

The History of Female Sufi Figures as Role Models of Good Behavior (*Akhlakul Karimah*)

Tukiran

Sumatera Institute of Technology, Indonesia
Corresponding author: tukiran@sll.itera.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to explore the severe history of Sufi figures from the female group with the aim of knowledge and wisdom of akhlakul karimah examples for readers, especially female students. This research is a descriptive qualitative type because the data studied is not numerical data, this research uses the Grounded Theory strategy, which is to explore a topic to be studied in depth with disciplinary theory, the technique used is Library Research, which is a study based on non-field literature data, with content analysis technique, which is a process of rigorous and systematic procedures for analyzing, testing, and clarifying data. The result of this study is that women and men have equality in their efforts to approach and achieve the Perfect (spirituality) in addition to equality in social roles. In Sufism for example, Robi'ah al-Adawiyah can surpass the level of men. This shows that men and women have the same opportunity and position to reach a certain level of piety. It all depends on their abilities and endeavors. In any case, women's involvement in Islamic mysticism has contributed immensely to the development of Islam and become a force in itself for Islam.

Keywords: *Sufi, Female, Akhlakul Karimah*

A. INTRODUCTION

Efforts to cleanse the soul are carried out with a serious struggle (*mujahadah*) as a way of behavior of a Sufi in controlling himself, always feeling under the supervision of Allah SWT, and always feeling in the presence of God. The achievement of the perfection of the purity of this soul requires education and mental training (*riyadlah*), which is formulated in the form of setting the right mental attitude and very strict behavioral discipline (Syukur, 2000). The method used is by using *dzauq* or feeling or heart.

Mysticism is a view or belief that knowledge of the nature of God can be obtained through meditation or spiritual awareness free from the interference of reason and the five senses. All religions have a mystical dimension that aims to build the drives that exist in humans, namely the drive to realize themselves as essentially spiritual and eternal beings. Tasawwuf, as a mystical dimension in Islam is one of the most widely developed spiritual traditions in the history of major religions. Derived from the Prophet Muhammad and the revelation of the Qur'an, Sufism for Muslims has played a tremendous role in the development of the Islamic faith, both private and public. The various movements of Sufism have spanned the Islamic world in the history of Islamic thought. Mysticism in Islam is the embodiment of faith. For Sufis, the deepening and experience of the inner aspect is paramount without neglecting the outer aspect, and is motivated to cleanse the soul.

The emergence of mysticism in Islam has been motivated by the socio-political problems of Islamic society, which is shown by the attitude of self-isolation or withdrawal from the hustle and bustle of Islamic society. Spirituality in the Qur'an never emphasizes asceticism. Certain ascetic practices, such as the Romadlan fast, are integrated in the Shari'ah. However, asceticism as a withdrawal from society was not encouraged in early Islam. The life of the Prophet Muhammad, who is seen as a model for Muslims, was fully lived in society. He married, had children, fought in wars and organized governments.

The *zuhud* impulse of the second-century AH has been attributed to a reaction to rampant corruption during the heyday of the Islamic caliphate. It was also a reaction to the influence of Indian and Christian asceticism in Syria and Egypt. Whatever its origins, the asceticism of the century was a major issue in developing a group of Muslims who came to be known as "Sufis" (Sells, 2004).

In its history and development, the mystical dimension in Islam has given rise to world-caliber figures, such as Dzun Nun al-Misri, Abu Yazid al-Bustami, al-Hallaj, al-Ghazali, and others. From a series of Sufi figures, there is also a phenomenal female Sufi figure, Rabiah al-Adawiyah (d. 801 AD), who developed the concept of *mahabbatullah* in the

world of Sufism. There is no doubt that she is a woman who in the life of Sufism has contributed greatly to women in the Sufi world. Almost all Sufi figures have used Rabiah's poems when discussing the issue of "love" for Allah, which have the substance of moral depth in the presence of the Divine and express great literary value. Other women in her time and afterward were considered Sufis, such as Mu'adzah al-Adawiyah (a companion of Rabiah al-Adawiyah), Sayyidah Nafisah bint Hasan bin Zaid bin Hasan bin Ali bin Abi Tholib (145208 AH), Zainab, and many other female Sufis.

With the emergence of Rabiah al-adawiyah in the struggle for Sufism and several other female Sufi figures, the contribution of women in the mystical world is no less important than that of men. Sufi women, while not as numerous as Sufi men, are certainly symbolic of the highest achievements of Muslim womanhood and provide real hope for attaining higher religious and social standards for Muslim women today (Smith, 1999). The involvement of women in Islamic spiritual struggles has led to the issue of gender in Sufism. In this regard, Faridh al-Din 'Aththar (d. approximately 627 AH/1230 CE), a Sufi poet and writer from Nisyapur, as quoted by Michael A. Sells that 'Aththar has dramatically highlighted gender issues by placing Rabiah al-Adawiyah as a Sufi murshid in the dominance of the "line of men" (shaffrijal) at that time. 'Aththar also cites the history of Aisha, one of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad, who was influential in hadith narration as "the narrator of two-thirds of the hadith of faith" (Sells, 2004). Also about Maryam, the mother of Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him), who will be the first among the "Row of men" on the day of resurrection. For 'Aththar, Allah only respects a person's intentions, not his physical form. There was no room for class distinctions between "nobles" and "commoners". Sufism is a real part of religious life, and both male and female Sufis are equally respected in the eyes of Islamic society for guiding Muslims to seek direct experience of God, to deepen their spiritual life, and to find ways to carry out God's will as an implementation of loving Him. However, there are still few discussions on the involvement of women in the history of Sufism compared to male Sufis. Therefore, this discussion will explain the involvement of female Sufis in achieving spirituality by describing female figures who can achieve Sufi status.

Sufi principles in the world of Sufism are closely related to the educational paradigm because Islamic education is actually fundamental, namely the cultivation of values of love for the nation, not necessarily always focusing on the results of one's achievements and work, which is one of the root causes of the emergence of capitalism in the world of education in

Indonesia (Arrohmatan, 2019). For this reason, through this research, the author examines the history of Sufi female figures as examples of *akhlakul karimah*.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's Gender Studies

Basically, sexually-biologically, humans can be divided into women and men. The difference between men and women is given so that it will also give birth to roles that are also natural, such as: women have the nature of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. Meanwhile, men have the nature to impregnate. These natural conditions are not interchangeable and are permanent. But the differences between men and women that are natural often have an impact on differences in roles in socio-cultural life. This difference in sex (sexuality) is seen as the most influential factor in determining social position, life experiences, physical and psychological conditions, interests, and values. The hierarchical relationship of male dominance and female subordination is assumed to be the source of injustice (Munawaroh, 2003). This role difference is so inherent in society that it is assumed to be a natural role - it will not cause problems as long as it does not lead to inequality in gender relations and roles. In the social sciences, gender refers to the differences in roles between women and men shaped by culture. Gender behavior is actually not inherited (brought at birth) and is also not natural, but is a behavior formed in a person when interacting with other people in social life.

In reality, gender differences have created gender inequalities, both for men and especially for women, Gender injustice is a system and structure in which men and women are victims. Gender injustice is manifested in various forms of injustice, namely marginalization or the process of economic impoverishment, subordination or insignificance in political decisions, stereotype formation or through negative labeling, violence, longer and more workloads (burden), and ideological socialization of gender role values. These manifestations of gender injustice cannot be separated because they are interrelated and affect each other dialectically. None of these manifestations of injustice is more important, more essential, than the others (Fakih, 1999). These manifestations of injustice are "socialized" to men and women steadily, who gradually become accustomed to and eventually believe that gender roles are as if they are nature, thus creating a structure and system of injustice that is "accepted" and no longer felt as a mistake. Both men and women accept the injustice and tend to maintain it (Fakih, 1999).

Thus, gender issues have influenced social structure. The influence of gender on a social structure can be seen in the culture of a society. On the one hand, social structure can be seen through the roles played by groups in society. On the other hand, social structure can be seen in the social status of groups in society. Throughout history, women have been placed in a minority position and identified as having "feminine" characteristics with meek, emotional, less rational, not strong traits, and a series of other traits that are not superior to men. These cultural assumptions automatically give men a higher role and social status than women (Umar, 1999). The greater the difference, the more unequal the social status, and the smaller the difference, the smaller the difference in social status, although gender differences are not the only variable that determines inequality or justice. Many factors contribute to the injustice of women's social status. The view that justifies the dominance of men over women, one of which is very well constructed by religious interpretations that are sentimental to women (mysoginist), which in fact, the understanding of religious issues, especially those concerning women's rights, is strongly influenced by the social culture that developed at that time. Just as an example in the fiqh tradition, sexual violence and injustice can be seen in the doctrine of cursing a wife by angels when she refuses to serve her husband (Ilyas, 2003). The model of interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith that creates injustice greatly affects women's participation in all sectors, both domestic and public roles. In this case, it is necessary to review gender-biased interpretations critically. Each text of the Qur'an and hadith should be understood verbally and from the metaphysical message of changes in the role and position of women indicated by these texts. From here will be seen the radical idea of change and the ideality of the position and role of women who change in line with the changing needs of society (Mul Khan, 2000). In this issue, religion faces a new test because religion is often considered a scapegoat for the occurrence of gender injustice.

The Qur'an, the principal reference of Islamic society, basically recognizes that the position of men and women is equal. Both are created from one nafs (living entity), where one has no superiority over the other. Even the Qur'an does not explicitly explain that Eve was created from the rib of the prophet Adam so her position and status are lower. On that basis, the Qur'anic principle towards men and women is the same, where the wife's rights are recognized as equal to the husband's rights (QS. Annisa verse 1). Thus, religious interpretation has a very strategic position in perpetuating gender injustice or in efforts to uphold gender justice. For this reason, it is necessary to reinterpret the entire religious interpretation through a new approach with a gender perspective (Fakih, 1999).

Review of Sufi Characteristics

The term Sufi is a term for someone who is an expert and deep in the field of Sufism. Sufism itself is part of Islam which studies the dimensions of good behavior or morals (Akhlaqul Karimah), in the study of Sufism the Sufis must have the character of mysticism. mysticism is a system rooted in mystical experience. Mystical experience (as well as aesthetic, religious, and moral experiences) is not really a philosophy, but just an experience that is a multi-complex dimension of social reality. As a reality, mystical experience can be made a philosophical reflection so that mystical experience has entered the realm of philosophy. Even in later developments, the discussion of mysticism entered the area of metaphysics, organized with a clear concept. Therefore, mysticism is a spiritual study in the search for inner knowledge to find a path or practice towards awareness and enlightenment of the heart. In the mystical experience, the *dzaug* (feeling) takes precedence over the ratio. Hence it is personal or existential. The essence of mysticism is the awareness of communication and dialogue between the human spirit and God by isolating oneself and contemplating the awareness of being close to God can take the form of union with God (Nasution, 1987). Therefore, mystics always try to gain a direct relationship with God by approaching themselves in the Divine presence through spiritual experiences. Indeed, the mystical experience is religious, so it can be interpreted as a type of religion that emphasizes and prioritizes the appreciation of God in a direct relationship.

From the point of view of anthropology, it is said that one of the phases of man as a religious being, namely making the appreciation of God as a human being and has been going on throughout human history. With the existence of religion, it does not stop but gets a container and becomes directed. Mystical symptoms are found in all religions and even in all nations throughout the ages, both those bound by religious traditions and those that are free from religious ties (Siregar, 2000). Because in the mystical experience, what is prioritized is *dzaug* (feeling), mysticism views the soul as something essential to human life when compared to matter. Louis Leahy states that the soul is spiritual and intrinsically free from matter in its essence. This is a result of the fact that certain human behaviors outperform material conditions. Then those behaviors can only be rooted in a principle that in itself is not intrinsically subject to the laws of matter. Man with mind and will transcend the material conditions of space and time. He attains universality, reaches the absolute, he is even able to arrive at the recognition of the Existent (das Sein). Because of the mind, we become "all things" (Leahy, 1984). But the soul is not a spirit alone, but remains extrinsically dependent on matter. Physical matter is a condition for the formation of human activity. It is a reality

that physical matter and the spiritual soul are mutually compatible in realizing human actions, and it is from these actions that can then determine the quality of one's mystical experience in achieving closeness to God.

C. METHOD

This research is descriptive qualitative because the data studied is not numerical. This research uses the Grounded Theory strategy to explore a topic to be studied in depth with disciplinary theories. The technique used is Library Research, namely studies based on non-field literature data, with content analysis techniques, namely the process of rigorous and systematic procedures for analyzing, testing, and clarifying data.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Throughout discussions about women, women are often attached to the stereotype of "weak creatures and prioritize feelings rather than ratios". If Sufism as a mystic in Islam prioritizes *dzauq* or feelings, women take a dominant role compared to men. However, the discussion about female Sufi figures in Sufism is not as much as about male Sufis. Therefore, to find out the extent of women's involvement in spiritual struggles can be shown by the presence of female Sufis, who are no less phenomenal than male Sufis. However, the figures below are also scholars who delve into science and study the books because it is an understanding of religious books that forms understanding and moral character (Arrohmatan, Mualifah, Harahap, & Murtafiah, 2022), as happened to the following Sufi women.

Rabiah Al-Adawiyah (713-801 H)

She was a famous female Sufi from Basrah. According to her history, she was a slave who was later freed. She lived in poverty and refused all the material assistance people gave her. Even in his prayers, he would not ask for material things from God. He truly lived in a state of *zuhud* and only wanted to be close to God. God for him is a substance that must be loved and overflows from his heart a deep love for God (Nasution, 1987). He is the most famous Sufi in *mahabbah* and even according to many opinions, he was the first to teach *al-hubb* with content and understanding that is typical of Sufism. According to Rivay, this may have something to do with her nature as a gentle and loving woman, a deep sense of aesthetics in the face of the situation she faced at that time. Pure love for God is the highlight of her teachings which are generally expressed through poetic verses (Siregar, 2000).

In the view of gender, the stereotype attached to women as soft-hearted and loving creatures and having a deep sense of aesthetics attached to Rabi'ah is not because of her nature as a woman. Rather an effort to achieve spiritual quality obtained through spiritual exercises related to morals, namely the level of zuhudan Rabi'ah in addressing the life she faced. The concept of mahabbah developed by Rabi'ah has become phenomenal among Sufis and Sufis afterward have made mahabbah the foundation of Sufism. The characterization of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah as a female Sufi has a high position in the eyes of the Muslim community, both men and women. In her dissertation on Rabi'ah's spiritual struggle, Margaret Smith describes many spiritual stories of Rabi'ah and her followers. The stories told by Rabi'ah's followers show that Rabi'ah's followers believe that her personality is alive even though she has died and is in heaven. And there are similar accounts of Sufis who, after their death, appear in the dreams of those still on earth or alive and claim that they feel happy and that other pleasures await them there (Smith, 1999). There is no doubt that Rabi'ah's involvement in Sufism has made women's greatest contribution to the development of Sufism. Her stature has been known and is of world caliber; both Muslims themselves and non-Muslims have spoken about her a lot.

Rabi'ah Binti Isma'il dari Syiria (wafat 135 H)

The name of this Sufi woman is often confused with the Sufi woman Rabi'ah al-adawiyah of Basra. But since she married, lived, and died in Syria, and it is also said that she died fifty years before Rabi'ah of Basrah, the difference is sufficient to distinguish the two. Rabi'ah's husband from Syria was Ahmad b. Abi al-Hawwari, a famous zahid, but had also been married before him. Her husband did not mind it because both of them paid more attention to her spiritual needs and had a similar outlook on life, prioritizing spiritual life over worldly. Before marriage, Rabi'ah had 300,000 dinars, which she had inherited from her previous husband, and with this money, they could support their household and a brother Ahmad. Rabi'ah considered it proof of a path to Allah Most High. In Sufism she was famous for her attainment of ahwal. Sometimes passion and love overcame her, and sometimes familiarity (with the Supreme Being) and sometimes fear. This attainment of ahwal was expressed through her Sufistic poems, and many stories of miracles were told about her and other saints. He was held in high esteem among his contemporaries; many people consulted him and asked him for clarification on matters of Sufism. He may also be regarded as an early Sufi because his austerity in Sufism was one of the characteristics of Sufism in its early days (Smith, 1999).

Sayyidah Nafisah (145-208 H)

She was Sayyidah Nafisah Bint Hasan bin Zaid bin Hasan bin Ali bin Abi Talib, husband of Fatima bint Roaulullah. Born in Mecca on Wednesday, the second of Rabiul Awwal in 145 A.H. At that time the Islamic world was under Caliph Abi Ja'far al-Manshur, the second caliph of the Abbasid dynasty based in Bagdad. She grew up in Madinah where she spent her time working hard and worshipping Allah SWT. She married Ishaq, the son of Imam Ja'far Sadiq, and had two children, al Qasim and Ummu Kultsum. It is said that one of Umm Hani's Jewish neighbors, Ayub bin Shabir, had a child who fell ill and could not move (paralyzed). At noon, Ayub and his wife entrusted their child to Sayyidah Nafisah and left to go home. At dawn, Nafisah took ablution water next to Ayyub's daughter until the child was irrigated with ablution water and immediately, the child was cured and able to walk. The incident caused the Jewish family to convert to Islam. From this story, Sayyidah Nafisah's karomah began to spread throughout Mecca. From then on many people came to her, from the common people to government officials and great scholars such as Imam Shafi'i, to ask for prayers, taraweeh prayers, and to listen to the narration of hadith. The respect of the Islamic people for her at that time encouraged Assirri ibn Hakim (Governor of Egypt) to give a grant to sayyidah Nafisah in the form of a house on the hill of Siba. In this place, she lived her life until her death on Friday, 15 Ramadan in 208 A.H. She was buried in Egypt. At that time his tomb became a masyhad beside which a mosque was built. At any time the tomb is not devoid of pilgrims from various regions, among the great scholars who have visited, among others; Dzun-Nun al Misri, Abul Hasan ad-Dinawari, Abu Ali Ar-Rudzbari, Abu Bakar Ahmad ibn Nashr Ad-Daqqaq and so on (Hasan, 2001).

Many privileges and karomahs were given by Allah to her, both before and after she died. It all because of her closeness to Allah which is shown by diligent worship, zuhud, wara', reading the Qur'an a lot until tears, always fasting except Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha and on the day of tashriq. She also always performs qiyamul lail at night, always doing good and has many other praiseworthy traits. Sayyidah Nafisah's prominence in spiritual struggles can be noted that until today, in Egypt there is still a thriving Nafisiyyah Order which is attributed to Sayyidah Nafisah as its founder. This phenomenon can be used as a benchmark for her exemplary behavior. If studied in depth in the discourse of Sufism, she has begun to introduce the theory of mahabbah, although not as thoroughly as Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah. It is clear that Sayyidah Nafisah was among the female Sufi figures whose influence was quite significant among the Muslim community at that time and later times (Hasan, 2001).

Mu'adzah Al-Adawiyah

She was a female zahidah in the early period of Sufism. She was a companion of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah. She was the daughter of Abdullah al-Adawi and her real name was Ummu as-Sahbah, and she had many admirers in Basrah. She was a member of the Hasan al-Basri sect, which emphasized purity over mysticism. His worldview was similar to Hasan al-Basri's in that he lived always in the shadow of fear of impending wrath, while his acquaintance with Rabi 'ah al-Adawiyah does not seem to have led him to seek God's path through love.

Jami' relates of this Muadzah as Margareth Smith quoted that for almost forty years, he never raised his head to the sky. He never ate anything during the day and never slept at night. One of his friends said, 'Won't you hurt yourself with this state of affairs?' But he replied, "There is no pain in my body; I have substituted my daytime meal for the night and my night's sleep for the day." She used to pray 600 *rakaats* a day and night and said, "I wonder at the sleeping eye, will it know how long it will be closed in the grave." She lived alone after her husband and son died in a battle against the infidels (Smith, 1999).

Ten Zainab Names

She was a female zahidah in the early period of Sufism. She was a companion of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah. She was the daughter of Abdullah al-Adawi and her real name was Ummu as-Sahbah, and she had many admirers in Basrah. She was a member of the Hasan al-Basri sect, which emphasized purity over mysticism. His worldview was similar to Hasan al-Basri's in that he lived always in the shadow of fear of impending wrath, while his acquaintance with Rabi 'ah al-Adawiyah does not seem to have led him to seek God's path through love. Jami' relates of this Muadzah as quoted by Margareth Smith, that for almost forty years, he never raised his head to the sky. He never ate anything during the day and never slept at night. One of his friends said to him, 'Won't you hurt yourself with this state of affairs?' But he replied, "There is no pain in my body; I have substituted my daytime meal for the night and my night's sleep for the day." She used to pray 600 *rakaats* a day and night and said, "I wonder at the sleeping eye, will it know how long it will be closed in the grave." She lived alone after her husband and son died in a battle against the infidels (Smith, 1999).

E. CONCLUSION

A high position has been achieved by Sufi women among Muslims. By looking at the actions of the Sufi women above, it can be said that the figure of women can become a role model and tremendously influence the public. The influence of authority that emanates from the sanctity of life and the intimacy of the relationship with the Holy One can touch all levels of society, from the small community to the royal officials to a caliph. This proves that a woman is able to compete with men in taking on public roles. Women have the same status as men before Allah in attaining spiritual qualities, so Allah wills honor and elevate their status both during their lifetime and after death. It should also be noted that the height of spiritual qualities that use feelings is not due to the nature of women who prioritize feelings over ratios but rather a severe struggle to approach themselves to the Holy One.

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