

THE POPULARIZING OF SUNNI DOCTRINE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: *SIFAT DUA PULUH* IN MALAY KITAB *JAWI* IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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Abstract

Sifat Dua Puluh (twenty attributes of God) is a specific term of Malay to convey the doctrine of the Sunni school in Southeast Asia. Adapted from a renowned book of Yusuf al-Sanusi, *Umm al-Barāhīn*, this term began to appear in the 19th century as a leading Islamic theme in the *kitab Jawi* of Malay scholars in Mecca (*Jawa*). The scholars translated the book into Malay and expounded its contents in the form of commentaries (*sharḥ*), a rising style of writing *kitab Jawi* on the doctrine of the period. This article is to present a historical analysis of the way *Sifat Dua Puluh* became an established concept of Sunni theology in the Southeast Asian context, which served to convey the Sunni creeds in a popularly vernacular expression of the Muslims in the region. *Sifat Dua Puluh* was taken as the Islamic subject transmitted of the period, alongside the reprinting of *kitab Jawi* to disseminate the concept to Southeast Asia.

Keywords: *Kitab Jawi*; Malay language; *Sifat Dua Puluh*; *Umm al-Barahin*, Mecca; Southeast Asia.

Khulasah

Sifat Dua Puluh merupakan satu istilah spesifik dari Bahasa Melayu yang digunakan untuk menyajikan doktrin Sunni di Asia Tenggara. Diadaptasi dari karya Yusuf al-Sanusi, *Umm al-Barāhīn*, istilah

tersebut mulai berkembang pada abad ke-19 sebagai tema keislaman utama dari kitab jawi karangan para ulama Nusantara di Mekah (*Jawa*). Mereka menterjemahkan karya al-Sanūsī tersebut ke dalam Bahasa Melayu dan menampilkannya dalam bentuk komentar (*sharḥ*), yang berkembang menjadi gaya penulisan kitab jawi berisi doktrin teologi. Artikel ini menghadirkan satu analisa historis tentang bagaimana Sifat Dua Puluh berkembang menjadi satu konsep yang mapan kepada teologi Sunni di Asia Tenggara, yang berfungsi menjelaskan ajaran Sunni dalam bahasa Muslim di kawasan tersebut. Sifat Dua Puluh menjadi satu subjek keislaman yang ditransmisikan, sejalan dengan percetakan kitab jawi dalam rangka diseminasinya di Asia Tenggara.

Kata kunci: Kitab Jawi; Bahasa Melayu; Sifat Dua Puluh; *Umm al-Barāhīn*; Mekah; Asia Tenggara.

Introduction

Certainly, Sunni is the school of doctrine the vast majority of Southeast Asian Muslims adhere. With the exception of some tiny and insignificant groups, Muslims of the region hold the principles of Sunni belief, called Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (adherents to the Prophetic tradition and the community). The question of when and how this Sunni belief came to dominate in Southeast Asia remains unexplored. In the scholarly studies, they are superseded by the acclaimed studies which pay much attention to Sufism as the first Islamic facet to appear in the early process of Islamization.¹ Even though, the issue of doctrine can be gleaned from the agents who introduced Islam to the people of the Malay-archipelago.

The classical works of Arnold² and Morrison³ attribute the Islamizing agency to the Muslim traders from

¹ See A. H. Johns, "Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History", *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2(2) (1961), 143-160.

² Thomas W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of Muslim Faith* (London: Constable, 1913), 364-365.

the coast of Coromandel in the Indian Ocean, with the argument that they shared the same Shafi'ite school of law (*madhhab*) as the Muslims of Southeast Asia. If it is the case, it can be said that the Muslims who initiated the Islamization were Sunnis, with the reason that the Shafi'ite *madhhab* belongs to Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah.

With due regard to the importance of historical origin, this article is however directed to discuss the advance of the Sunni in 19th century Southeast Asia, when it was already established as one of the pillars of Islamic orthodoxy, next to Shafi'ite school in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and the ethical Sufism of al-Ghazali (d. 1111AD). Special attention will be given to the concept of *Sifat Dua Puluh* (twenty attributes of God), which appears to be a popular formula of Sunni doctrine in the region. Adapted from the work of Muhammad Yusuf al-Sanusi (d. 1490), *Umm al-Barāhin* (The Mother of Proofs), *Sifat Dua Puluh* evolved to be a mainstream subject of doctrine.⁴

Muhammad Zayn (Shaykh Muhammad Zayn bin Faqih Jalal al-Din al-'Ashi), a Malay 'ālim of Aceh of the 18th century, was the first scholar ever known who introduced the concept to Malay people with his book *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* (The Beginning of Guidance), which is a commentary (*sharḥ*) to the mentioned work of al-Sanusi. Afterward, the subject gained its prominence with the coming of Malay commentaries and *kitab Jawi* on the same subject, leading *Sifat Dua Puluh* to appear as the most notable feature of the creeds in the *kitab Jawi* of the 19th century.

³ G. E. Morrison, "The Coming of Islam to the East Indies", *Journal of Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24(1) (1951), 31-37.

⁴ Michael Laffan, *The Making of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of Sufi Past* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 33-34.

In this discussion, the rise of Malay commentaries to the mentioned work of al-Sanusi is taken as a crucial point in the development of *Sifat Dua Puluh*, and therefore it will be paid attention to. It marks the intellectual endeavours of Malay '*ulamā*', both in Mecca and then in Southeast Asia, to create an easily-digested formulae of Sunni doctrines. To be noted at this point are the roles of Dawud al-Fatani (Shaykh Dawud 'Abd Allah al-Fatani, 1769-1847AD), and other Malay '*ulamā*' of Patani origin, in the augmentation of the prevailing discourse concerning *Sifat Dua Puluh*. As will be apparent below, the works of Patani '*ulamā*' on the subject will be examined, with the reason that the '*ulamā*' originated from southern Thailand today formed the leading writers of *kitab Jawi* in the 19th century, and they simultaneously made a major contribution to the advance of *Sifat Dua Puluh*. This transmitted subject of doctrine was then reproduced by the Malay '*ulamā*' of later generations, as will be discussed in the last part of this article. As a result, *Sifat Dua Puluh* continued to grow, forming the core substance of Sunni doctrine in the first half of the 20th century.

Taking *kitab Jawi* as the primary source, this article presents a historical analysis of the way *Sifat Dua Puluh* came to exist as such. In doing so, the crucial role of Malay '*ulamā*' of the 19th century in popularizing the Malay term of Sunni doctrine will be discussed. They greatly contributed to making the term alive within the religious knowledge of Southeast Asian Muslims through the centuries.⁵ The term popularizing is used to depict the ways the Sunni doctrines were understood, elaborated, and articulated in the Malay language of Southeast Asia,

⁵ My personal experiences as a child in the late 1970s until the early 1980s confirms this. Having been lived in a small Muslim village, I used to memorize the attributes of God, based on the knowledge I received from the transmitted oral tradition. And, following the practices of fellow Muslims, I used to recite them in the afternoon prior to the time of praying (*ṣalāt*) in a mosque.

which served the local context of Islamic expression, where the term familiar with the local Muslims constituted what was regarded as being essential in Islam.⁶ As can be seen in the *kitab Jawi*, *Sifat Dua Puluh* was taken as the core subject the Malay 'ulamā' voiced to engage in the strengthening of Sunni school and in turn in the consolidating of its Islamic orthodoxy in the region.

To the above point, another important thing should be added, which is related to the Meccan background of the rise of Malay 'ulamā' with their *kitab Jawi* in the 19th century. This is due to the reason that almost all the *kitab Jawi* of the period were written by the 'ulamā' of *Jawa* (Southeast Asians) who established their careers in Mecca in the field of Islamic scholarship. The Meccan experiences helped to enhance the 'ulamā's religious authority. As well, it should be noted that the Meccan circumstance of the 19th century provided the *Jawa* with a changing mode of instruction that began to be based on printed copies of the texts, not merely the oral lectures of their masters. This occurred following the intellectual trend of Meccan scholars who started publishing materials they lectured, to which the *Jawa* "noted down only a few oral remarks (*taqārīr*)".⁷ All these facts, with the support of the establishment of printing presses, might have led especially the Malay intellectual leaders of the *Jawa* to engage in authoring Malay *kitab Jawi*.

As a result, the intellectual network between Mecca and Southeast Asia intensified in the 19th century, more than the one that had in the previous centuries.⁸ This was

⁶ Dale F. Eickelman, "The Study of Islam in Local Context", *Contributions to Asian Studies* 1(17) (1983), 1-16.

⁷ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), 208.

⁸ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century* (Australia & Honolulu: Allen & Unwin and University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

due to the fact that the network under this discussion proceeded in the printing era, where the transmission and reproduction of knowledge occurred through the *kitab Jawi* which were printed in the Middle East and then in Southeast Asia. Appeared in book format, *kitab Jawi* provided the '*ulamā*'s voices with effective channels to reach the heart of Muslims' religiosity, and hence to constitute the substantial capacity for their revival in early modern Southeast Asia.

In this article, network with Mecca is taken in such importance as a way that it created the opportunity for the *Jawa* to reach the intellectual achievement as the Malay '*ulamā*' in the Holy City with the knowledge produced and printed in the Middle East, in the form of Malay *kitab Jawi*, and then reprinted and reproduced in Southeast Asia. In this particular respect, the concept of the discursive tradition of Talal Asad is relevant to refer to here, in the sense that it denotes the tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses their relation with foundational texts of Islam, which is interpretative in character.

Hence, the point to emphasize is the socio-historical formation through which what is regarded as essential in Islam is produced. With this perspective, Mecca and the Middle East in general of the period are to be viewed as having created the necessary condition for the production of knowledge, the acknowledged essential in Islam, which was then reproduced and reformulated in Southeast Asia.⁹ *Sifat Dua Puluh* was formulated through such mentioned processes of knowledge production, across the two Muslim regions (Mecca and the Malay world in Southeast Asia), which led to its being accepted as Islamic orthodoxy in the field of theology.

This article sheds light on the crucial aspect of Sunni doctrine in Malay which is still unexplored in scholarly

⁹ Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam", *Qui Parle* 17(2) (2009), 20-24.

studies, including the recent work of Bruckmayr which pays attention much to the linguistic issue.¹⁰ Consequently, the Islamic knowledge that was produced and was (and is still) believed to be essential, is not well studied. As well, this article is to revise the previous work of al-Edrus which fails, albeit important, to conceive *Sifat Dua Puluh* as an explicit formulation of Sunni doctrine in the Southeast Asian context.¹¹

The Attributes of God: Brief Intellectual Origin

As already noted, the idea of twenty attributes of God has strong ground in the classical history of Islamic thought, which can be traced back to the debates on the doctrines of God's attributes within the Mu'tazilites. This debate appeared to have led Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari to abandon the Mu'tazilah circle and formed a Sunni school (Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah). One debated point was concerned with the question of the attribute of knowledge, on which the Mu'tazilites, including al-Ash'ari's teacher (Abu 'Ali al-Jubba'i, d. 915AH), affirmed it, next to the attribute of power (*qudrah*). For al-Ash'ari, while he accepted the opinion of Mu'tazilah that God has attributes, notably knowledge, it is however by the attribute of knowledge that God knows, not by His essence; for the Mu'tazilites, God is knowing by His essence, not by knowledge, and therefore they were objected to the term 'knowledge'. In reference to the Qur'anic verse (11: 14), al-Ash'ari argued that God has knowledge as an attribute, and with which

¹⁰ Philipp Bruckmayr, "The Sharḥ/Hāshiyā Phenomenon in Southeast Asia", *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales* 32 (2017), 27-52.

¹¹ Syed Muhammad Dawilah al-Edrus, "The Role of *Kitab Jawi* in the Development of Islamic Thought in the Malay Archipelago with Special Reference to *Umm al-Barāhīn* and the Writings on the Twenty Attributes" (Ph.D. Thesis, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1993).

He is knowing; this attribute is inherent in God, although it is not exactly the same as His essence.¹²

Al-Ash'ari's concept of God's attributes becomes one of the main creeds of the Sunni theological school and is elaborated by the Sunni '*ulamā*'. And, one '*ālim*' who had great influence in Malay-archipelago, and in the Muslim countries at large, was Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf al-Sanusi (1435AD/839AH-1490AD/895AH). With his work on this subject, *Umm al-Barāhīn* (The Mother of Proofs), also known as *al-Sanusīyyah*, Yusuf al-Sanusi concluded the discussions on the attributes of Allah into what came to be popularly known as *Sifat Dua Puluh* (Twenty Attributes). He formulated the *Sifat Dua Puluh* as a way to determine the issue into religious guidance for the Muslims, freed from unending philosophical debates. As such, Muslims are obliged to have knowledge of the attributes, although they are also urged to recognize other attributes of God which are unlimited in number.¹³ Al-Sanusi wrote in *Umm al-Barāhīn*:

It is obligatory on every *mukallaf* (a person who has reached the age of puberty) in the eyes of the divine ordinance (*shar'*) to know what is [the attributes of] necessary [*wājib*], inadmissible [*mustahīl*], and admissible [*jā'iz*] in respect of Allah, the Magnificent, the Mighty. And likewise, it is an obligation on him to know the same in respect of the Messenger, may blessing and peace be upon them".¹⁴

No need to present al-Sanusi's intellectual biography here. The fact is that the work of this '*ālim*' of western

¹² W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 245-6; 299.

¹³ Al-Edrūs, *The Role of Kitab Jawi*, 153-4.

¹⁴ Muhammad Yusuf al-Sanusi, *Umm al-Barāhīn*, the annotated translation prepared by al-Edrūs, "The Role of *Kitab Jawi*", 158.

Algeria today, the mentioned *Umm al-Barāhīn*, has been widely used in Muslims' socio-religious life and has intellectually been appreciated by scholars in the Muslim world. Many commentaries on this work appeared, the leading of which are as follow: *Ḥāshiyah al-Hudhudī 'alā Umm al-Barāhīn* by Mansur al-Hudhudi; this commentary was then commented by Hijazi al-Sharqawi in his work *Ḥāshiyah 'Abd Allāh al-Sharqāwī 'ala Sharḥ al-Imām al-Hudhudī 'alā al-Sanūsiyyah*; Shaykh Ibrahim al-Bayjuri is another 'ālim who made commentary on *Umm al-Barāhīn*, entitled *Ḥāshiyah al-Bayjūrī 'ala Matn al-Sanūsiyyah*; and the work of Muhammad bin 'Abd Allah bin 'Arafa al-Dasuki, *Ḥāshiyah 'alā Sharḥ Umm al-Barāhīn*.¹⁵ These commentaries, as Messick asserts, are of function not only as an interpretive elaboration of a basic text (*matn*), but also yield its transformation into becoming the heart of Islamic intellectual discourse and finally the formation of Muslim religious life.¹⁶ Due in part to these commentaries *Umm al-Barāhīn* came to the knowledge of Jawa of Mecca, which led the scholars of Southeast Asian diasporas to make its Malay translations and commentaries for their Muslim fellows in the region.

The Coming of Malay Commentaries

As noted above, the first 'ālim who introduced al-Sanusi's *Umm al-Barāhīn* to Malay audiences in Southeast Asia was Muhammad Zayn bin Faqih Jalal al-Din al-'Ashi. He was also the first Malay scholar of the 18th century who wrote the commentary to *Umm al-Barāhīn* with his

¹⁵ Al-Edrus, "The Role of *Kitab Jawi*", 156; see also C. Brockelman, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, vol. 2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1949), 324.

¹⁶ Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 31.

Bidāyat al-Hidāyah (The Beginning of Guidance).¹⁷ No much is known about his life, except that he was noted with the title 'al-Ashi' (the Acehnese) in his last name, which is translated into "the land of Aceh", as is found in the title page of his work just mentioned. Completed in Mecca in 1756AD/1170AH, and printed in Constantinople in 1885AD,¹⁸ this book was dedicated to being a learning material for *Jawi* students of the beginners, whom he described as having been inadequate in the studying of Arabic sources (*segala orang yang baru belajar*). For this reason, the author stated that he translated the mentioned book by Yusuf al-Sanusi into Malay; he explicated the contents of the book in reference to the commentaries and glossies.¹⁹

In this discussion, the work of Muhammad Zayn of Aceh is of specific significance. Not only did it appear as the first *kitab Jawi* ever made to commence introducing *Umm al-Barāhīn* to Southeast Asia, but it was also the pioneer of the rise of commentary to *Umm al-Barāhīn*, which grew in the 19th century. As a result, in terms of writing style at least, his *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* seems to have been much more influential, compared for instance to the 'independent work-style' *al-Durr al-Thamīn* by Dawud al-Fatani, as will be discussed later, in which the book of al-Sanusi is only one of many sources referred to. More than five *Jawi* books appeared in the 19th century

¹⁷ The manuscript of *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* is preserved in Leiden University, the Netherlands (CodOr. 5741A), together with another work, *Talkhiṣ al-Falāh fī Bayān Ahkām al-Ṭalaq wa al-Nikāh*, also known as *Bāb al-Nikāh* (CodOr 5741F). See Teuku Iskandar, *Kesusasteraan Klasik Melayu Sepanjang Abad* (Brunei: Universiti Brunei Darussalam, 1995), 433. See also Ahmad Fauzi Ilyas, *Warisan Intelektual Ulama Nusantara* (Medan: Rawda Publishing, 2018), 3-7.

¹⁸ Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 287.

¹⁹ Muhammad Zayn ibn Faqih Jalal al-Dīn al-Ashi, *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* (Patani: Matba'at bin Halabi, n.d.), 2.

which deal with the same subject of doctrine and are in the same style of writing, the commentaries. These books explain every point of the basic text in Malay, which constitutes the essence of what came to be popularly known in Southeast Asia as *Sifat Dua Puluh*.

Shaykh Muhammad Tayyib bin Mas'ud al-Banjari is the first 'ālim to mention this regard. In 1858AD/1274AH, he wrote *Miftāḥ al-Jannah fī Bayān al-'Aqīdah* (Key to Paradise in Clarifying the Creeds), which was based on *Umm al-Barāhīn*. Like Muhammad Zayn of Aceh, the lack of Arabic proficiency among the *Jawa* of Mecca was the reason for Muhammad Tayyib of Banjar to write this book. "So I collect for them [the *Jawa*]", the author wrote, "the principles of faith (*segala simpulan iman*) from the book of *Umm al-Barāhīn* in their language [Malay]; I present it with the sign of its meaning; and I explain the meaning of every point of creeds in reference to what I have studied in the commentaries and glosses in a way which makes it [the explanation] short in order to be easier for the *Jawa*".²⁰

The next 'ālim of 19th century *Jawa* in Mecca was Shaykh Muhammad Zayn al-Din bin Muhammad al-Badawi al-Sumbawi. Almost thirty years later, in 1885-6AD/1304AH, his work which was written based on the book of al-Sanusi, entitled *Sirāj al-Hudā fī 'Aqīdah Ahl al-Taqwā* (Light of the Guidance concerning the Creeds of Those who are Pious), was printed in Mecca, adding the considerable number of Malay books circulated there, and as such pointing to the increasing importance of the intellectual role of *Jawa* in the Holy City.²¹ In the introductory pages, Muhammad Zayn of Sumbawa, an island in West Nusa Tenggara, shares the same experiences of *Jawi* 'ulama already discussed; he was

²⁰ Muhammad Tayyib ibn Mas'ud al-Banjari, *Miftāḥ al-Jannah fī Bayān al-'Aqīdah* (Patani: Matba'at bin Halabi, n.d.), 3-4.

²¹ Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 286.

persistently asked to write a beautiful treatise in Malay as commentary to *Umm al-Barāhīn*.²²

Included in the list of Malay commentary to *Umm al-Barāhīn* is '*Aṭīyah al-Raḥmān fī Bayānī Qawā'id al-Īmān* (The Benevolent Present in the Explanation on the Foundation of Faith) by Shaykh Muhammad Azhari bin 'Abd Allah al-Falimbani. Since it was completed, it seems that this work never appeared as an independent book. The version available today is an attachment inserted in the margin of *Sirāj al-Hudā*. Muhammad Azhari of Palembang wrote '*Aṭīyah al-Raḥmān* in 1843/1259 after he joined the learning circle to study the cited work of Yusuf al-Sanusi in Mecca and the gloss of Ibrahim al-Bajuri.²³ Like Muhammad Zayn of Sumbawa, the request of *Jawi* students to deliver the teachings of Sanusiyyah in Malay was the reason behind his writing of '*Aṭīyah al-Raḥmān*.²⁴

Concerning the backdrop of the rising commentaries, the religious ideas of *Umm al-Barāhīn*, next to the language issue, appear to be another essential reason. It points to the fact that the book was accepted as an authoritative source of Islamic theological doctrine to be transmitted to Southeast Asia. Muhammad Zayn of Aceh, for instance, held the opinion that the contents of the book have "followed the noble Qur'an and implemented the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad",²⁵ leading it to be recognized as to have presented by the Sunni theological school. Similarly, Muhammad Zayn of Sumbawa stated in his *Sirāj al-Hudā* that the Malay translation and

²² Muhammad Zayn al-Din bin Muhammad al-Badawi al-Sumbawi, *Sirāj al-Hudā fī 'Aqīdah Ahl al-Taqwā* (Patani: Maṭba'at bin Halabi, n.d.), 2.

²³ Muhammad Azhari bin 'Abd Allah al-Falimbani, '*Aṭīyah al-Raḥmān fī Bayānī Qawā'id al-Īmān* inserted in the margin of *Sirāj al-Hudā* (Patani: Maṭba'at bin Halabi, n.d.), 2-3.

²⁴ Muhammad Azhari, '*Aṭīyah al-Raḥmān*, 3-4.

²⁵ Muhammad Zayn al-Ashi, *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah*, 3.

commentary to *Umm al Barāhīn* was also due to the reason that the *kitab* conveyed the foundation of Islamic faith and therefore was of great avail for both the *Jawa* in Mecca and the Muslims in Southeast Asia.²⁶

Special for the latter-mentioned region, the Malay translations provided the Muslims with accessible sources, in their own language, concerning the attributes of God, to which the Muslims of *mukallaf* (who have reached the age of puberty) is necessitated (*wājib*) to have sufficient knowledge. For this reason, the *Jawi* scholar not merely translated the book of al-Sanusi in the literal sense of meaning, but also expounded and elaborated its contents in reference to the Qur'an, Hadith, and the opinions of '*ulamā*'. As a result, the commentaries contributed to enhancing the explanatory mission of *Umm al-Barāhīn* as a Sunni text and to make it easier to be digested by Southeast Asian people. The Malay commentaries affirm the important role of *Jawi* scholars as what Snouck Hurgronje calls "the heart of religious life of the East-Indian Archipelago".²⁷

Added to the reason for the rise of commentaries is the fact that *Umm al-Barāhīn* was already popular in the Muslim world in the 19th century. In reference to *Sirāj al-Hudā*, it is said that the small book of al-Sanusi was famed among the Arabs, the *Jawa* (Southeast Asian), the Turkish, the Indians, and those of other Muslim countries; they studied the book and followed its instructions.²⁸

In the Southeast Asian context, this popularity is testified by the fact that the commentary is not limited to the circle of Malay scholars. A leading *Jawi* '*ālim* of Java and the leader of the Javanese community in 19th-century Mecca, Shaykh Muhammad Nawawi al-Jawi al-Bantani (1813-1897AD), wrote a commentary to *Umm al-Barāhīn*

²⁶ Muhammad Zayn al-Sumbawi, *Sirāj al-Hudā*, 2.

²⁷ Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 291.

²⁸ Muhammad Zayn al-Sumbawi, *Sirāj al-Hudā*, 2.

with the title *Ḍarī‘at al-Yaqīn ‘alā Sharḥ Umm al-Barāhīn*, also known as *Durrat al-Nadrā ‘alā ‘Aqīdah al-Sughrā*.²⁹ This work contributed to making the book of al-Sanusi circulated in the *pesantren* learning in Java of the period, which came to be known in Indonesia as *kitab kuning*.³⁰ No less important to mention here the work of Hadrami ‘*ālim* of Batavia, Sayyid Uthman bin ‘Abd Allah bin ‘Aqil bin Yahya al-‘Alawi al-Batawi (1822-1914AD). He produced a booklet entitled *Kitab Sifat Dua Puluh* in 1886AD/1304AH, even before. It was printed several times and is still available in bookshops throughout Indonesia.³¹ Although needs further research, it can be said that the booklet of this ‘*ālim* has had a significant impact in Batavia and the western part of Java.

As such, the Malay commentaries to *Umm al-Barāhīn* held a major role in the development of *Sifat Dua Puluh* to evolve into a celebrated topic of Sunni creeds in Southeast Asia in the 19th century. All the above-mentioned commentaries were dedicated to expounding the contents of the book, which constitute the core substance of God’s attributes. In line with this fact, the trend of consolidating Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah strengthened, to the extent that this theological concept came to be widely accepted as a leading pillar of an established Islamic orthodoxy in the region.

²⁹ Abd Rahman, "Nawawi al-Batani: An Intellectual Master of the *Pesantren* Tradition", *Studia Islamika* 3(3) (1996), 81-114.

³⁰ L.W.C. van den Berg, "Het Mohammedaansche godsdienstonderwijs op Java en Madoera en de daarbij gebruikte Arabische boeken", *TBG* 3(1) (1886), 539-541; see also Martin van Bruinessen, "Kitab Kuning: Books in Arabic Script Used in the *Pesantren* Milieu", *BKI* 146(2) (1990), 251-2.

³¹ Nico J. G. Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age in the Netherlands East Indies: A Biography of Sayyid Uthman (1822-1914)* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 89-90.

Enhancing the Discourse: *al-Durr al-Thamīn* of Dawud al-Fatani

Alongside the rise of the commentaries, appreciation of *Umm al-Barāhīn* can also be gleaned from a sort of 'independent book' of *kitab Jawi*, of which *al-Durr al-Thamīn* is important to explain here. It was written by a leading and venerated Malay 'ālim of Patani origin, Shaykh Dawud 'Abd Allah al-Fatani, 1769-1847AD).³² This work cites al-Sanusi's *Umm al-Barāhīn* as an important source of reference, besides *Jawhar al-Tawhīd* by Shaykh Ibrahim al-Laḡani. Completed in 1816AD/1232AH and first printed in Mecca in the 1880s, this book circulated in the bookshops in the Holy City in the late 19th century and was therefore included in the list of *kitab Jawi* Snouck Hurgronje provides.³³ This work was reprinted several times in Southeast Asia and continues to circulate among Muslims in the countries of the region nowadays, alongside its being used as a learning material in the *pondok* of Patani and the Malay peninsula.³⁴

This book has its complete title *al-Durr al-Thamīn pada menyatakan I'tiqād Orang Mu'minīn* (Precious Pearl in Explaining the Creeds of the Believers). Dawud al-Fatani begins the discussion with introductory notes, stating that this book is to compile the thought of 'ulamā'

³² For biography of Dawud al-Fatani, see Francis R. Bradley, *Forging Islamic Power and Place: The Legacy of Shaykh Dā'ūd 'Abd Allāh al-Faṭānī in Mecca and Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016); Wan Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah, *Syeikh bin Abdullah Al-Fathani: Ulama dan Pengarang Terulung Asia Tenggara* (Kuala Lumpur: Hizbi, 1999); Virginia Matheson & M. B. Hooker, "Jawi Literature in Patani: The Maintenance of an Islamic Tradition", *Journal of Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 61(1) (1988), 20-21; Ahmad Fathy al-Fatani, *Ulama Besar dari Patani* (Kota Bharu: Majlis Ugama Islam dan Adat Istiadat Melayu, 2009), 40-45.

³³ Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 287.

³⁴ Hasan Madmarn, *The Pondok and Madrasah in Patani* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1999), 25.

as the truth seekers (*muhaqqiqīn*) concerning the foundation of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) and the creeds of those who upheld the principles of God's Unity (*ahl al-tawḥīd*). In the writing of this book, Dawud al-Fatani narrates in an illustration that he collected the pearls and threw away the casing, in order to encourage those who searched for the knowledge. As in the cases of *kitab Jawi* in general, Dawud al-Fatani also notes that he rendered the contents of *al-Durr al-Thamīn* in Malay with the intention that it could be comprehended by the people who do not understand Arabic.³⁵

From the introductory notes, the book continues with the discussions on the creeds of Sunni theological school (*i'tiqād Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*) as laid down by Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 936), the father of the school. Besides describing the history of its founding, Dawud al-Fatani strongly emphasizes the belief that the Sunni school has the right creeds because it is based on the Qur'an, hadith, the consensus of the Companions, and the *salaf* generation; further, he argues the urgency of Muslims to have sufficient knowledge of the Sunni doctrine in order to be able to distinguish, among the schools of theology, the right creed to follow and to uphold in their religious belief.³⁶

The book goes to the issue which is said as "more significant" in the field of doctrine, to know God (*mengenal Tuhan*). In this respect, Dawud al-Fatani states that this knowledge of God is obligatory for Muslims as they have already reached the age of puberty (*'āqil bāligh*), provided that it is based on the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet, so they could achieve the right principles of faith. He notes that the universe provides us with the ways to know God; it indicates the condition that

³⁵ Dawud al-Fatani, *al-Durr al-Thamīn pada menyatakan I'tiqād Segala Orang Mu'minīn* (Patani: Matba'ah bin Halabi, n.d.), 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

God, as the creator (*khāliq*), must be absolutely in existence (*wājib al-wujūd*), non-origination (*qidam*) and permanence (*baqā'*), demonstrating that God must have the attributes of absolute perfection and all the things in the universe are created (*makhlūq*).³⁷ To strengthen the argument, references to al-Sanusi, besides to al-Laqani, are made. While recognizing the variety of intellectual capabilities among Muslims, the book stresses that knowing God (*ma'rifah*) is compulsory for every Muslim. Therefore, Dawud al-Fatani notes that Muslims have to observe the universe, which is obligatory, to come to know God as the creator and to firmly believe that God has absolute power to create the universe.³⁸

The book then underlines the difference between the creator (*khāliq*) and the created (*makhlūq*). It will be discovered in the universe, so the book notifies, the magnificent creation which features God who created it with the attributes of perfection in His power and of encompassing in His knowledge. Nonetheless, this universe is created and therefore has the qualities of incidence and happening (*ḥudūth*) and non-existence (*'adam*); and everything with these qualities (*ḥudūth* and *'adam*) has an origin (*awwāl*) and transience (*akhīr*). It means that the universe is dependent on God who has the attributes of absolute existence (*wujūd*) and permanence (*baqā'*). God has absolute power to determine the beginning and the end of the universe. All these facts, with the support of Qur'anic verses and Hadith, are proofs of God's perfect qualities the Muslims should believe, which

³⁷ Dawud al-Fatani, *al-Durr al-Thamīn*, 4-5.

³⁸ Dawud al-Fatani, *al-Durr al-Thamīn*, 16-17. It should be said that reference to al-Sanūsī (see also pages 9-10) is made without mentioning his work *Umm al-Barāhīn*. The book writes: "according to Shaykh al-Sanusi" or "Shaykh al-Sanusi said". Most probably *Umm al-Barāhīn* was well-known already among the Jawa, and it was the only work of al-Sanūsī circulated, so citing this work was deemed unnecessary.

are elaborated in this book in the well-known concept of twenty attributes of God, termed in Malay as *Sifat Dua Puluh*.³⁹

The next subject of the book's discussion is concerning the twenty attributes of God. This subject is elaborated on in great detail, where almost all attributes (*ṣifāt*) are taken into a specific discussion. Reference to many sources is made to strengthen the author's explanation and argument, including al-Sanusi and al-Laḡani, as well as the verses of the Qur'an and the Hadith. The discussion of this subject starts with the attribute of *wujūd* (existence), *qidam* (non-beginning), *baqā'* (permanence), *mukhālafat li al-ḥawādith* (no-resemblance to all that have qualities of happening or the created), *qiyāmuḥu bi nafsīhi* (self-existence), *waḥdāniyyah* (absolute oneness), until *kawnuḥu mutaqa'llim* (being attributed with speech) as the last one.⁴⁰

The twenty attributes will be dealt with later in a specific section. For now, it is clear that *al-Durr al-Thamīn* presents all the attributes of God in such a way as to demonstrate that the idea follows the Sunni dogma. In reference to the mentioned *Jawhar al-Tawḥīd*, Dawud al-Fatani states that the majority of 'ulamā', who hold the Sunni school, are of the opinion that all the names of Allah are determined based on *sharī'ah*, as is found in the Qur'an and Hadith.⁴¹ Equally important is that Dawud al-Fatani refers to *Umm al-Barāhīn* as his main source.⁴² Hence, he enhances the growing public discourse of *Sifat Dua Puluh* in Southeast Asia.⁴³

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 20-37.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 19 and 41.

⁴³ Laffan, *Sejarah Islam*, 38.

'Aqīdah al-Nājīn and Farīdat al-Farā'id: Two Examples of Commentaries

To all those outlined, two commentaries by two Malay 'ulamā' of Patani origin are of special importance to be taken into special discussion. They are *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Creeds of the Firm Believers Concerning the Science of the Foundation of Religion) by Shaykh Zayn al-'Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani (popularly known as Tuan Minal, 1820-1910AD) and *Farīdat al-Farā'id fī 'Ilm al-'Aqā'id* (The Precious Gem of Gems in the Science of 'Aqīdah) by Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad Zayn al-Fatani (1856-1906AD). As will be apparent below, these commentaries had a great impact on to further development of *Sifat Dua Puluh* in the Malay world in the early 20th century. Here, a closer look is made to see how the two Malay 'ulamā' formulated the arguments which emphasize the significance of *Sifat Dua Puluh*, besides the popularity, the two commentaries enjoyed, alongside the impact they yielded, in the Malay world which reached the mainland areas of Southeast Asia.⁴⁴

Let me begin with *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*. It was completed in Mecca and first printed by Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah in Cairo in 1890AD/1308AH and then reprinted several times in Southeast Asia.⁴⁵ Written in the form of commentary, this book presented a relatively new trend in the Patani intellectual tradition. The majority of *kitab Jawi* by Patani 'ulamā' took the form of

⁴⁴ See Philipp Bruckmayr, *Cambodia's Muslims and the Malay World* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 165-171.

⁴⁵ Matheson and Hooker, "Jawi Literature", 34. These two scholars mentions undated version that circulated in Patani and Malaysia in the 1980s by al-Ma'arif in Pulau Penang as the fourth reprinting. This Penang edition appears to be the basis of the recent edition by Matba'ah bin Halabi in Patani. It is stated in the last page that this book was reprinted with the permission of the author's son, Shaykh Hasan, and revised by al-Hajj Ilyas Yaqub al-Azhari.

independent books. Of all the works of Dawud al-Fatani, to mention only the leading figure, only two are in the form of commentaries.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, this book of Tuan Minal should be seen as part of the rising trend of writing *kitab Jawi* on the subject of doctrine in the 19th century, where appreciation of *Umm al-Barāhīn* became a dominant feature. And all the works are, as already shown, commentaries.

As the title suggests, this 140-page book was written to expound and disseminate the Sunni theological thought in al-Sanusi's *Umm al-Barāhīn*. The author explains the meaning of the book's title as "the creeds of those who are freed from being perverted and heresy", pointing to the strong belief of Muslims in the unity of God (*tawhīd*). The author also mentions the objective of this book, which is "to discuss (*pada bicara*) the science of the foundation of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) according to the *madhhab* of orthodox Muslims of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah",⁴⁷ which was in line with the rising Islamic discourse of the time. And, like other *kitab Jawi* as already noted, Zayn al-'Abidin in writing this book consulted the commentaries and glosses to *Umm al-Barāhīn* that had been made, in order to enrich the discussions and to make its messages easy to be comprehended.⁴⁸ In fact, considering the number of pages, the discussions of *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn* is apparently much elaborated.

After the opening, which consists of explaining the words *Bismillāh* (in the name of Allah) and *Alḥamdulillāh* (praising God) and praying for the Prophet Muhammad,

⁴⁶ The two books of Shaykh Dawud al-Fatani are *al-Bahjat al-Saniyah fī al-'Aqā'id al-Sunniyah* (a commentary to *'Aqīdat al-'Awām* by his teacher, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Marzuki) and *Ward al-Zawāhir li Hill Alḥāz 'Aqd al-Jawāhir* (to *Jawhārat al-Tawhīd* by Shaykh Ibrahim al-Laqqani). These two books are *'aqīdah*.

⁴⁷ Zayn al-'Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Patani: Matba'ah bin Halabi, n.d.), title page, 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

the book begins the discussions with the significance of having knowledge (*'ilm*) of *tawhīd*. It is defined as the way to affirm the basic tenet of religion based on reliable sources, concerning the essence and the attributes of God and His Messenger, as was formulated by Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi and those who followed these two scholars. As such, the *'ilm* of *tawhīd* is expected and is believed to liberate the people from what is said as the lack of knowing (*jahl*), doubt (*shakk*), uncertainty (*ẓann*), and illusion (*wahm*). In the specific field of *i'tiqād*, none of the four points mentioned is tolerated, with the argument that it would lead the Muslims to the condition of unbelievers (*kāfir*).⁴⁹

The book, therefore, emphasizes the necessity of the Muslims to have knowledge of *usūl al-dīn*, which is in fact compulsory from the perspective of *shar'ī*, based on which they hold their *'aqīdah*. The Muslims' belief in God, especially among those of *mukallaf*, is guided by the knowledge of doctrine, not by blindly following what others say and do (*taqlīd*) without knowing both the argument and proof.⁵⁰ To this point, the book expounds on the responsibilities of the Muslims in the field of *'aqīdah* by elucidating two kinds of duties that are well-known in Islamic tradition, the individual (*farḍ al-'ayn*) and the collective duties (*farḍ al-kifāyah*).

The first one (*farḍ al-'ayn*) points to the condition that the Muslims of *mukallaf*, each of them, knows in detail, based on reliable argument, all the attributes of God which consist of those necessary (*wājib*), inadmissible (*mustahīl*), and admissible (*al-jā'iz*). Nevertheless, the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁵⁰ In this respect, the book notes that the *'ulamā'* had a different opinion on the status of *muqallid* (those who do *taqlid*); some said that they were still believers, while for others they fell under the category of unbelievers. See Zayn al-'Abidin, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, 6, 13.

book also recognizes the situation in which the knowledge of God's attributes is based on general argument (*dalīl ijmālī*), that is, it is based on the recognition that the universe is created and as such the proof of God's existence.⁵¹ While noting the primacy of knowing the verses of the Qur'an which state the nature of createdness of the universe,⁵² the book also gives an illustration of the way individual Muslim found the earth as a clear evidence of its being God's creature, affirming what has stated in the Qur'an that "on the earth are signs of those of assured faith (*al-mūqinīn*)".⁵³

The second duty (*fard al-kifāyah*), which is collective in nature, refers to the fact that the responsibility to know the attributes of God in detail is in the hands of Muslim leaders, the '*ulamā*' and the *qādī* (the judge). With their Islamic knowledge, these leaders have the authority to solve disputed religious problems, especially those concerning the issue of the createdness of the universe—"that it (the universe) is created (*ḥudūth*) and everything which is created necessitates the creator... and (the obligation) to comprehend this issue is collective in nature, that every country is requested to have someone who could determine and explain its argument".⁵⁴ If it is the case, the residents of the country who do not have knowledge of the subject are freed from being committed to sin. It is mentioned here that the Muslim leaders are

⁵¹ Zayn al-'Abidin, '*Aqīdah al-Nājīm*, 6-7.

⁵² One of the verses of the Qur'an that states the createdness of the universe is verse 164 of al-Baqarah (2): "in the creation of heavens and earth; in the alternation of the Night and the Day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith ... (here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise".

⁵³ The Qur'an, al-Dhāriyāt (51): 20. To be added here the verse 23 which says "Then, by the Lord of heavens and earth, this is the very Truth, as much as the fact that you can speak intelligently to each other".

⁵⁴ Zayn al-'Abidin, '*Aqīdah al-Nājīm*, 7.

also tasked to protect the residents from the dissemination of deviated ideas which are the potential to jeopardise the Muslims' belief in God (*'aqīdah*).⁵⁵

In line with the above argument, the book adds to knowledge (*'ilm*) the concept of *ma'rifat* (knowing Allah); both are side-by-side and point to the primacy of knowledge in *'aqīdah*. It follows that knowing Allah is His attributes, not His essence, which could be achieved by the use of knowledge-based reasoning. Knowledge will lead the process of understanding the attributes of Allah towards *ma'rifat*. To this point, the book explains the obligation of Muslims of *mukallaḥ*, in reference to the opinion of *'ulamā'*, to have a deep look at the universe to the extent that they recognize that it is created by God and then to confirm it. In this process, knowledge provides the Muslims with the capability to distinguish what is valid from what is wrong, as well as between the prophet and not prophet in the case of *ma'rifat* of the Prophet Muhammad.⁵⁶ From this point, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn* discusses the so-called *Sifat Dua Puluh*, which will be dealt with later.

Now, attention will be given to *Farīdat al-Farā'id* of Ahmad al-Fatani. In the history of Patani scholars, Ahmad al-Fatani was one of the most prolific writers after Dawud al-Fatani. From his hands, several works on this subject appeared in Patani and Malay Archipelago. This small book, with 24 pages, had a special position among Malay people, primarily the *'ulamā'* of *pondok* (*Tok Guru*) who were (and perhaps are) familiar with this book, along with the author, next to his major work on *fatāwā* (religious opinions) concerning various aspects of Southeast Asian Islam and Muslims' affairs, *al-Fatāwa al-Faṭāniyyah*.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Zayn al-'Abidin, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, 7-8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-3.

⁵⁷ Perayot Rahimmula, "The Patani Fatāwā: A Case Study of the Kitāb al-Fatāwa al-Faṭāniyyah" (Ph.D. Thesis, Canterbury: Kent

It should be stated that *Farīdat al-Farā'id* is different from other commentaries that are already discussed. In this work, no specific statement is made by the author that this book is a translation and commentary on *Umm al-Barāhīn*. However, as will be shown, both the contents and the line of thought of the book are substantially similar to those of *Umm al-Barāhīn* and its Malay commentaries. The twenty attributes of God, the main subject of al-Sanusi's book, appears to be the major discussion of *Farīdat al-Farā'id*. As well, the book is aimed, as stated in its title pages, to present the subjects of *tawhīd* and *uṣūl al-dīn* of the school of al-Ash'ari. Therefore, the book belongs to the Malay commentaries of Patani 'ulamā' to *Umm al-Barāhīn*, next to the '*Aqīdah al-Nājīn*.

As the title suggests, *Farīdat al-Farā'id* is devoted to discussing the subject of '*aqīdah* and *tawhīd* in general. In the introductory pages, the author states that this work (*risālah*) is written based on authoritative books, where the author compiled the essential elements of the science of *tawhīd*, like "picking up fruits in a garden or precious jewels in an ocean"; herewith the book presents, in the Malay language with Patani dialect, the true and beautifully illuminating creeds according to the foundation of faith outlined by the Ash'arite *madhhab*.⁵⁸

Farīdat al-Farā'id begins the discussions with an explanation of the principles of *tawhīd*, the principles of faith (*i'tiqād*) which are based on sound argument and are concerned with the attributes of God - those of necessary, inadmissible, and admissible - and of the Prophet. The *tawhīd* is strongly emphasized as a leading pillar of

University, 1992), 359, 337. Rahimmulla also states that *Farīdat al-Farā'id* is widely used as a learning material in *pondok* and mosques in Patani, Yalal, Narathiwat, and in some areas of Malaysia today.

⁵⁸ Ahmad bin Muhammad Zayn al-Fatani, *Farīdat al-Farā'id fī 'Ilm al-'Aqā'id* (Patani: Matba'ah bin Halabi, n.d.), 2-3.

religion, besides performing devotion to God (*'ibādah*) and practicing what is religiously prescribed. The book enumerates the five pillars of Islam and the six pillars of faith, and *ihsān* (the religious moralities) that are concerned with having a close relationship with God to gain the perfection of the two pillars mentioned.⁵⁹

Like *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, *Farīdat al-Farā'id* also deals with the *ma'rifat* of Allah, which is said as an essential aspect of *tawhīd*. Yet, the latter-mentioned *kitāb* gives emphasis more to the necessity of the Muslims to know His attributes, not His essence, with the argument of their createdness, while the knowledge dimension of *ma'rifat*, as is extensively discussed in *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, is mentioned only in passing. In this respect, *Farīdat al-Farā'id* explains the general point of *tawhīd*, which can be found in all commentaries, that Allah has the attributes of perfection, which are necessary (*wājib*), and it is therefore inadmissible for Allah to have the attributes of deficiency.⁶⁰ And these attributes, known in Malay as *Sifat Dua Puluh*, will be discussed below.

Sifat Dua Puluh, What and Which?

Taking *Umm al-Barāhīn* as the main source, to be a basic text, all the Malay commentaries have the same line of thought on the subject. The difference lies in the styles of explanation and expression, which are related in part to the sources the authors consulted. In this part, the discussion on *Sifat Dua Puluh* will refer to the mentioned two commentaries by two Patani scholars, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn* by Zayn al-'Abidin and *Farīdat al-Farā'id* by Ahmad al-Fatani.

As already noted, the number of attributes of Allah is unlimited, alongside His essence. However, the '*ulamā*' of Sunni *madhhab* agreed that the twenty attributes are to be

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

the number of God's attributes the Muslims are obliged to know, either in detail (*tafṣīl*) or in general and brief (*ijmāl*). These twenty attributes are necessary (*wājib*) for Allah and are divided into several categories. The first attribute is *wujūd* (existence), which is categorized as *nafsiyyah* (personal attributes), followed by five attributes under the category of *salbiyyah* (negative attributes). They are *qidam* (non-origination), *baqā'* (permanence), *mukhālafah li al-ḥawādith* (difference from the created), *qiyāmuḥu bī al-nafsih* (self-subsistence), and *waḥdāniyyah* (oneness).

There are other seven attributes necessary for Allah, which are categorized as *ṣifāt al-ma'ānī* (conceptual attributes). They are *qudrah* (power), *irādah* (will), *'ilm* (knowledge), *ḥayāh* (life), *sam'* (audition), *baṣar* (sight), and *kalām* (speech). As a consequence of the seven conceptual attributes, the other seven attributes necessary for Allah emerge, which are termed *ṣifāt ma'nawiyyah* (qualitative attributes). They are *qādir* (He is powerful), *murīd* (willing), *'ālim* (knowing), *ḥayy* (living), *samī'* (hearing), *baṣīr* (seeing), and *mutakallim* (speaking).

To these twenty attributes, both *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn* and *Farīdat al-Farā'id* elaborate, on each of them, its meaning and the argument in the framework of *'aqīdah*, and it was made in reference mainly to the *Umm al-Barāhīn* of al-Sanusi. Regarding the attribute of *wujūd*, the books state that it points to the condition that Allah exists by His essence and nothing else outside Allah partakes His being existent; Allah is the prime and the ultimate source (*uṣūl*) for the created others, and He is necessary to be attributed with *qidam* (state of non-origination) and *baqā'* (permanence). The opposite of *wujūd* is *'adam* (non-existence), while of *qidam* is *ḥudūth* (createdness) and of *baqā'* is *ṭurq al-'adam* (becoming non-existent); all of which are inadmissible (*mustaḥīl*) for Allah. The proof (*burhān*) that denotes the state of *wujūd* for Allah is the

createdness of the universe, in the sense that it has its origination because it is created from non-existence, as well as its transience when it terminated its existence into becoming non-existent. And Allah is the Creator (*khāliq*) of the universe.⁶¹

Still, regarding the relationship between the creator and the created, the next attribute necessary for Allah is *mukhālafah lil al-ḥawādith* (difference from the created). As a consequence of the necessity of being *qidam* and *baqā'*, Allah is different from all those He created (*makhlūq*); none of Allah, His essence, and His attributes, are similar to any of them, otherwise He would have been created. It is inadmissible for Allah of being resemblance to the created (*mumāthalah li al-ḥawādith*), in the sense of being a substance (*jirm*) that occupies a measure of space, being an accident (*'araḍ*), or being confined to any place and time.⁶² As well, the difference from the created constitutes the core point of the next attribute necessary for Allah, *qiyāmuḥu bī al-naḥsih* (self-subsistence), that is, being without a subject of inherence (*maḥall*) or initiating agent (*mukhaṣṣiṣ*). This is based on the argument that if He were to need (*berkehendak*) a subject of inherence then He would be an attribute, which is inadmissible for Allah. He is not an attribute, but He has necessarily the attributes of either conceptual or qualitative categories, as already stated. Likewise, if He were to need an initiating agent then He would be created, which is also inadmissible for Allah.⁶³

Waḥdāniyyah (oneness), the last attribute under the category of *salbiyah*, points to the condition of oneness in

⁶¹ Zayn al-'Abidin, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, 16-7; Ahmad al-Fatani, *Farīdat al-Farā'id*, 5.

⁶² Zayn al-'Abidin, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, 18-9; Ahmad al-Fatani, *Farīdat al-Farā'id*, 5.

⁶³ Zayn al-'Abidin, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, 20- 1; Ahmad al-Fatani, *Farīdat al-Farā'id*, 6.

His essence (*dhāt*), His attributes (*ṣifāt*), and His acts (*af'āl*). In regard to the *waḥdāniyyah* in His essence, the mentioned Malay commentaries elucidate—in reference to *Umm al-Barāhīn*—that the essence of Allah is one, not two or three (*kam munfaṣil*), neither consists of many elements (*kam muttaṣil*); if He were not one, He would have been created and it inadmissible for Allah. The same is also true with His attributes, that the divine attributes are necessary only for Allah, not for the created; as well, each attribute of Allah is one and nothing else similar to His particular attribute. The attribute of *qudrah*, one of the seven attributes of *ma'ānī*, can be taken as an example. It is the only kind of attribute of Allah to create and terminate all those created. While to *waḥdāniyyah* in His acts, it is said that the acts of Allah exclusively belong to Him, none of the created could partake in His acts; nevertheless, His acts consist of many aspects and as such *kam muttaṣil* applies in this case.⁶⁴

The next attributes necessary for Allah are called *ma'ānī*, four of which (*qudrah*, *irādah*, *'ilm*, and *ḥayāh*) are to prove His position being absolute determinant of the existence of all the created. It follows that if any of these attributes were to be lacking, nothing from those created would exist. With the attribute of *qudrah*, Allah has the power to make all those admissible (*jā'iz*) come into existence and vice versa, while with *irādah* Allah has the will to determine the nature and the potentials of all those created. These two attributes are interdependent on each other, in the sense that *irādah* is necessarily linked to the creation attributed to the *qudrah*. Ultimately, both of them, and the attribute of *'ilm* (knowledge), necessitate the attribute of *ḥayāh*, with the argument if Allah were dead,

⁶⁴ Zayn al-'Abidin, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, 21-2; Ahmad al-Fatani, *Farīdat al-Farā'id*, 7.

there would be no power, will, and knowledge of Him.⁶⁵ While the rest of the seven *ma'ānī* attributes (*sam'*, *baṣar*, and *kalām*) are to add the attributes of perfection; if He did not possess these attributes, He would invariably have possessed the imperfect attributes of their opposite (*ṣamam* [deafness], *'umy* [blindness], and *bakam* [dumbness]), which are inadmissible for Allah.⁶⁶

In this particular context, the attribute of *kalām* needs special attention. It is related to the status of the Qur'an in Islamic theological thought. Like other attributes of *ma'ānī*, *kalām* (speech) is an attribute of *wujūdiyyah* (Godly), that it exists with the essence of Allah which frees from a letter (*huruf*) and sound (*suara*), as well as of origination and termination. As such, the attribute of *kalām* is not equal to the Qur'an in the form *muṣṣhaf* (book), as it is created (*makhlūq*). And *kalām* is not a creation of the created. In this case, Zayn al-'Abidin in *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, in reference to Yusuf al-Sanusi in *Umm al-Barāhīn*, states that the letters of the Qur'an evidence the *kalām* of Allah which has permanence (*azalī*) and exists with the essence of Allah. Therefore, the Qur'an is believed by the Sunni '*ulamā'* as *kalām* of Allah with permanent attribute (*qadīm*).⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Zayn al-'Abidin, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, 24-31; Ahmad al-Fatani, *Farīdat al-Farā'id*, 9-10.

⁶⁶ Zayn al-'Abidin, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, 31-5; Ahmad al-Fatani, *Farīdat al-Farā'id*, 10.

⁶⁷ Zayn al-'Abidin, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, 32. It says as follows: "*Kalam itu sifat yang wujūdiyyah yang berdiri ia dengan zat Allah yang maha suci daripada huruf dan suara dan maha suci dari terdahulu dan terkemudian... Barang yang antara dua kulit mushaf itu kalam Allah; itu artinya makhluk bagi Allah, tiada ia [al-Qur'an] karangan makhluk; dan hanya sanya dinas [ditegaskan] oleh musanaf [pengarang Umm al-Barāhīn] dan oleh yang lainnya atasnya bahwa huruf Qur'an itu menunjukkan atas kalam Allah yang azali yang berdiri denga zat-Nya; maka dikatakan Qur'an itu kalam Allah sebab ia menunjukkan atas kalam yang berdiri pada zat-Nya*".

In relation to the attributes of *ma'ānī*, the attributes of *ma'nawiyah*, as are enumerated above, were introduced to make the *ma'ānī* attributes "active", in the sense that Allah is always and permanently in the process of doing and creating. The attribute of *kawnuhu Qādiran* (the condition that He is powerful) can be taken as an example. With this attribute, not only does Allah has the attribute of power (*qudrah*), but His power is active in the creation of all those happening in the universe, which are continuously in the process. Therefore, *kawnuhu qādiran* creates a connection between *qudrah*, and other *ma'ānī* attributes of Allah, and the real events in the world, which are created in nature and have both origination and termination.⁶⁸

Following *Umm al-Barāhīn*, the two Malay commentaries of Patani *'ulama* deal with the attributes which are necessary for the Messenger. They are *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *amānah* (trustworthiness), *tablīgh* (conveyance), and *faṭānah* (intelligent). The opposite of these attributes is *kadhib* (falsehood), *khiyānah* (faithlessness), *kitmān al-'ilm* (concealing the knowledge), especially to those they were commanded to disseminate (*tablīgh*) to the people, and *jahl* (thoughtlessness). Hence, the books discuss the meaning of the statement of faith, *Lā ilāha illa Allāh Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh* (no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger), with a strong emphasis on the necessity of the Muslims to believe in Allah as the only God they have to worship and in Muhammad as the Messenger of Allah and twenty-five messengers acknowledged by the Muslims. Mentioned here is the belief in angels and Divine revealed books, notably the Qur'an.

⁶⁸ Zayn al-'Abidin, *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, 36; Ahmad al-Fatani, *Farīdat al-Farā'id*, 11.

Other Malay Books on *Sifat Dua Puluh*

In addition to *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn* and *Farīdat al-Farā'id*, there emerged other works by other authors of Malay *'ulamā'* which paid attention to the subject of *Sifat Dua Puluh*. The first work to mention is *Miftāḥ al-Murīd fī 'Ilm al-Tawḥīd* (Keys for the Students in the Science of *Tawḥīd*) by Shaykh Zayn al-'Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani. This treatise was written most likely as an abridgment of *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, with the intention to have the Malay Muslims acquainted with the teaching on the attributes of God and in general the *'ilm al-tawḥīd*. Based on the undated version of al-Ma'arif in Penang, this 16-page treatise is compiled with other essays by two other writers, one of whom is the author's son Umar, who wrote the cause that leads to the apostasy (*murtad*). The other is Haji Ahmad bin Abd al-Ra'uf of Melaka who composed his essay on *tawḥīd* in a type of Malay rhyme. In the margin of the book is inserted a work of Dawud al-Fatani, *Muta'allim*.⁶⁹

In the 1960s, there appeared two commentaries to *Farīdat al-Farā'id* of Ahmad al-Fatani: *'Umdat al-Ṭālib al-Mujtahid fī Sharḥ Farīdat al-Farā'id* (The Leading Knowledge Seeker in the Commentary to *Farīdat al-Farā'id*) by Tuan Guru Haji Abdullah bin Haji Ibrahim al-Fatani al-Jabi, and *Pati Farīdat al-Farā'id* (The Substance of *Farīdat al-Farā'id*) by Tuan Guru Haji Nik Abdullah Ahmad al-Jambuwi al-Fatani. The first mentioned work, *'Umdat al-Ṭālib*, was completed in 1960AD/1380AH in Malay. It was written with the intention to expound the mentioned work of Ahmad al-Fatani, which is described "as to have been beneficial and useful in the science of

⁶⁹ Zayn al-'Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani, *Miftāḥ al-Murīd fī 'Ilm al-Tawḥīd* (Pulau Penang: Dar al-Ma'arif, n.d.); see also Matheson & Hooker, "Jawi Literature", 33, 35; Madmam, *The Pondok*, 31.

'*aqā'id*', in order to make it easy to be digested for those who search for Islamic knowledge.⁷⁰

The second work, *Patī Farīdat al-Farā'id*, was written with the same objective as '*Umdat al-Tālib*. This work has received high appreciation by mainly the Malay of the peninsula, as it was later published in Kuala Lumpur with the modern style of Malay language expression.⁷¹ These two commentaries not only sign the popularity of *Farīdat al-Farā'id* in Patani and the Malay-archipelago, but also the primacy of the teaching of *Sifat Dua Puluh* as an established formulation of the principles of belief ('*aqīdah*) among the Muslim in Southeast Asia.

Another '*ālim* to mention here is Shaykh Ismail bin Abdul Kadir al-Fatani, also known as Pakda El al-Fatani. Not much is known about this '*ālim*, unless he is said as the cousin of Ahmad al-Fatani and had a career as a teacher in Mecca. He wrote two works that discuss the subject of *Sifat Dua Puluh*, *Sharḥ Bākūrah al-Amānī* (Commentary to *Bākūrat al-Amānī* [The Beginning of Peace]) and *Idāh al-Marān lī Taḥqīq Ṣubul al-Salām* (The Beginning of Season for the Actualisation of Peace Process). The first work is a commentary to his small work (8 pages) he had completed in 1912, *Bākūrah al-Amānī*, four years before he began writing this 30-page *sharḥ* in 1916. Shaykh Ismail has called his commentary *Tabṣīrat al-Adāni bi al-Ḥāni Bākūrah al-Amānī* (The Enlightenment Appropriate to Understand *Bākūrah al-*

⁷⁰ Haji Abdullah bin Haji Ibrahim al-Fatani al-Jabi, '*Umdat al-Tālib al-Mujtahid fī Sharḥ Farīdat al-Farā'id*' (Patani: Bin Halabi, n.d.), 3. There was also reprinted version of this book by Taman Pustaka Press in Patani as was a run of 2,000 copies. See Matheson & Hooker, "Jawi Literature", 27.

⁷¹ Che' Razi Jusoh, "Preliminary Study on the Accounts of Some of the Malay-Jawi Aqidah Texts and Commentaries", *AFKAR: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 12 (2011), 33. Che' Razi Jusoh notes that Ibrahim Abu Bakar edited and annotated *Farīdat al-Farā'id* and published it in Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 2007.

Amānī). The second work was written in 1917 and appeared as a brief and simple booklet (12 pages). It explains the same subject of *Sifat Dua Puluh* for beginners.⁷²

To be added here is the work by Haji Muhammad Daud bin Haji Muhammad Yusuf, *al-Risālah al-Tawhīdiyyah*. Written in 1958/9AD/1378AH, this 58-page book is to explain the *Sifat Dua Puluh*, next to the subjects of the *ḥajj* and *‘umrah*.⁷³ Another scholar is Tuan Guru Abdul Qadir bin Wangah from *kampung* (village) Sekam, Waratan in Patani. He wrote a book on the *ṣifāt ma ‘ānī* entitled *Mabḥath al-Kalām fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām* (The Subject of *Kalām* in the Science of *Kalām*), completed in 13 Rabi’ al-Thani 1374/9AH/ December 1954AD.⁷⁴ So important was the subject of *Sifat Dua Puluh* that it attracted a female scholar to write a small *risālah*, entitled *Sifat Dua Puluh pada Ilmu Tawhīd* (The Twenty Attributes in the Science of *Tawhīd*). She was Hajjah Wan Yah binti Tuan Kadi Haji Wan Abdul Rahman from Patani.⁷⁵ Completed in 1962AD/1382AH, this *risālah* was written for beginners. "Some friends of mine requested me", so she

⁷² Matheson & Hooker, "Jawi Literature", 30-1. These two scholars found in the 1980s the edition of *Sharḥ Bakūrat al-Amānī* 7th reprinted by al-Patani Press in 1382AH (1962-3AD). See also Che’ Razi Jusoh, "Preliminary Study", 34, in which this scholar notes that the most recent version of the work was printed by Khazanah Fathaniyah in 1421AH/2000AD.

⁷³ Matheson & Hooker, "Jawi Literature", 31.

⁷⁴ This work was printed, but undated, by Percetakan Saudara Press in Patani. See Che’ Jusoh, "Preliminary Study", 34.

⁷⁵ No much is known about this female *‘ālim* of Patani. Yet, the Malaysian-based website has made a news report recently (5 July 2019) on the female Muslim leaders in the Malay world, in which Hajjah Wan Yah is acknowledged as one of three Malaysian female *‘ulamā’* who made contribution to the Islamic development, together with Hajjah Khadijah Tok Selehor and Syekhah Fatimah Syeikh Abdul Wahab Bugis. See orangkata.my/agama, accessed in 28 June 2020.

stated in introductory pages, "to compose a small *risālah* in explaining the foundation of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) which is delivered for the beginners, and [therefore] I made it easy to be comprehended".⁷⁶

As can be gleaned from its title, the *risālah* explains each of the twenty attributes in brief and simple manners, emphasising the basic points of the meaning of every attribute. In the last part, the author discusses the attributes necessary for the Messenger with a brief story of the Prophet Muhammad, the belief in angels, and then elaborates on the meaning and significance of the pillars of Islam and faith. The *risālah* concludes its discussions with an explanation of the prayer (*ṣalāt*) and the advice to stay on the right path.⁷⁷

Closing Remarks

Certainly, *Sifat Dua Puluh* since the 19th century has become an acclaimed Malay term to convey the Sunni doctrine in Southeast Asia. The *kitab Jawi* held a major role in the production and development of this conceptual term, which was adapted from Yusuf al-Sanusi's *Umm al-Barāhīn*. The *Jawi* scholars of Mecca translated the book into Malay and, more importantly, expounded its contents in the form of commentaries, leading *Sifat Dua Puluh* to emerge as a popular formulation of the theological school of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. This trend of scholarly development was intensified as the students and cohorts of Meccan *Jawi* scholars continued writing treatises on the subject in the early 20th century. To be added to this advance of *Sifat Dua Puluh* was the role of local 'ulamā' who disseminated it through oral sermons and lectures. As such, *Sifat Dua Puluh* is a clear example of the

⁷⁶ Hajjah Wan Yah binti Tuan Kadi Haji Wan Abdul Rahman, *Sifat Dua Puluh pada Ilmu Tawhid* (the publisher and the date of its publication is not identified), 2.

⁷⁷ See Hajjah Wan Yah, *Sifat Dua Puluh*.

nowadays emerging discourse of Islam Nusantara in primarily Indonesia and Malaysia.

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