepest meaning, it is necessary to carry out spiritual disciplines such as self-purification with various conditions and denial of anything other than God. When he has arrived at this core meaning, he will witness the oneness of one and feel the delights of mortal states and

the experience of *uniomystica* (mystical union). Finally, he will feel the state of *baqa*, eternal life in the Being.

This individual pious condition cannot be separated from social piety and environmental piety. Within the framework of this understanding and appreciation, Sufism will give birth to *elan* and *vitalism* and bring benefits to society (Effendi, 1991).

Furthermore, Sufism has the ability to provide a wider space for differences in social and religious conflicts. Of course, this appearance does not necessarily compromise the truth. The attainment of this truth places love (*mahabbah* or *'isyq*) as a high spiritual rank on the path of Sufism. Sufis often describe love as a 'living wine' that gives birth to mystical passion and is achieved through intuitive experience of the nature of divinity (Smith in Abdul Hadi (2020)).

In other words, Sufism or Sufism has basic characteristics which are pearls that can make the pulse of this religion more relevant in the future. One of these important pearls is love and *isyq*. The theme of love is an expression of Sufi poets since the 8th century by Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah to Muhammad Iqbal in the 20th century.

Love itself was chosen because love is the highest and most important spiritual rank in Sufism. Sufi poets argue that only love can bring a *salik* successful in their journey to achieve authenticity. In the Sufi aesthetic system, love has a broad and multi-faceted meaning. Love is a spiritual state that can bring a person to reach a very important type of knowledge, namely divine knowledge, especially love is a combination of various elements of feelings and mental states such as *uns* (almost), *syawq* (longing), *mahabbah* (inclination of the heart) (Hadi, 2020).

The challenge of religion to survive in modern times is getting stronger with the emergence of tension relations between religion and science, as well as within religion itself. The history of Islamic thought shows how theology, philosophy, Sufism have mutual discourse with their respective schools. This discourse still leaves traces of debate in the past.

The difference between these schools of thought is precisely the dynamics of each sect to be able to provide a new religious worldview in this modern era. Sufism cannot stand alone, leaving both *sharia* and philosophy. The future era of religious studies is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. The integrity of a religious worldview that uses these two approaches will form a religious perspective within a person or group with a transdisciplinary pattern. Religion needs to make a humanitarian contribution to social change that is different from technological advances and the Covid-19 pandemic (Abdullah, 2020).

As an important note, Islam with a style that is dominated by Sufism or *Irfan* is what preachers brought to the archipelago since tens of centuries ago, and because of that, as historians have noted, the Islamization of the archipelago in general took place peacefully, through trade, and not by military expansion. According to Dr. Mohd. Syukri Yeoh from the Tamadun Melayu Academy, University of Kebangsaan Malaysia, the trade relations that existed between the archipelago at that time and the Middle East, including Egypt, opened up intense social interactions, which in part continued to marriage relations. Islam first arrived in the archipelago through expert traders (people with Sufi traditions). Until in the 8th century, Muslims began to appear in the coastal areas of Aceh, and the peak was the emergence of the Islamic Perlak Kingdom in the 9th century. (Sudjatna, 2016)

The presence of Muslim communities in the archipelago (Nusantara) in large numbers was also triggered by Hulagu Khan's attack on Baghdad in the 13th century. This made many scholars migrate to the archipelago for security reasons. Evidence of this can be seen from graves with al-Baghdadi inscriptions on tombstones dating from that period,

such as Muhammad al-Bagdadi and Sheikh Fairus al-Bagdadi in Aceh. Furthermore, the Islamization of the archipelago was also influenced by the political policy of the Ottoman State which in its preaching to the archipelago also brought tarekat murshids, with evidence of the emergence of zawiyah and the first center of Islamic education, in Langsa, East Aceh, namely Zawiyah Cot Kala around the 10-11 century.

The development of Islam in the archipelago (Nusantara), which was dominated by Sufism, can also be seen from a 12th century manuscript. There, it is stated that Sheikh Abdullah Arif, one of the scholars at that time, was a mursyid of the Qadariyah order. The alumni of Zawiyah Cot Kala, such as Sunan Giri, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Gunung Jati, and Sunan Ampel, are members of the Syattariyah congregation. A little later, Nuruddin ar-Raniri was a follower of the Rifaiyyah order; Hamzah Fansuri is a follower of the Qadariyah order; and Sheikh Syamsuddin as-Sumatrai and Abdurrauf Singkil were followers of the Syattariyah order.

#### IV. Conclusion

Religion was originally the *Mysterium Tremendum*. An alluring mystery according to Rudolf Otto. An expression that reflects how a human being is able to interpret religion in life. As a mystery, religion exudes wonder in humans. It is a form of respect and submission of a servant before God.

This basic definition is an important motive for understanding the future of religion itself. An ideal idea about the norms and values of goodness and justice which often does not run linearly in practice. As the data presented in the discussion section, some secular countries are relatively successful in providing good humanitarian achievements.

Sufism is an element of the depth of religion in Islam which has the basic potential to restore the function of religion as an example, a moral exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad. Teachings about Love, longing, connection to the Creator that makes humans feel close, and overcomes excessive love of the world. Sufism is able to encourage humans to do justice to others and the environment as God teaches and wills.

In this regard, based on the study of experts on ancient manuscripts—which has been going on for approximately five years and is still ongoing today, the spread of Islam throughout the Malay world or the archipelago uses more than 40 tarekat with the Syattariyah congregation as the majority. The disappearance of the tarekat and its records in the archipelago was greatly influenced by the colonialization of the Europeans which triggered a reaction of rejection and resistance from the natives. In the struggle against colonialization, many tarekat clerics died and had not had time to pass on their tarekat knowledge and murshidship.

Tracing and re-discovering the traces of Sufism in the archipelago (Nusantara) is important to show that Sufism is not only a religious spirit conceptually, as described above, but also practically has become the main feature when Islam first grew and spread in the archipelago.

## References

- Abdullah, Amin. 2020. *Multidisiplin, Interdisiplin, dan Transdisiplin: Metode Studi Agama dan Studi Islam di Era Kontemporer*. PT Litera Cahaya Bangsa: Yogyakarta
- Abu Al-wafa' Al-Ghanimi Taftazani, Abu al-Wafa. Sufi dari Zaman ke Zaman Suatu pengantar dari tasawuf / Dr. Abu Al-wafa' Al-Ghanimi Taftazani; penerjemah: Ahmad Rofi' Utsmani. 1985
- Badrudin, *Pengantar Ilmu Tasawuf*, Penerbit A-Empat 2015
- Effendi, Djohan. *Sufisme: Esensi dan Masa Depan Agama dalam Islam dan Kebudayaan Indonesia, dulu, kini, dan esok*. 1993. Yayasan Festifal Istiqlal: Jakarta.
- Hadi, Abdul Hadi. *Tasawuf yang Tertindas* (Kajian Hermeneutik terhadap Karya-karya Hamzah Fansuri). 2020. Kompas: Jakarta.
- <http://islamicity-index.org/wp/latest-indices-2019>
- Jan Van Der Veken (2003) *The Future Of Religion And The Religion Of The Future, Bijdragen: International Journal For Philosophy And Theology*, 64:2, 129-143
- Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam*. 1979. Terjemahan Ahsin Mohamad. Cetakan VI (2010). Penerbit Pustaka: Bandung.
- Sudjatna, A.S. *Tasawuf sebagai Inti Agama*, <https://crcs.ugm.ac.id/tasawuf-sebagai-inti-agama/>