

The Concept of God in Malay Sufi Literature: A Study of the Sufi Poetry of Hamzah Fansuri

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Abstract

This article examines the literary footsteps of Hamzah Fansuri who is known as a famous Sufi and poet in Aceh in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Fansuri's primary contribution to Malay literature is very significant. As a controversial *wujud* Sufi, Fansuri utilized poetry to convey his Sufi experiences and ideas. This article uses a qualitative method to explore and describe his rich mystical views. By using a content analysis approach, this article presents Fansuri's poetry in order to understand the constellation of his *wujudiyah* thoughts. This article found that Fansuri succeeded in showing his expertise in conveying his Sufi ideas using the medium of poetry. In addition, he was a key Sufi poet who has introduced the Malay poetic image by creatively adopting Arabic-Persian vocabularies.

Keywords: Hamzah Fansuri, mystical poetry, Sufi poet, *wujudiyah*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi jejak kepenyairan Hamzah Fansuri yang dikenal sebagai tokoh sufi kondang sekaligus penyair masyhur di Aceh pada abad ke-16 dan 17. Kontribusi Fansuri dalam sastra Melayu amatlah signifikan. Sebagai seorang sufi *wujudiyah* yang kontroversial, Fansuri menggunakan puisi untuk menyampaikan pengalaman dan gagasan sufistiknya. Artikel ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif untuk menggali dan menjelaskan gagasan-gagasannya. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis isi, artikel ini menyajikan puisi-puisi Fansuri untuk dapat memahami konstelasi pemikiran pokok *wujudiyah*-nya. Artikel ini menemukan bahwa Fansuri berhasil menunjukkan kepiawaiannya dalam menyampaikan ide-ide sufistiknya dengan medium puisi. Selain itu, ia merupakan penyair sufi yang penting diperhitungkan dalam memperkenalkan imaji puitik bahasa Melayu dengan mengadopsi secara kreatif kosakata-kosakata Arab-Persia.

Kata kunci: Hamzah Fansuri, puisi mistik, penyair sufi, *wujudiyah*

INTRODUCTION

Sufism as an esoteric aspect in Islam functions as a means of healing the human soul. This is in line with Aristotle's view that art and literature act as catharsis in human life. Both Sufism and literature are sourced from spiritual intuition that is manifested in the world of aesthetics. Sufism is not only limited to ethics and ritual but also includes aesthetic elements. For Sufis, poetry is a very important medium of expression to convey their experiences of transcendental love (Wachid B.S., 2005: 477-478).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr states that the divine aspect in Islam is viewed as beauty or aesthetics. This view is the unique basis of Sufism which contains the Islamic principles. The beauty of this divine aspect is considered the esoteric and mystical dimension of Islam and is seen as the most beautiful side of the religion (Hadi W. M., 2001: 10). Therefore, there exists an interweaving between literary aesthetics and Sufism. In this respect, al-Ghazali elucidates that the beauty produced by noble works of art—like music and poetry—is able to awaken love hidden in the heart both worldly and sensual love as well as spiritual and divine love (Hadi W. M., 2016: 135).

The way the Sufis express their ecstatic mystical love through poetry means affirming that their expressions must be in figurative forms and metaphors. As Ibn 'Arabi expounds, *ahl al-ma'rifah* or Sufis cannot convey their feelings to others clearly, and they can, therefore, only express them symbolically (Wachid B.S., 2005: 477). The main basis of Sufi literature lies in the religious experience of the Sufis. *Tawhid* of the Sufis, which emphasizes that God is One and the only one who truly exists, is the core of their spiritual expression. This mystical expression is realized through the symbolism of language. In this respect, Sufi literature also functions as a social means to convey divine reflection and philosophy (Hadi W. M., 2001: 21-22; Zakaria, 2016: 24-27).

Since the beginning of the history of Sufism, literature—especially poetry—has been the main medium for conveying the spiritual experience of the Sufis (Ula, 2017: 26). Their various experiences related to mystical knowledge and unity are expressed in the form of anecdotal stories, metaphors, or poetic allegories. Although poetry and literature have a great influence on the intellectual activities of the Sufis, most of them did not write with the aim of becoming writers or poets. Their writings emerged from religious and spiritual motivations, namely, to convey wisdom and obtain blessings (*barakah*). One example of such a figure included in this Sufi poetry tradition is Hamzah Fansuri.

Discussing and understanding Hamzah Fansuri's Sufi poetry has profound significance because his poems not only represent the spiritual dimension of Islamic mysticism but also present a unique blend of Sufi thought and the aesthetics of classical Malay literature. The uniqueness of Fansuri's poems lies in his ability to articulate the metaphysical concepts of Sufism in the form of poetic verses full of symbolism, making him one of the pioneers of Sufi literature in the Indonesian archipelago. Nevertheless, despite his very important contribution, certain parts of Hamzah Fansuri's Sufi poetry, related to its philosophical meaning and cross-cultural influences, have not been elaborated or discussed in depth in academic studies. This opens up a great opportunity to fill the research gap and to further explore his intellectual and spiritual heritage which can enrich the understanding of the relationship between religion, culture, and literature in the Malay world.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative method. As library research, this study collects relevant literature ranging from books, journals, to encyclopedias and others as textual sources. A historical approach is applied to examine the context of Hamzah Fansuri's life and thoughts as the main figure, including his social, cultural, and religious background. In addition, the content analysis method is used to describe and interpret Hamzah Fansuri's poems. Through this analysis, the symbolic meaning, Sufi values, and spiritual messages in Fansuri's works are identified and interpreted in depth. Research data were obtained from various primary sources, such as Fansuri's poetry collections, and secondary sources in the form of literature relevant to the research theme.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hamzah Fansuri's Life

The life history of Hamzah Fansuri is not very clear and is a complicated problem for researchers. The year of his birth and death, even the location of his burial, are not clearly known by researchers. Until now, there has been no definite and clear discovery regarding his life journey, his works, and which original poems he wrote as a poet (Hadi W. M., 2016: 115; Shihab, 2001: 124-125).

Two books which are believed to be the most complete in recording the history of the Aceh sultanate in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, namely *Hikayat Aceh* and *Bustan al-Salatin*, do not mention the name Hamzah Fansuri. According to Kreamer, the reason why Hamzah Fansuri's name is not included in *Hikayat Aceh* is that this figure often wandered and was rarely in Aceh. If this reason is true, it means that Hamzah Fansuri was hardly involved in various religious activities organized by the Aceh royal palace (Hadi W. M., 2001: 116).

In Azyumardi Azra's notes, it is said that Hamzah Fansuri was the chief bishop during the reign of Sultan 'Ala al-Din Ri'ayat Shah. However, this opinion is refuted by other scholars, that what is actually meant as the bishop was Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani, not Hamzah Fansuri. Nonetheless, the first opinion is more reasonable, because at that time Shams al-Din was still in the middle of his career. It was only after under the rule of the next sultan, namely Iskandar Muda, that Shams al-Din became the chief bishop (Azra, 2005: 199-200).

Fansuri is also not mentioned in *Bustan al-Salatin*, but to investigate the reason, it is certainly easier. Since the book is the work of Nur al-Din al-Raniri who was sentimental about Hamzah Fansuri's *wujudiyah* teachings, al-Raniri did not mention Fansuri's name, because for al-Raniri it meant the same as tarnishing the good name of the kingdom. In fact, in the paragraph relating to the development of religious knowledge and Sufism, al-Raniri only mentions the names of three foreign scholars who came to Aceh to teach religious knowledge and debate with *wujudiyah* leaders at the end of the sixteenth century (Riyadi, 2016: 354). Meanwhile, the names of several local scholars who played significant roles were never mentioned. Of course, this is a product of hostile sentiment, resulting in the underestimation of Hamzah Fansuri and Shams al-Din in their competent authority (Hadi W. M., 2001: 116).

Hamzah Fansuri was established as a very strong figure in Sufism and Malay literature at the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The opinion that he lived in the second half of the sixteenth century is based on the fact that he was a Sufism expert who lived one generation before Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani (d. 1630), and even Hamzah Fansuri was Shams al-Din's master. Several scholars agree with this opinion, an opinion expressed by Snouck Hurgronje. However, quite a few scholars reject it. Kreamer states that Hamzah Fansuri lived until 1636, six years after al-Sumatrani's death. Doorenbos,

Winstedt, Harun Hadiwijono, and Ali Hasjmi agree with this latter opinion (Hadi W. M., 2001: 118).

While Braginsky—based on Fansuri’s poems and European notes about him—assumes that Fansuri lived until 1621, Drewes and Brekel argue that Fansuri lived only until the end of the sixteenth century. This is based on the fact that in the early seventeenth century the influential Sufism teaching in Aceh was the teaching of seven planes of being (*maratib al-sab’ah*), which was spread by Shams al-Din, Hamzah’s disciple. Al-Attas suggests that Fansuri lived at least until the early seventeenth century (Arifin, 2013: 30).

It is indeed complicated to find information about the biographies of the early Islamic intellectuals of the Indonesian archipelago as there are not many written sources, either in the form of manuscripts or others, that talk about their lives. Moreover, they themselves also do not talk much about themselves in their various works, including in this context Hamzah Fansuri. Although he left quite a lot of writings that can still be seen and read to this day, his personal life is not widely known (Arifin, 2013: 29).

Based on his works, Hamzah Fansuri appears to have mastered two foreign languages, namely Arabic and Persian, in addition to his native Malay (Shihab, 2001: 125). There is not much prose and poetry written by Hamzah Fansuri, only three Sufi treatises and at least thirty-two collections of poetry which are considered genuine. However, it is not impossible that some of his works were destroyed in the burning of *wujudiyah* literature in Aceh in 1637. Be that as it may, three of his works that have been discovered and translated are *Syarab al-‘Ashiqin*, *Asrar al-‘Arifin*, and *al-Muntahi* (Hadi W. M., 2001: 146-158; Mulyati, 2006: 77). All of these works talk about *tawhid*, *ma‘rifat*, and spiritual journey in Ibn ‘Arabian worldview (Shihab, 2001: 126).

The last name “Fansuri” is *takhallus* that shows he was a poet who came from Fansur that people call “Barus,” which is now a small town on the west coast of Sumatra located between the cities of Sibolga and Singkel. Sufi poets often use *takhallus* to mean freeing themselves from their previous life, that is, after experiencing a transformation in the spiritual life. Apart from that, the *takhallus* also describes the poet’s hometown or country of origin (Hadi W. M., 1995: 9; Magdalena, 2015: 5). However, there is another opinion which states that Fansuri was conceived by his mother in Barus and born in Shahr Nawī based on his poetry as follows:

Hamzah *nin* asalnya Fansuri
Mendapat wujud di tanah Shahr Nawī
Beroleh *khilafat* ilmu yang ‘*ali*
Daripada ‘Abd al-Qa dir al-Jilani (Djamaris & Prijanto, 1995: 1)

(Hamzah comes from the land of Fansuri
Finding existence in the land of Syahr Nawī
Obtaining a legacy of high knowledge
From Shaikh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani)

Hamzah Fansuri is thought to have been orphaned when he was young and came from an ordinary family, so he had a strong determination to travel in search of knowledge and wealth. His life was full of wanderings from one place to another, especially to places of Islamic study, such as Mecca, Medina, and Baghdad. It was in the latter place that he joined the Qadiriyyah Order as made explicit in his poem above. Meanwhile, in the field of fiqh, he follows the Shafi’iyah school of thought. After he traveled, it was reported that he returned to Aceh. Initially he taught in Barus and then in Banda Aceh (Ni’am, 2017: 268-269).

Hamzah Fansuri’s pioneering works are highly recognized in the development of the Malay language through his Sufi poems on the one hand, and his contribution in enriching spiritual life, especially the philosophical Sufism of

Ibn ‘Arabi on the other. There was not a single Sufi philosopher who emerged after him but definitely recognized the significance of Hamzah Fansuri. It is not known for certain when he died, except for various differences of opinion among scholars as has been mentioned earlier (Shihab, 2001: 129).

Hamzah Fansuri’s *Wujudiyah* Sufism

In the Indonesian archipelago, Hamzah Fansuri is more identified as a follower of *wujudiyah* Sufism. He adopted many of the classical *wujudiyah* teachings as initiated by Ibn ‘Arabi. Like Hamzah Fansuri, Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani is also categorized in the same Sufi school of thought. Both are the main figures in the interpretation of philosophical Sufism, namely *wahdat al-wujud*, which is particularly influenced by Ibn ‘Arabi and al-Jili. They strictly follow the complex *wahdat al-wujud* system. For example, they explain nature in relation to a series of Neoplatonic emanations and try to explain each process and stage of God’s emanation (Azra, 2002: 119). However, between the two there is a difference regarding the concept of the planes of being (*maratib al-wujud*). Hamzah Fansuri himself is an adherent of the five planes of being, while al-Sumtrani adheres to the seven planes of being which he adopted from the book *al-Tuhfah al-Mursalah ila al-Ruh al-Nabi* by Muhammad Fadlullah al-Burhanpuri (Arifin, 2013: 42-43; Hadi W. M., 2001: 118-119).

The *wujudiyah* thought is closely related to the affirmation that there is only one being, although it appears plural. From this one being, some are outward appearances, and some are inner realities. Everything in the cosmos is a manifestation of *al-Haqq*. Hamzah Fansuri likens it in a very literary way, that is, God’s being is like a deep ocean that does not move. This cosmos is the ocean waves of God’s being. The flow of the Absolute Essence is likened to the movement of waves that blend together with the ocean, creating steam, smoke,

and clouds, which then become the world of phenomena. That is what is called *ta'ayyun* from the Essence that is *la ta'ayyun*. It can also be called *tanazzul* (descending). Everything returns to God (*taraqqi*), which is described as steam, smoke, clouds, rain, water into rivers, and back to the ocean (Ni'am, 2017: 274-275). It was Hamzah Fansuri's teachings that would later gain polemical momentum from Nur al-Din al-Raniri.

Furthermore, Hamzah Fansuri depicts the relationship between God and everything other than Him as the relationship between the one in front of a mirror and what is in the mirror. Even though the cosmos is outwardly tangible, in fact it is not a real form. The ultimate being is God. Moreover, Fansuri maintains that servants are not separated from God, and neither is God. This kind of expression is an indication of the teachings of *wahdat al-wujud* (Arifin, 2013: 40-41), for this expression seems to show that there is no distance between God and creatures (Ni'am, 2017: 276).

It is quite clear about Hamzah Fansuri's views that emphasize more on the immanence of God, rather than His transcendence. Such a concept is what makes Hamzah Fansuri considered by scholars who oppose him as a pantheist Sufi who is different from orthodox Sufis and the practices of Muslims in general. The impact is that orthodox Sufis do not hesitate to consider Hamzah Fansuri's teachings as heterodox (Fauziah, 2013: 292-293). Of course, such accusations need objective clarification to examine them comprehensively.

Seen briefly above, thus, Hamzah Fansuri's views emphasize the immanence of God alone. Nevertheless, since he was quite strict in following the concept of *wujudiyah* of Ibn Arabi, it cannot be denied that Hamzah Fansuri also elaborates on the transcendence of God. Hamzah Fansuri views that God is the One with His solitude. In this regard, God is believed to be unreachable by humans, but because humans need knowledge about Him, different expressions

emerge according to their respective ways of perceiving. Therefore, Hamzah Fansuri's views about God can be understood as an expression that is merely *i'tibar*, not touching the Essence of God (Kurdi, 2013: 21).

Tuhan kita tidak ber-*mitsal*
 Bukannya bintang dan *Shamsu hilal*
 Di antara kening di manakan *wisal*
 Jangan kaupandang pada cahaya dan *zilal* (Hadi W. M., 2016: 167).

(Our God is without equal or likeness
 Not like a beautiful star, sun, or crescent moon
 If you look between the foreheads, where is the real encounter?
 Don't look at ephemeral light or shadow).

In the concept of the hierarchy of being of Hamzah Fansuri, like Ibn Arabi (Kartanegara, 2002: 39), there is the first plane of being called *la ta'ayyun*, which is a term that the nature of God's Essence (*Dhat*) is free from anything. Here Fansuri believes that God's Essence cannot be said (*tanzih*), because it is beyond the reach of knowledge and is dark from the sight of anyone except only Himself. So dark is the plane of *la ta'ayyun* that Hamzah Fansuri asserts that both the prophets and the saints, either with revelation or *ma'rifah*, would still not be able to know His Essence (Kurdi, 2013: 22). From here, it can be concluded that in relation to the concept of divinity, Hamzah Fansuri is not trapped in pantheism which carelessly equates God with nature. Instead, he also emphasizes the transcendental aspect of God, that is, He is also the Most Incomparable.

From Arabic-Persian Literature to Hamzah Fansuri

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 and Persian literature. Persian sources played a prominent role in the building of Malay Sufi literature. In a study, it was shown that no less than

429 Persian words were absorbed into Malay. In Persian Sufi literary writing, it can be seen that Farid al-Din Attar's work entitled *Mantiq al-Tayr* has been adapted into Malay, and is entitled *Hikayat Si Burung Pingai*, *Andai-Andai Si Burung Pingai*, and *Hikayat Burung Berau-Berau*. This allegorical fable inspired Hamzah Fansuri's poetry, especially his poem entitled *Syair Burung Pingai* (Hadi W.M., 2004: 21-24).

Hamzah *gharib* unggas *quddusi*
 Akan rumanya *Bayt al-Ma'muri*
Kursinya sekalian *kapuri*
Min al-ashjari di negeri Fansuri (Hadi W. M., 1995: 30)

(Hamzah is a traveler, a holy bird
 His home is in the eternal Bayt al-Ma'mur
 His chair is made of shining white chalk
 Made from trees in the land of Fansuri).

The poem above is an example of Hamzah Fansuri putting the name "Fansuri" as the name of his hometown or as his nickname. This custom originates from Persia and is called *takhallus*. Persian poets commonly use *takhallus* at the end of a verse when writing *ghazal*. This is related to the function of *ghazal* as a medium for erotic and mystical poetry. According to Jami, Persian poets choose *takhallus* by asking the opinion of the king who is the poet's protector or asking his or her teacher for advice. Some poets take their *takhallus* from the names of the towns where they were born or raised (Syarifuddin, 2013: 109).

The Malay language that Hamzah Fansuri uses in his poetry is so charming. Words taken from Arabic have been completely integrated into the Malay language system. Hamzah Fansuri really mastered Malay and Arabic. From the 32 sets of his poetry that were found (each set consists of 13-15 stanzas, and some have up to 17-19 stanzas), it can be seen that the process of Islamizing the Malay language was carried out by Hamzah Fansuri. In these 32 sets themselves, there

are approximately 800 words taken from Arabic, not to mention the technical terms of Sufism and Quranic verses as well as Hadith or Hadith *qudsi* (Hadi W. M., 2001: 413-436). Nonetheless, this does not make Hamzah Fansuri's poetry lose its poetic value, because the adopted words were adapted and aestheticized in such a way as to be absorbed into the Malay linguistic system (Hadi W. M., 2016: 151).

According to A. Teeuw, the system of poetry authorship introduced by Hamzah Fansuri was greatly influenced by Arabic and Persian poetry models. Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani, Fansuri's disciple, calls Hamzah Fansuri's poetry a type of *ruba 'i* which is known in the Arab-Persian world as *ruba 'iyat* in the plural form. However, the *ruba 'i* pattern is different from the poetry pattern referred to Fansuri's in terms of rhyme in one stanza.

The rhyme of *ruba 'i* is a-a-b-a, while the poetry developed by Hamzah Fansuri uses the rhyme a-a-a-a. Therefore, according to al-Attas, Arabic-Persian poetry has played an important role in influencing the creation of Malay Sufi poetry. In other words, Hamzah Fansuri in his time introduced elements of Arabic-Persian thought, aesthetics, and poetic characteristics into Malay literature, so that he is known to have brought new innovations to Malay literature with the creation of his poetry (Syarifuddin, 2013: 109-110).

As for vocabulary, Hamzah Fansuri's poetry is a work that has a significant influence on Malay language and literature (Hadi W.M., 2002: 379-380). Therefore, he has a huge influence on the development of Malay language and literature which was influenced by Arab and Persian Islamic culture. In fact, Hamzah Fansuri is often called the father of the Malay language. This is not an exaggeration, because Hamzah Fansuri is one of the Islamic figures who took part in efforts to Islamize Malay language and literature (Hadi W.M., 2002: 377; Nurhuda, 2016: 122-124).

The Concept of God in Hamzah Fansuri's Poetry

Poetry, for Sufis, can package spiritual experiences that are complicated to express. In poetic language, Sufi experiences can be condensed with metaphors. Poetic language is unlike language in general that operates rationally and discursively, being unfeasible to express mystical or Sufism experiences. In this section, we discuss several excerpts from Hamzah Fansuri's poetry that are representative of his views, especially those that are laden with the *wujudiyah* thought.

Hamzah nin asalnya Fansuri
Mendapat wujud di tanah Syahr Nawari
Beroleh khilafat ilmu yang 'ali
Daripada Syaikh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (Djamaris & Prijanto, 1995: 1).

(Hamzah comes from the land of Fansuri
Finding existence in the land of Syahr Nawari
Obtaining a legacy of high knowledge
From Shaikh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani).

Most scholars interpret the verse above as the identity of Hamzah Fansuri, especially with regard to the origins of his birth. In fact, if it is read through Sufi hermeneutics, the verse above using the term "*wujud*" (i.e. finding existence in the land of Syahr Nawari) is supposed to be understood as finding *al-Wujud* (God) or experiencing *mushahadah* (mystical witnessing) in the land of Syahr Nawari. It could be said that he reached the spiritual stage of *ma'rifah* in the land of Syahr Nawari (Hadi W. M., 2001: 140-142).

In another poem, Hamzah Fansuri formulates a sophisticated ontological system, which can be used as a reference for the spiritual journey of humans in the concept of transcendental anthropology. The human being in Hamzah Fansuri's view from the excerpt of the poem below indicates that one must find a home (a place to return) in the spiritual realm (Nasution, 2017: 239).

Kenali dirimu hai anak dagang

Jadikan markab tempat berpulang
 Kemudi tinggal jangan kau goyang
 Supaya dapat dekat kau pulang (Hadi W.M., 2016: 19).

(Know yourself, O wandering trader
 Make the ship your home
 Hold the helm, don't let go
 So, you can return home close and safe).

As for the purpose of humans in this world, Hamzah Fansuri reminds humankind not to be lulled by the world. From the verse above, he wants to convey that each person must always be aware of this world, which is only a temporary stopover. Humans must realize that they are only like traders who come for a moment to the world and will surely return to their origin soon. With such an understanding, humans should utilize all their potential to understand their place of return, “so you can return home close and safe,” as expressed in the last line (Nasution, 2017: 240).

Hamzah Fansuri also uses the word “trade,” which is a symbol of *faqir*. In Sufism, *faqir* is defined as a person who is no longer connected to the world but is reliant solely on God. Humans who essentially have nothing (*al-faqr*) need God. Based on this understanding, Hamzah Fansuri maintains that the true *faqir* is the Prophet Muhammad. In all aspects of his enviable life, he truly depended only on God (Hadi W.M., 2016: 17-18).

Rasulullah itulah yang tiada berlawan
 Meninggalkan tamak sungguh pun makan
 Uzlat dan tunggal di dalam kawan
 Olehnya duduk waktu berjalan (Hadi W.M., 2016: 18).

(The Messenger of Allah is the one who has no equal
 Avoiding greed, even in need of food
 Isolating himself and living simply in the midst of the crowd
 He was walking while sitting).

The third line that reads “*uzlat dan tunggal di dalam kawan*” can be interpreted to mean that the Prophet Muhammad is a man who was fond of retreat, but he did not abandon his social responsibility, since the line “he was walking while sitting” means that even though his heart was only tied to God, he was also still active in carrying out world affairs with full sincerity and devotion. If interpreted this way, the idea of *faqir* cannot be equated with passive asceticism and social escapism (Hadi W.M., 2016: 18).

Kenali dirimu hai anak dagang
 Di balik papan tidur terlentang
 Kelam dan dingin bukan kepalang
 Dengan siapa lawan berbincang (Nasution, 2017: 240).

(Know thyself, O wandering trader
 Behind the board you sleep on your back
 In the incomparable darkness and cold
 Who else are you going to talk to?)

From the verse above, the term “know” is meant not at the empirical or rational sensory level, but rather by mystical experience (*ma‘rifah*). Such a state will be achieved after experiencing self-annihilation (*fana’*). Therefore, in another fragment of poetry, Hamzah Fansuri even tries to emphasize that the wandering trader should deny himself or herself. Indeed, in the view of the *wujudiyah* Sufis, the “self” is only a shadow or reflection of the “True Self”. So, it is necessary to deny the “self” or small ego in order to reveal the “Self” or God. This denial also coincides with letting go lust and desire. Therefore, Hamzah Fansuri also criticizes people who indulge their desires.

Aho segala kita yang menyembah hawa
 Kerjama terlalu *ghawa*
 Tempat *qab qawaysn aw adna*
 Tiada antara kening tempatmu raya

Qab qawsayn ini terlalu *ujab*
 Akan tamsil jua kepada *ulul albab*

Barangsiapa *fana* ' daripada sekalian *hisab*
Beroleh Tuhan tiada dengan *hijab* (Tarigan, 2016: 105).

(O, all of us who are enslaved by lust
Your work is full of vain illusions
The holy place, Qab Qawsayn or Adna
is not between the brows, where you feel magnificent

The meaning of Qab Qawsayn is very deep
Only as a metaphor for wise people who understand
Whoever is annihilated from all calculations
He will find God without a veil).

After a seeker has made a long journey in his or her hard *mujahadah*, he or she will experience *fana* ' (self-annihilation). This *unio mystica* experience is felt by the seeker in the first stage of mystical state. As 'Attar said, this experience, namely *mushahadah* or *wahdat al-shuhud*, is the initial gate to enter the real palace of banquet. In such a state, the seeker sees himself or herself as having sunk in the vast ocean of the Divine, so that the seeker sees the foam, the rolling waves, or the sound of the crashing on the reef as mere manifestations of God.

Hamzah miskin hina dan karam
Bermain mata dengan *Rabbul Alam*
Selamnya sangat terlalu dalam
Seperti mayat sudah tertanam (Nasution, 2017: 53).

(Poor, lowly, and drowning Hamzah
Playing love with Rabbul 'Alam
The dive is very deep
Like an embedded corpse).

Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani, as a student of Hamzah Fansuri, interprets the above verse, "...that the Sufi is known for his poor self, without nature, name, action; then the one who has form, the one who has nature, the one who has name, and the one who acts is only God alone" (Nasution, 2017: 53). Therefore, in the *mujahadah* process of mystical seekers, they are required to negate themselves,

in the sense of realizing their total absence, because in principle, ontological existence is only God alone. Humans must position themselves before God like corpses that have been embedded, unable to move, so that humans feel the continuous impact of God.

In studying Sufi knowledge, Hamzah Fansuri spent many years traveling to distant countries such as the Malay Peninsula, Java, India, Persia, Arabia, and others. This gave him a broad horizon, so that he became a Sufi poet whose writing was pithy and dense with philosophical points, but still aesthetic to read and appreciate (Kurdi, 2013: 28).

Hamzah Fansuri di dalam Mekkah
Mencari Tuhan di *Bayt al-Ka'bah*
Di Barus ke Qudus terlalu payah
Akhirnya dijumpa di dalam rumah (Hadi W. M., 2001: 142).

(Hamzah Fansuri is in Mecca
Seeking God at Bayt al-Kaaba
From Barus to Quds, the journey is so difficult
Finally, God was found in the house).

In such a verse, Hamzah Fansuri reveals that God resides in “the house,” which in the Sufi view refers to the human heart. For Sufis, the heart is understood as the divine residence, as hinted at in the Prophet’s hadith, “*qalb al-mu'minin bayt Allah*” (the believer’s heart is the house of God). This understanding is not only literal but dives into an esoteric dimension, describing the heart as a sacred space where humans draw closer to the Creator. By using the symbol “house,” Hamzah Fansuri emphasizes the presence of God in the human heart who continually directs one’s soul and consciousness to Him.

Regarding his *wujudiyah* view, Hamzah Fansuri expresses his ideas symbolically using “ocean” to describe God’s omnipotence, because ocean shows breadth and depth, while the cosmos is compared to crashing waves. For Hamzah Fansuri, waves are a form of *tajalli* from the ocean and the two cannot

be separated. However, it can still be understood that waves and the ocean are two entities that can be identified as different. This is often regarded as a paradoxical metaphor in Sufism (Tarigan, 2016: 91).

Tuhan itu misal *bahr al- 'amiq*
 Ombaknya penuh pada sekalian *tariq*
 Laut dan ombak keduanya *rafiq*
 Akhir ke dalamnya ombaknya *ghariq*

Bahr al-Haqq terlalu dalam
 Ombaknya menjadi *'alam*
 Asalnya tiada bersiang malam
 Di laut itu *'alam* nin karam (Tarigan, 2016: 91-92).

(God is like a deep ocean
 Its waves cover every path of life
 The ocean and the waves both go hand in hand
 Finally, the waves sink into the ocean)

The Ocean of Truth is so deep
 Its waves transform into nature
 Originally there was no day or night
 In that ocean, nature sinks).

Hamzah Fansuri in the verse above likens the infinite Being of God to the ocean (*al-bahr*). Everything is likened to a *tariq* (path). In the Quran, it is stated that God (*al-Muhit*) encompasses all things. The line “*laut dan ombak keduanya rafiq*” explains the closeness of humans to God, for He is closer to humans than their own jugular veins. The word *rafiq* comes from Arabic which means “close” (Hadi W. M., 2001: 154). However, Hamzah Fansuri also strictly emphasizes God’s incomparability and transcendence.

Tuhan kita tidak ber-*mitsal*
 Bukannya bintang dan *Shamsu hilal*
 Di antara kening di manakan *wisal*
 Jangan kaupandang pada cahaya dan *zilal* (Hadi W. M., 2016: 167).

(Our God is without equal or likeness)

Not like a beautiful star, sun or crescent moon
If you look between the foreheads, where is the real encounter?
Don't look at ephemeral light or shadow)

In the teachings of *pranayama*, the forehead is seen as *atman* (soul) and is used as a point of concentration when one practices yoga. The goal is to achieve unity with *Paramestiguru*. However, Hamzah Fansuri criticizes such practices being included in Islam. The context of the poem is quite clear. Religious life in Aceh at that time was still strongly influenced by non-Islamic elements. As a Sufi, he taught that God has no place, which is different from the teachings of *pranayama* which view God as immanent (pantheistic). According to Hamzah Fansuri, that God is immanent (*tashbih*) is true, but the truth is only half, because at the same time, He is transcendent (*tanzih*) (Hadi W. M., 2016: 167-169).

Indeed, the *wujudiyah* Sufis often use symbolism in delivering their experiences so that readers need deep reflection to understand them. This is one of the benchmarks for classifying Sufis such as Hamzah Fansuri or Ibn 'Arabi into philosophical Sufis (*al-tasawwuf al-falsafi*) because to be able to understand them, one needs philosophical reflection. Nevertheless, this classification is actually for convenience only, not to classify Sufism absolutely into various schools.

CONCLUSION

Islamic literature or art has a foundation of knowledge inspired by spiritual values, wisdom, and discernment. This is indeed based on esoteric insight that reaches into the inner reality (*haqa'iq*) of all things. Islamic art and literature do not imitate (*memesis*) the external forms of nature but reflect its principles. It embodies—in a physical level that can be directly understood by the mind—fundamental realities as a ladder for the soul's ascent from the level of what can be seen and heard to the level of silence above every sound.

Sufism is not only limited to a religious and spiritual movement but also transformed into a rich literary movement. Braginsky calls Sufism “poetic Sufism” when expressed in literary form, especially poetry, while “book Sufism” refers to Sufism that is codified in religious doctrine. Poetic Sufism becomes a universal medium for expressing the spiritual experience of Sufis through language and aesthetics, transcending national boundaries as well as Arab-Muslim and Persian cultural environments. This phenomenon permeates various literary traditions of the world, such as Turkish, Urdu, Malay, and Javanese, showing that Sufi aesthetics has a universal dimension that transcends time and place.

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