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Research Article

The Expressions of Sufi Literature and Its Development from the Islamic World to the Indonesian Archipelago

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The Expressions of Sufi Literature and Its Development from the Islamic World to the Indonesian Archipelago

Abstract. This article aims to analyze the historical development of Sufi literature from its roots in the Middle East to its spread to Indonesia, tracing the transformation of Sufi expression in various literary forms. Using a historical approach and descriptive qualitative method, this study traces the transformation of Sufi literature, which is not only a medium of spirituality, but also a tool for profound aesthetic expressions. Through a content analysis of these works, this article finds that poetry and literature can be means of Sufi expression regarding mystical experience. This article found that Sufi literature not only reflects the spiritual journey but also plays an important role in shaping literary traditions and religious thought in the Islamic world in general and in Indonesia in particular. Additionally, while each literary expression is intertextual, Sufistic literature shows its own uniqueness derived from Indonesian context.

Keywords: Sufi Experience, Sufi Literature, Sufi Poetry

INTRODUCTION

Sufism as an esoteric dimension of Islam accommodates inner appreciation of religiosity. In the beginning, the discipline of Sufism was an expression of the journey of the spiritual ascension towards God. However, as a result, Sufism becomes a womb to give birth to many poets who compose beautiful literary works.¹ So, Sufis are often identified as poets. Likewise, poets often do literary or Sufi practices. The interconnectedness between Sufism and literature is quite striking for travelers in the twists and turns of life.

For Sufi poets, life is seen as a transcendental literary masterpiece. In addition, life is a manifestation of His love to be known. Poets also interpret life, no matter how bitter, as rhythmic verses. That is what is called amazement. Life is dealt with as a mystery containing *tremendum et fascinant*. Awe and amazement are two effects of the manifestations of God's names *jalaliyah* and *jamaliyah*. In Sufism, the experience of witnessing God's *tajalli* is that of *muraqabah* and *mushahahadah*. Being aware of God's all-encompassing presence is that which leads to mystical experience. This mystical experience can not only improve morality, but also has aesthetic quality.

Apart from having aesthetic quality, mystical experience, as mentioned by al-Hallaj, contain intuitive and cognitive aspects, referring to *ma'rifah*. In fact, al-Hallaj also states that mystical experience contains such a strong creative element that it can become an intense stimulus for the creation of high-quality literature.² Therefore, there is a close connection between the creative aspect of mystical experience and the mystical aspect of poetic language.

Sufism also plays a role as a healing for the human psyche. This is parallel to what Aristotle puts forward that art and poetry would be catharsis for human life. Indeed, Sufism and poetry or literary works in general are both excavated from spiritual intuition in the world of aesthetics. Put differently, Sufism is not only ethics and ritualism, but also includes aesthetic language, such as love (*mahabbah*), longing (*'ishq*), witnessing (*mushahahadah*), intimacy (*uns*). These matters are a package of consequences of knowing God (*ma'rifah*).³

Some scholars argue that spiritual literature and art are represented by the discipline of Sufism as the core of Islam. Sufism emphasizes the spiritual, sacrifices the profane, wins the esoteric and defeats the exoteric. There is one characteristic

¹ Abdul Hadi W.M., *Semesta Maulana Rumi* (Yogyakarta: DIVA Press, 2016), 7.

² Abdul Hadi W. M., *Tasawuf yang Tertindas: Kajian Hermeneutik terhadap Karya-Karya Hamzah Fansuri* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001), 46.

³ In Sufism, the operation of logic is positioned below intuition, although this does not mean abandoning the role of reason. Likewise, poetry often escapes logical analysis since the basis of poetry and art is imagination (*al-khayāl*). Can the mystical experiences of the Sufis be analyzed based on logic alone? Rūmī replied, "in the face of love, reason must be silenced." Therefore, the Sufis use literary works operative through symbolic language to express their mystical experiences. See Oliver Leaman, *Estetika Islam: Menafsirkan Seni dan Keindahan*, trans. Irfan Abubakar (Bandung: Mizan, 2005), 139-140.

that is worth noting that the universality of beauty in the aesthetics of literature and art can reflect the sacred. This demonstrates that poets and artists direct themselves in contemplation that leads them to understand things as they really are and then express them in their literary works.⁴

Sufi poetry has a basis of knowledge inspired by spiritual values and wisdom. This is indeed based upon esoteric insight that reaches into the inner reality (*haqa'iq*) of all things. Islamic art and poetry do not imitate (*memesis*) the external forms of reality but reflect its principles. Put simply, it embodies fundamental realities as a ladder for the ascent of the soul.⁵

Research on Sufi literature and its development in Indonesia is important because of the significant role of Sufi literature in shaping the literary and cultural treasures of the Islamic civilization.⁶ Sufi literary works not only function as a medium of spiritual expression, but also as a means of spreading Sufism teachings that influence the religious life of Indonesian society. Several previous studies have discussed certain aspects of Sufi literature in Indonesia. For example, Zulhelmi in his article "Karakteristik Sastra Sufi Hamzah Fansuri: Kajian terhadap Syair Perahu" analyzes the characteristics of Sufi literature in Hamzah Fansuri's works, especially the symbolism and Sufism concepts contained therein.⁷ In addition, Muamar Abd. Halil (2017) in his article "Gaya Bahasa Sastra Sufistik Ternate" describes the style of language in Sufi oral literature in Ternate, such as *Dolabolo* and *Dalil Tifa*.⁸

Abdul Hadi W.M. in "Pengaruh Parsi terhadap Sastra Sufistik Melayu Islam" highlights the significant influence of Persian literature in shaping Malay Sufi literature, especially through the adoption of poetic forms.⁹ Jajang A. Rohmana studied literary expressions of Hamzah Fansuri dan Hasan Mustapa in comparison, seeking to find the distinction between Malay and Sundanese literature.¹⁰ Unlike those studies, this article focuses on the development of Sufi literature in Indonesia as a whole, by tracing the transformation of themes, forms, and functions of Sufi literature from classical to contemporary times. In-depth descriptive and historical studies on the transformation and adaptation of Sufi literature in the context of Indonesian culture are still limited, so this study is expected to fill this gap.

⁴ Ibid, 35-37. Cf. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Spiritualitas dan Seni Islam*, trans. Sutejo (Bandung: Mizan, 1993), 17-18.

⁵ Nasr, *Spiritualitas dan Seni*, 17-19.

⁶ Lidya Arman, "Karakteristik Sastra Sufi (Content Analysis Karya-karya Sastra Indonesia)," *Al-Munir: Jurnal Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam* 10, no. 1 (2019), 62-63.

⁷ Zulhelmi, "Karakteristik Sastra Sufi Hamzah Fansuri: Kajian terhadap Syair Perahu," *Jurnal Adabiya* 18, no. 2 (2016).

⁸ Muamar Abd. Halil, "Gaya Bahasa Sastra Sufistik Ternate," *Riska Bahasa: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pembelajarannya* 3, no. 1 (2017).

⁹ Abdul Hadi W.M., "Pengaruh Parsi terhadap Sastra Sufistik Melayu Islam," *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 2, no. 1 (2004).

¹⁰ Jajang A. Rohmana, "Sastra Sufistik Melayu Dan Sunda Di Nusantara: Mempertemukan Hamzah Fansuri Dan Haji Hasan Mustapa," *Ibda': Jurnal Kajian Islam dan Budaya* 13, no. 1 (2015).

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method in this library research is a method with a qualitative and historical approach. This research focuses on tracing and analyzing written sources, such as books, journals, manuscripts, and documents concerning the development of Sufi literature. The historical approach is used to understand the context of the development of Sufi literature from its inception to its spread to Indonesia, while content analysis is applied to explore the meaning, value, and contribution of Sufi literature in various texts studied. This approach allows the author to produce an in-depth understanding of the evolution and role of Sufi literature in history and culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sufi Literature and Its Significance

Braginsky states that Sufism is not only a religious movement, but also a literary movement. He calls Sufism as a spiritual or religious movement “book Sufism” (*tasawuf kitab*), while Sufism as a literary movement “poetic Sufism” (*tasawuf puitik*). Poetic Sufism is not a local cultural phenomenon, but universal, existing in almost all regions in which Sufism is spread. In other words, it is not limited to the Arab or Persian Muslim tradition, but also emerges in other traditions such as Turkish, Urdu, Chinese, Malay, and Javanese.¹¹

Literature as part of human culture also has its Sufi or mystical character. Islamic mystical poetry, at least during the first seven centuries, has many aspects. Such poetry began with the simple tones of *munajat* (supplication) and ascetic expressions of the early Sufis, and has then evolved into pure and mystical poems, which speak of human love for God, and finally reaches the peak of its flowering in the odes of Ibn al-Farid, which is considered the culmination of Islamic mystical poetry.¹²

In addition, it is Rumi in Persia who pioneered a special poetic tradition. Rumi's poems are full of paradoxes, such as his visions and the stories he wrote, thus being different from the complex but controlled poetic styles such as those found in Sa'di and Hafiz.¹³ Paradoxical poetry is indeed typical of Sufi literature, for the Sufis are inspired by the experience of the paradoxical God.

For Sufis, literature is a very important medium of expression in order to convey their experiences of transcendental love. Sufis believe that the beauty of a profound literary language has the power to bring someone to the realm of essence and God's presence. Therefore, 'Abd al-Rahman Jami states that literature is an allusion to the realm of eternity whose content is wisdom gleaned in the Garden of the Divine Rose. Wisdom, as one form of the highest spiritual beauty, which can be achieved by a poet, is related to aesthetics and divine truth. In this respect, Jami certainly does not discuss

¹¹ Hadi W.M., *Tasawuf Yang Tertindas*, 11.

¹² Idrus al-Kaf, “Pemikiran Sufistik Syaikh Umar Ibn al-Faridh dalam *Dîwân Ibn al-Faridh*,” *Intizar* 20, no. 1 (2014), 181-197.

¹³ Annemarie Schimmel, *Menyingkap Yang Tersembunyi: Misteri Tuhan dalam Puisi-Puisi Mistis Islam*, trans. Saini K.M (Bandung: Mizan, 2005), 29-32.

external beauty that can be captured by the five senses, but rather internal beauty apprehended by human spiritual eyes.¹⁴

Sufis often depict their divine experiences as love relationships. Due to love relationships, literary language as a medium of expression finds its fit on the grounds that poetic literary language can not only symbolize God (the Untranslatable) but can also express intimate emotions such as love and longing. The relationship between subject and object, between a servant and God, is eliminated through the intimacy of the love relationship, thereby being the lover and the beloved. For Sufis, love indeed undergirds all life, since the beginning when God loved to create creatures.¹⁵

Love is life

Die with it

You have the right to die and be forgiven¹⁶

"If there were no Love, the world would disappear," said Rumi. In his expression of the transcendental experience of love, Rumi chose poetry and literature as the medium. Love is an aesthetic experience; therefore, it will be effective if conveyed through aesthetic expression as well.¹⁷ Indeed, a deep and complex idea, obtained through direct spiritual experience, can only penetrate the minds and hearts of the listeners if conveyed through poetic expressions. Scientific and philosophical language is a dry and rigid discursive language, so that it is not easy to inspire and stir feelings. This is different from the figurative language of literature and poetry, which utilizes all aspects of linguistic aesthetics to achieve the power of its expression, which more easily transmits the flames of divine love.¹⁸

The relationship between knowledge (*ma'rifah*), love (*mahabbah*), and aesthetics is very close. In the Sufi tradition, aesthetics is closely related to metaphysics and the spiritual path that Sufis take. That which is discussed in Sufi aesthetics includes its nature and function, its influence on human psychology and spiritual life, the use of works of art and literature in fostering religious spirit and social solidarity, and ways of understanding works of art through hermeneutic methods. Sufis believe that all good works must refer to the Quranic verses. Hence, it

¹⁴ Abdul Hadi W. M., *Hamzah Fansuri: Risalah Tasawuf dan Puisi-Puisinya* (Bandung: Mizan, 1995) 68.

¹⁵ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufisme: Samudra Makrifat Ibn Arabi*, trans. Musa Khazim dan Arif Mulyadi (Bandung: Mizan, 2015), 135-138.

¹⁶ Ma'mun Gharib, *Ibn al-Faridh: Romantisme dan Senandung Cinta Sang Raja Sufi*, trans. Misbakhul Koir (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2008), 73.

¹⁷ In this regard, Sufi poets maintain that God's love and vision have been embedded in the depths of human hearts and spirits since the beginning of creation as a great secret that needs to be revealed. 'Ayn al-Quzat, a student of Ahmad al-Ghazālī, developed his teacher's idea that love is the essence of creation. On this basis, the congruence can be found, that is, al-Hallāj asserts that the experience of Sufism, apart from containing an intuitive aspect, also contains a cognitive aspect. He also states that mystical experience contains a creative element. See Hadi W. M., *Tasawuf yang Tertindas*, 46-50.

¹⁸ Abdul Hadi W. M., *Kembali ke Akar Kembali ke Sumber: Jejak-Jejak Pergumulan Kesusastaan Islam di Nusantara* (Yogyakarta: DIVA Press, 2016), 129-130.

is undeniable that Sufi poetry is actually a kind of spiritual interpretation of the Quranic verses which are transformed into figurative-poetic language.¹⁹

Seyyed Hossein Nasr maintains that Islam itself considers the divine aspect as beauty or aesthetics, making it the basis of the uniqueness of Sufism which manifests the core of Islamic teachings. This divine aspect as beauty is seen as the mystical aspect or esoteric dimension of Islam, which is also considered the most beautiful aspect of Islam.²⁰ Therefore, there is a close relationship between Sufism and literary aesthetics. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali asserts that the vibrations caused by aesthetics in art and literature, such as poetry or music, can ignite love that has been sleeping in the human heart.²¹

By conveying their spiritual experiences, the Sufis also hope to be able to shine their experiences to their audience so that the audience can glean a sort of spiritual wisdom therein, as the Sufis obtained it.²² The basis of Sufi literature is also clear, that is, the religious experience of the Sufis. The assertion of Sufi *tawhid*, namely God is the only one, implies that God is the only existence. Such a transcendental statement is an expression of divinity symbolized through language. Besides, Sufi literature also has a social role to convey divine reflection and philosophy.²³

It is clear that Sufism is not only a religious and spiritual movement, but also a literary movement. As has been mentioned in passing, Braginsky calls Sufism as a literary movement “poetic Sufism” and Sufism as a religious movement “book Sufism”. Poetic Sufism is a universal phenomenon in expressing the spiritual experience using literary-language forms, particularly poetry. As a result, it is not a national phenomenon or only in the Arab-Muslim and Persian regions, but spread to various other cultures, such as Turkish, Urdu, Malay, and even Javanese,²⁴ showing that Sufi aesthetics exists in all places and all times.

The Dynamics of Sufi Literature

Indeed, Islam is very rich in poetic expressions. As for Islamic mysticism or Sufism, actually many treasures of poetry can be found in Arabic and especially in Persian and Turkish literature, as well as various languages in the Indian Subcontinent such as Pakistan. These literary treasures have furnished scholars with an understanding of the uniqueness of Islamic mysticism.²⁵ As has been stated above,

¹⁹ Abdul Hadi W.M., *Hermeneutika, Estetika, dan Religiusitas: Esai-Esai Sastra Sufistik dan Seni Rupa* (Yogyakarta: Matahari, 2004), 37-38.

²⁰ Hadi W.M., *Tasawuf yang Tertindas*, 10.

²¹ Hadi W.M., *Kembali ke Akar*, 135. Cf. Leaman, *Estetika Islam*, 35-40.

²² To mention several names of Sufi poets or those who expressed their Sufi experiences through literature and poetry, there are Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawīyah (d. 801 CE), Bāyazīd Bistāmī (d. 849 CE), al-Hallāj (w. . 922 AD), Abū Sa‘īd al-Khair (d. 1059 CE), ‘Umar al-Khayyām (d. 1132 CE), Hakīm Sana‘i (d. 1141 CE), Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār (d. 1220 CE), Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240 CE), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (d. 1273 CE), Sa‘dī Shīrāzī (d. 1292 AD), Yunus Emre (d. 1320 CE), Mahmūd Shabistarī (d. 1340 CE), Hāfiz Shīrāzā (d. 1390 CE), ‘Abd al-Rahman Jāmī (d. 1492 CE). Most of the Sufis above describe the divine love using literary or poetic language. See more Wachid B.S., “Lukisan Peleburan,” 476-498.

²³ Hadi W.M., *Tasawuf yang Tertindas*, 21-22.

²⁴ Ibid, 11.

²⁵ Schimmel, *Menyingkap yang Tersembunyi*, 38.

Sufi literature initially began with simple notes of asceticism but then became mystical poetry. Sufi literature is nothing but the Sufi teachings by the Sufis themselves. The foundational reason the Sufis write poetry is to describe mystical experiences and spiritual states they achieve.²⁶

Sufi poetry in its early development was still the simple expression of asceticism. Nevertheless, such poetry developed into pure and mystical poems, which talk about human love for God.²⁷ The earliest mystical poetry is that of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah (d. 801 CE) who sang of her love for God, a firm love as it stands firm and does not grow stronger or weaker due to the existence of heaven or hell.

I love You in two modes: for myself
And love worthy of You
In love for myself, I do nothing
save remembering You in my every thought
Pure love arises when You lift
The veil that covers my eyes that admire You
It is not for me to praise You for this or that
All praise is Yours, that I know.²⁸

According to al-Ghazali, what Rabi'ah means by "love for myself" is love for God because of His goodness and grace, whereas "love worthy of You" is love caused by His beauty (*al-Jamal*) and majesty (*al-Jalal*) which reveal the secrets of Himself. Both of these modes of love are noble and deep ones, a spiritual delight in witnessing the beauty of God.²⁹ A Sufi from Egypt, Dhu al-Nun al-Misri sang a love verse that is soft and clear as follows:

The home of the Sufi is in the garden of heaven
Underneath the curtains of God are spread
In his camp: abundant fruits
Flowers bloom on the windy path of intimacy with God.³⁰

Such a metaphorical verse delineates that to get pleasure is not only in His heaven in the Hereafter, but most importantly in this life and now. That is to say, the garden of heaven can also be visited in the home of one's own heart, which is the self that has become the perfect human (*al-insan al-kamil*).³¹ Besides, a Sufi from Baghdad named Junayd describes his love for God with a profound feeling, because he is afraid of being separated from his Beloved.

My business is being a stranger among strangers
I am strange among all that is strange.³²

In such a verse, Junayd expresses this alienation in relation to the fact that the Sufis have various levels of status, and no one is able to penetrate the depths of Sufi

²⁶ Hadi W.M, *Tasawuf yang Terdindas*, 21.

²⁷ Schimmel, *Menyingkap yang Tersembunyi*, 29.

²⁸ Ibid, 45.

²⁹ Abdul Wachid B.S, "Tasawuf Cinta dalam Sastra Sufi," *Ibda'; Jurnal Studi Islam dan Budaya* 2, no. 1 (2004), 5.

³⁰ Schimmel, *Menyingkap yang Tersembunyi*, 46.

³¹ Ibid, 47

³² Ibid, 48

experience except those who have experienced a deep sense of love for God. This deep sense of love seems to have been experienced by al-Hallaj, a Sufi with a controversial ecstatic utterances, especially “*Ana al-Haqq*”. He recites his rhythmic poem in his book *Tawasin*.

I see my God with the eye of my heart
And I asked, “Who are You?”
He answered, “You”³³
I become the One I love
He who loves me becomes Me
We are two souls fused in one body!
My sight is His sight
His sight is Our sight³⁴

The verses of al-Hallaj illustrate the burial of the carnal soul and express the unity between God and the human spirit.³⁵ Such a strange expression is called “*shatahat*” (ecstatic utterances) caused by the state when one’s consciousness of reality is elevated. *Shatahat* were also uttered by al-Hallaj’s predecessor, namely Bayazid, saying, “*subhani*” (Glory be to Me). Such *shatahat* take place when the human consciousness is not under control. Hence, *shatahat* are in need of interpretation, since they cannot be judged in a literal way. In the next development, ecstatic utterances were expressed in poetic metaphors so that the potential for controversy was minimized due to the similes that make them vague. Ecstatic utterances can be found in almost all the poems of the literary works in Persia. Put differently, literary creations and creative elements in mystical experiences have resulted in a wealth of Sufi literature, one of which was Rumi’s poetry.

Farid al-Din ‘Attar, a Sufi poet before Rumi, wrote an allegorical work entitled *Mantiq al-Tayr* (Conversation of Birds).³⁶ In this work, ‘Attar tells the story of the journey of a group of birds that wanted to look for the King of Kings, because the bird kingdom had had no ruler. In this search, they were eager to meet Simurgh, as the King of the Kings, who was behind Mount Qaf. Hoopoe became the leader of the group of birds. Before traveling, many birds complained and refused Hoopoe’s invitation to search. However, some of them joined such a journey. The journey was long, tiring, and even devastating. Of the hundreds of birds that made the journey, only thirty birds were able to arrive behind Mount Qaf where Simurgh is.

Once there, they entered the palace of Simurgh. The birds were shocked, because all in the palace of Simurgh was a mirror. So, the birds saw nothing but the reflection of themselves. They were, as a matter of ontological fact, Simurgh, whom they had been searching for all this time and with all their energy. ‘Attar’s work truly discloses a profound symbolism. The image of a bird is a metaphor for the human spirit that longs to fly to the embrace of the beloved.

³³ Ibid, 50.

³⁴ Louis Massignon, *Diwan Al-Hallaj*, trans. Maimunah (Yogyakarta: Adipura, 2001), 125.

³⁵ Ibid, 65.

³⁶ Faridudin Attar, *Manthiq al-Thayr: Perjalanan menuju Tuhan*, trans. Haris Abdul Hakim, (Yogyakarta: Hijrah, 2003); cf. Hadi W.M., *Hermeneutika, Estetika*, 136-160.

Once, ‘Attar met Rumi who was still a child. At that time, it is told that ‘Attar gave Rumi a *diwan* (collection of poems). As an adult, Rumi truly felt inspired to become a great Sufi poet who was most enthusiastic about voicing the paradoxes of life. Until now, Rûmî’s poems are not only read in the Islamic world, but also enjoyed throughout the world. Rumi’s greatest work is *Mathnavi*. Concerning *Mathnavi*, Jami says, “Rumi is not a prophet, but he has a holy book.” Rumi himself once called his *Mathnavi* the “*tawhid* shop”. For thirsty travelers, it is indeed necessary to visit the *tawhid* shop. “In the *tawhid* shop,” said Rumi, “other than the One are idols.”

Listen to the reed and the tale it tells,
How it sings of separation.
Ever since I was cut from the reed bed,
My lament has caused men and women to weep.³⁷

Rumi’s poem seems to describe the sadness of the reed separated from its origin. This separation is a pain that makes its voice melancholy to the listener. Rumi would like to say that the human spirit always longs to return to its source, to its original home which is the primordial origin of the spirit. This kind of expression of longing finds much explication in the poems of Ibn al-Farid, who is often called the “sultan of lovers”. His poems are quite controversial, as is common in all Sufi poetry.

We drink wine when we remember the Beloved
Remembering Him makes us drunk before the wine is stirred
The full moon is just the glass
The wine is the sun surrounded by a crescent moon.³⁸

Sufi poets often use the metaphors of wine, drunk, wine, cup, shop, glass, mirror, garden, fragrant, fire, donkey, wood, and so on to sublimate the meaning.³⁹ In fact, in other poems, Ibn al-Farid dares to carve erotic diction that literally seems so indecent if it is considered as the poetry of a divine lover. Indeed, the thoughts of the Sufis break the existing mainstream formality, playing with paradoxes to mock the fixation and rigidity of reality.

I love her for her slim body and her firm buttocks
How beautiful the full moon is
How beautiful it is to spend the night with the cold situation
When her cheek touches mine in an embrace.⁴⁰

Interpreting the above verse requires a very deep understanding, because the verse textually written by Ibn Farid above contains erotic elements. In understanding the two former lines, it can be interpreted as a figurative meaning. The word “slim” in

³⁷ Hadi W.M., *Hermeneutika, Estetika*, 190.

³⁸ Gharib, *Ibn al-Faridh*, 74.

³⁹ Compare with Rûmî’s verse:

My hands used to hold the Quran
But now they hold the cup of love
My mouth used to recite supplication
But now it only sings poetry and songs.

See J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Sana’i, Attar and Rumi; Comparative Notes*, trans. Ribut Wahyudi (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Sufi, 2003), 52.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 36.

the first verse refers to a form of God's *tajalli* (manifestation). Then, "firm buttocks" is a sign that refers to the whole cosmos, which has been written by a pen on the preserved tablet (*lawh al-mahfuz*).

If truth
Does not have a burning spirit
That is flat philosophy
If it has a flame
That is poetry.⁴¹

Muhammad Iqbal, a reformer of Pakistan in the modern era is one of the Sufi poets who has been widely known. One of his specialties compared to other poets in the twentieth century is that he earnestly dug and collected fragments of ideas from the rich treasures of Sufism that were buried, while other Islamic poets often underestimated such treasures. The reason why Iqbal wrote poems is to invite his readers to experience spiritual enlightenment, because human beings are not merely social and material creatures.⁴²

Poetry whose message lives eternally
is the song of Gabriel, the wing of Israfil.⁴³

For Iqbal, Sufi poetry is one that can convey the message of self-realization. Iqbal argues that life is an infinite ocean, the waves of which are never still. Besides, he maintains that the "self" of human being is always active and dynamic. "Self" as an infinite spiritual potential is only possessed by humans, and its potential can be used as a means to perfect their lives.⁴⁴

The life of a true Muslim
lies in persistent self-search
The peak of such a search is *junon*.⁴⁵

The peak of "self" achievement according to Iqbal is *junon*. The term *junon* is taken from the word "Majnun", the name of a character in a famous Arabic love story. The love story full of sacrifice, even to the point of letting oneself be burned, has been used as a metaphorical depiction of true love by the Sufis. *Junon* is interpreted as devotion in loving the One or as indicating a state of mystical passion.⁴⁶

Sufistic Literature in Indonesia

Hamzah Fansuri can be considered as the first Sufi poet in the constellation of Malay Sufi literature. Malay Sufi literature grew and developed as a result of the interaction process of Malay writers with external sources over a long period of time. In Malay Sufi literature, the most dominant external sources during its formation were Arabic-Persian literature.⁴⁷ In other words, Persian sources played a prominent

⁴¹ Mohammad Iqbal's poem is quoted from Hadi W.M., *Kembali ke Akar*, 262.

⁴² Ibid, 260-301.

⁴³ Ibid, 274.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 279.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Since the early development of Islam in the archipelago, Arabs and Persians (also Indians), ranging from traders, preachers, religious teachers, intellectuals, writers to Sufis and practitioners of

role in the Malay Sufi-literary edifice. It is shown that no less than 429 Persian words have been absorbed into Malay. In Persian Sufi literary writing, it can be seen that 'Attar's work, entitled *Mantiq al-Tayr*, has been adapted into Malay entitled *Hikayat Si Burung Pingai*, *Andai-Andai Si Burung Pingai*, and *Hikayat Burung Berau-Berau*. This allegorical fable inspired Hamzah Fansuri's poem entitled *Syair Burung Pingai*.⁴⁸ Hamzah Fansuri's poetry is full of *wujudiyah* metaphors.

Hamzah Fansuri in Mecca

was seeking God at *Bayt al-Ka'bah*

The journey from Barus to Quds was too difficult

Finally found God at house.⁴⁹

In such a mystical verse, Fansuri shows that God actually resides in the house. For the Sufis, the house of God is the human heart, that is to say, the Sufis understand the Hadith which says, "*qalb al-mu'minin bayt Allah*". The heart of the believers, for the Sufis, is the house of Allah. Therefore, metaphorically, Fansuri uses the symbol of "house" to indicate God's place in the hearts of those who always stand before Him.

According to Abdul Hadi W.M., the echo of Hamzah Fansuri's Sufi aesthetics can be felt from the works of Amir Hamzah,⁵⁰ an Indonesian poet in the *Poedjangga Baroe* generation. Amir Hamzah's poetry that echoes Fansuri's can be seen in his poetry anthology entitled *Buah Rindu* and *Nyanyi Sunyi*. In the poem "Padamu Jua", Amir Hamzah sings as follows:

It's all over

All my love has disappeared

I'll come back to you

Like before

You are the shining candlestick

Window lamp in dark night

Waving slowly to go home

Always patient and loyal

One my beloved

I'm human

Long for the feeling

Long for your appearance

Where are you?

There is no appearance

Faint voice

the Sufi orders, played a significant role in the spread of Islam. Historians believe that the first Islamic kind to be spread in the archipelago was the Sufi one. In other words, the process of the advent and development of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago is related to the Sufi Islam which was flexible and full of wisdom. See Lukman Hakim "Napak Tilas Warisan Sufi Persia di Nusantara", *Substantia* 17, no. 1 (2015), 22-23.

⁴⁸ Abdul Hadi W.M., "Pengaruh Parsi terhadap Sastra Sufistik Melayu Islam," *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 2, no. 1 (2004) 21-24.

⁴⁹ Hadi W.M., *Tasawuf yang Tertindas*, 142.

⁵⁰ Hadi W.M., *Hermeneutika, Estetika*, 50.

Just words that string the heart.⁵¹

The third and fourth lines in the second stanza demonstrate that the poet's loss of his worldly beloved rekindles his longing for the "primordial covenant" when humans bear witness to the love of Beloved. The metaphor of the appearance of divine love in such a poem is likened to a "shining candlestick" which can be referred to sura al-Nur in the Quran often used as a philosophical basis for Sufis about creation. Meanwhile, the expression "longing for the feeling/longing for your appearance" would remind readers of the experience of the Prophet Moses on Mount Sinai when he heard God's voice without seeing Him.⁵²

I am a puppet, you are a puppet
The puppeteer arranges the song
On the flower screen, they exchange glances
Only one song as long as the chant.⁵³

In the poem above, Amir Hamzah seems to have been inspired by the *weltanschauung* of the Sufis who emphasize the unity of being or *tawhid wujud*. The basis is the explanation of Junayd al-Baghdadi, saying that *tawhid* means one becomes a puppet in the hands of God, a puppet who obeys God's commands according to His will. Thus, besides Amir Hamzah being inspired by Sufi insight, he was also inspired by Javanese culture with its local arts such as his metaphor of the art of puppetry (*pewayangan*).⁵⁴

In the development of modern literature in Indonesia, there has been a discussion about Sufi literature in the 1970s to 1980s. There was enthusiasm from Indonesian writers to revive the spirit of religiosity that had been eroded by Western modernism. Some popular names to mention are Kuntowijoyo, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, Danarto, and Emha Ainun Nadjib.⁵⁵ Literary efforts that appear as the antithesis of hedonistic and materialistic modernity are known by the terms "returning to the source" or "returning to the root of tradition".⁵⁶ This article can only touch briefly on the Sufistic works of Kuntowijoyo, Sutardji, and a short story writer Danarto.

One of the most important things of this movement is what is commonly called "Sufi literature" (*sastra sufistik*) or "transcendental literature" (*sastra transcendental*). Since its inception, it has shown a burning spirit as well as a *weltanschauung* based on its connection with the aesthetic insight of Sufism. Hence, Sufism is used as one of the inspirations in the writing.⁵⁷

Kuntowijoyo is one of the writers who uses Sufism as his inspiration. In his novel *Khotbah di Atas Bukit*, he explicitly and satirically depicts the hedonistic life of an old man named Barman. Barman spends the rest of his life in a remote rural area

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Hadi W.M., *Kembali ke Akar*, 254.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 251-260.

⁵⁵ Emha Ainun Nadjib, *Terus Mencoba Budaya Tanding* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1994), 56-62.

⁵⁶ Hadi W.M., *Kembali ke Akar*, 15-46.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 47-116.

accompanied by a beautiful young woman. One day Barman meets Humam.⁵⁸ According to Hadi W.M., Barman is a word that is an abbreviation of “*barbar man*” (uncivilized man), while Humam is “human”.⁵⁹ Barman is the carnal soul trapped by the profane fog, while Humam who in the novel’s narrative becomes Barman’s best friend is Barman’s true self whose job is to raise awareness in his life.

In addition to Kuntowijoyo, Danarto is a prolific short story writer. A. Teeuw states that Danarto’s short stories provide a fascinating picture of human existence from a Sufi perspective. Mangunwijaya asserts that Danarto’s short stories are religious parables, spiritualist figurative stories that are very dynamic and have strong imagination. They have an inner, spiritual, abstract, surrealistic atmosphere, as well as concrete, social, and worldly. Umar Kayyam comments on Danarto’s short stories as builders of alternative worlds with an absurd atmosphere which is created from a very rich Sufi perspective.⁶⁰

In Danarto’s short story entitled “*Dinding Ibu*” (Mother’s Wall), it is told that there is a successful woman who is a mother, but she has lost her own “self”.⁶¹ One of her children has clairvoyant visions so that he often sees his mother appear with another woman who looks like her mother. According to the child, the woman who is often present in the midst of his family and claims to be his mother is not his real mother. However, the other woman is the embodiment of an ambitious will of the mother. The social criticism of this short story feels sharp for modern society. The “mother” who is locked in the wall is a depiction of a prison of worldly wealth or profane luxury. The structure of this short story is very abstract based on the metaphysical dimensions that are common in the Sufi world.⁶²

Further, there is Sutardji Calzoum Bachri in poetry. The poems he composes are known as mantras. He is an avant-garde poet who has brought a new breath to the world of poetry in Indonesia, who emerged in the early 1970s with his controversial and sensational poetry credo. For Sutardji, “words in poetry must be freed from the burden of understanding.” In his poems, he is very intense in describing spiritual wanderings and pursuits.

on the slopes
the drinkers
climb the drunken mountain
sometimes they slip
fall
and climb again
picking the moon
at the top
they sway
but they say
we will not sink

⁵⁸ Kuntowijoyo, *Khotbah di Atas Bukit* (Yogyakarta: Bentang, 2008).

⁵⁹ Hadi W.M., *Hermeneutika, Estetika*, 55.

⁶⁰ Hadi W.M., *Kembali ke Akar*, 91-96.

⁶¹ Danarto, *Berhala* (Yogyakarta: DIVA Press, 2017), 111-122.

⁶² Hadi W.M., *Kembali ke Akar*, 100-101.

in the sea of the moon
 they sing
 fall
 and climb again
 at the top of the drunken mountain
 they manage to pick the moon
 they keep the moon
 and the moon keeps them
 at the top
 everything is silent and kept.⁶³

The poem above describes the struggle of the spiritual journey of ascension to the drunken mountain. They are depicted as plucking the moonlight to become light, showing that the seekers have become one with the moon (they keep the moon / and the moon keeps them). The state of *unio mystica* or *fana'* is described by Sutardji when they have reached the peak of the drunken mountain. In another poem, Sutardji wants to express who and what "I" really is.

above the sky
 below the sky
 the peak promise
 doesn't wait
 above the lip
 below the lip
 the dictionary
 can't pronounce "I".⁶⁴

The imagery used in the poem above is "sky" which shows a journey into the metaphysical realm. The journey is carried out to lead to a deep understanding of reality. Meanwhile, "above the lip" indicates an understanding of speculative philosophical language that cannot lead to the peak of understanding. Everyday language (referring to "below the lip") included the dictionary is apparently unable to explain who and what "I" actually is.

Sufi literature, as a manifestation of spiritual expression in literary form, has undergone significant evolution since its emergence until it reached the Indonesian archipelago. This development not only reflects the internal dynamics of the Sufi tradition, but also the interaction with diverse local cultures.⁶⁵

Historically, Sufi literature is rooted in oral and written traditions in the Islamic world, with figures such as Rumi and 'Attar who used poetry as a medium to convey mystical experiences and Sufi teachings. Their works are often laden with complex symbolism and metaphors, depicting a spiritual journey towards union with God.

⁶³Puisiapasaja, "Kumpulan Puisi Sutardji Calzoum Bachri", <https://puisiapasaja.wordpress.com/category/puisi/kumpulan-puisi-sutardji-calzoum-bachri>. Accessed on January 17, 2025.

⁶⁴Hadi W.M., *Kembali ke Akar*, 76.

⁶⁵Fuad Mahbub Siraj et al., "The Existence and the Challenges of Sufi Literature in Indonesia," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah dan Pemikiran Islam* 24, no. 1 (2022). 262-263.

Such expressions not only function as a means of teaching, but also as a profound art form.⁶⁶

In the Indonesian context, Sufi literature began to develop along with the entry of Islam into the archipelago. Local Sufi poets adapted traditional poetic forms, such as *syair* and *pantun*, to express Sufism themes. For example, Hamzah Fansuri, a prominent Sufi poet from Aceh in the sixteenth century, is known for his works that combine elements of Sufism with Malay culture. His works not only show spiritual depth, but also innovation in the use of language and poetic forms.⁶⁷

How Sufi works are received and adapted in different cultural contexts shows that the meaning of a literary work is not only determined by its author, but also by its readers. In this case, readers especially those poets in modern Indonesia interpret and adapt Sufi works according to their cultural and social contexts, producing new forms of expression that remain true to the essence of Sufism but are relevant to local experiences, particularly in response to modernism such as those works of Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, Danarto, and Kuntowijoyo.

According to the theory of intertextuality, literary texts are interconnected and influence each other.⁶⁸ In this context, Sufi literary works in Indonesia do not emerge in isolation, but as a result of interaction with previous texts, both from Islamic and local traditions. This can be seen in the way Indonesian Sufistic authors combine elements from various sources to create unique and meaningful works. In its development, Sufistic literature in Indonesia is not only limited to poetry, but also spreads to other literary forms, such as prose, novel, and short stories, creating new forms of expression that reflected the spiritual and social dynamics of contemporary Indonesian society.

Overall, the historical development of Sufi literature until it reached Indonesia shows a dynamic process of adaptation and transformation. Through interaction with local cultures and in response to modernity, Sufistic literature in Indonesia has succeeded in creating unique forms of expression, which not only reflect the depth of Islamic spirituality, but also the richness of Indonesian cultures.

CONCLUSION

Sufi literature or poetry tends to describe the transcendental dimension and is more about depicting the metaphysical realm. Sufi experience is a *unio mystica* experience, which contains cognitive and creative elements as well as aesthetic ones. Such experiences indeed make Sufis unable to describe their experiences. Nonetheless, after experiencing such a mystical state, Sufis can reconstruct it and translate it into words. Literature occupies the position of metaphorical depiction. In such an effort, symbolization and allegory can be played freely to express intricate mystical experiences.

⁶⁶ Miftahul Ula, "Simbolisme Bahasa Sufi: Kajian Hermeneutika terhadap Puisi Hamzah Fansuri," *Religia* 19, no. 2 (2016), 30-31.

⁶⁷ Abdul Hadi W. M., "Jejak Sang Sufi: Hamzah Fansuri dan Syair-Syairnya," *Kalam* 28 (2016), 5-8.

⁶⁸ Era Octafiona, "Kajian Intertekstualitas dalam Karya Sastra Indonesia," *Edu Cendikia: Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan* 4, no. 2 (2024), 646.

Further, Sufi experience is an experience of brilliant knowledge of reality. This knowledge is often in contrast to knowledge in general as Sufi experience reveals a world of meaning that has not been touched by most people. The reality that is displayed to Sufis is paradoxical in nature. In this respect, it is literature or poetry that is capable of expressing it, not philosophical language.

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