

# Purification of Sufism According to Hamka

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## Abstract

*This research investigates Hamka's concept of Modern Sufism as a significant effort to purify and reform traditional Sufism. The study begins by exploring the historical context of Sufism in Indonesia, where it played a pivotal role in the dissemination of Islam but was later influenced by mystical, materialistic, and hedonistic elements. These influences often deviated from the foundational principles of Islam, necessitating a return to its purest form. The study adopts a descriptive and inductive research design, analyzing Hamka's seminal works. The research focuses on Hamka's critique of practices like saint veneration, excessive grave visitation, and misinterpretations of concepts like *waḥdah al-wujūd*. Hamka's approach emphasizes *tawḥīd* (the Oneness of God) as a cornerstone of Sufi practice, advocating for a direct and immanent relationship with Allah without intermediaries. The findings reveal that Hamka redefined wealth and poverty in Sufism. Wealth, according to Hamka, is not inherently negative but should be seen as a trust from Allah, to be used for good deeds and social welfare. True poverty, on the other hand, lies in detachment from material possessions, even amidst abundance, reflecting the principle of *zuhd* (asceticism). Furthermore, Hamka's Modern Sufism rejects hedonistic tendencies by promoting self-control and prioritizing social engagement as essential aspects of a successful Sufi life. The study concludes that Hamka's Modern Sufism bridges spirituality with societal needs, offering a dynamic and pragmatic framework for addressing the spiritual crises of modern society. His approach not only restores Sufism to its monotheistic roots but*

*also ensures its relevance in contemporary contexts, balancing worldly and spiritual aspirations.*

**Keywords:** *Hamka, Purification, Sufism, Modern, Modern Sufism*

### **Abstrak**

*Penelitian ini menyelidiki konsep Tasawuf Modern menurut Hamka sebagai upaya signifikan untuk membersihkan dan mereformasi Tasawuf tradisional. Studi dimulai dengan mengeksplorasi konteks historis Tasawuf di Indonesia, di mana ia memainkan peran penting dalam penyebaran Islam namun kemudian dipengaruhi oleh elemen-elemen mistik, materialistik, dan hedonistik. Pengaruh-pengaruh ini sering menyimpang dari prinsip dasar Islam, sehingga memerlukan kembali kepada bentuknya yang paling murni. Penelitian ini mengadopsi desain penelitian deskriptif dan induktif, menganalisis karya-karya penting Hamka. Penelitian ini fokus pada kritik Hamka terhadap praktik-praktik seperti pemujaan terhadap wali, kunjungan makam yang berlebihan, dan salah tafsir terhadap konsep-konsep seperti wahdat al-wujūd. Pendekatan Hamka menekankan tauhid sebagai pokok ajaran dalam praktik Tasawuf, dengan mengadopsi hubungan langsung dan imanen dengan Allah tanpa perantara. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa Hamka mendefinisikan kembali kekayaan dan kemiskinan dalam Tasawuf. Kekayaan, menurut Hamka, tidak selalu negatif, tetapi harus dilihat sebagai amanah dari Allah yang harus digunakan untuk amal kebaikan dan kesejahteraan sosial. Sedangkan kemiskinan, terletak pada keterlepasan dari harta benda, meskipun di tengah kelimpahan, mencerminkan prinsip zuhud (asketisme). Selain itu, Tasawuf Modern Hamka menolak kecenderungan hedonistik dengan mempromosikan pengendalian diri dan memprioritaskan keterlibatan sosial sebagai aspek penting dari kehidupan Tasawuf yang sukses. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Tasawuf Modern Hamka menjembatani spiritualitas dengan kebutuhan masyarakat, menawarkan kerangka dinamis dan pragmatis untuk mengatasi krisis spiritual dalam masyarakat modern. Pendekatan Hamka tidak hanya mengembalikan Tasawuf kepada akar monoteistiknya tetapi juga memastikan relevansinya dalam konteks kontemporer, menyeimbangkan aspirasi duniawi dan spiritual.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Hamka, Pemurnian, Tasawuf, Modern, Tasawuf Modern*

## Introduction

Sufism has deep roots in the history of Indonesia, beginning in the 11th century CE when Islam was introduced through Yemeni traders who spread the faith via Sufism. Numerous Sufi orders emerged as many Indonesians converted to Islam, with Sufi principles and values becoming prevalent, especially among those who pledged allegiance to specific Sheikh within certain orders. This situation significantly influenced Indonesian Muslims' perception of Sufism.<sup>1</sup>

In the latter half of the 20th century, many Indonesian youths traveled to various Arab countries, bringing with them new ideological perspectives that differed greatly from the spirit of Sufism introduced by Islam. Some of these individuals, particularly those who graduated from Saudi Arabia, were influenced by contemporary Salafi thought, rejecting Sufism and claiming it has no basis in Islam, nor evidence from the Qur'an or the Sunnah.<sup>2</sup>

In the early 20th century, one of the most prominent Indonesian scholars emerged: Haj Abdul Malik bin Abdul Karim Amrullah, known as Hamka. He was recognized for a Salafi approach that leaned towards reform in education. Hamka defined and promoted Sufi principles and values, labeling them as "Modern Sufism".<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the core issue of our research revolves around the nature of Sufism that Hamka presented, its relationship with past and present Sufism, and its connection to Salafism.

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<sup>1</sup>Peter G. Riddell, "The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past By Michael Laffan.", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2013), 408–11, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/ett045>; Kholili Hasib, "Mazhab Akidah dan Sejarah Perkembangan Tasawuf Ba'lawi", *Kalimah: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Pemikiran Islam*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2017), 19–36.

<sup>2</sup>Hazim Fouad, "Unveiling the Innovators—A Glimpse on Sufi-Salafi Polemics", *Religions*, vol. 11 (2020); Amine Tais, "Islam, Salafism, and Peace: Facing the Challenges of Tradition and Change", *Religions*, vol. 15 (2024).

<sup>3</sup>The term 'Modern Sufism' is recognized as one of the columns or sections in the Islamic weekly magazine led by Hamka himself, which was quite popular from 1936 to 1943. The 'Modern Sufism' column was written by Hamka and later compiled into a book titled: Hamka, *Tasawuf Modern*, (Bandung: Nurul Islam Publishing, 1981).

## Sufism in Indonesia

It is well-known that the history of Islam's entry into Indonesia cannot be separated from the history of Sufism and its orders. The Islamization of Indonesia occurred at a time when Sufism and its orders became a mode of thought within the Islamic world. Sufism played a significant role in encouraging Indonesians to embrace Islam. The *Wali Songo* (Nine Saints) left no written works specifically on Sufi orders or Islam in general; their impact is primarily reflected in a collection of religious advice found in the writings of their students (*santri*) in the Javanese language called *sulūk*.

In the early days of the Islamic Demak Kingdom (1475 CE), the teaching of Islamic sciences at the "Raden Fatih" Institute revolved around the teachings of Sufism associated with the "Sunan" (the Sufism of the Nine Saints). Key references included the "Kitab Sunan Sultan" (the writings of the saints) and the Tafsir al-Jalalayn, the latter containing accounts of the experiences of the pious. These writings document the experiences of the devout, asserting that spiritual practices (*riyāḍah*) and the struggle against desires (*mujāhadah*) are essential for Muslims to purify the heart and refine the soul to draw closer to Allah. This proximity leads the individual to a realm of spirituality when the soul yearns for Allah, seeking a drop of divine light. A strong relationship with Allah cannot be achieved through a materialistic self preoccupied with worldly matters, distancing itself from religion and Allah.<sup>4</sup>

Worship and struggle are integral to the spiritual life that intertwines with the traditions of the pesantren community. The educational institutions of pesantren and religious schools spread throughout the country are among the historical legacies that assisted the *Wali Songo* in propagating Islam in Indonesia.

Most Islamic institutes apply the teachings of Al-Ghazali's Sufism, teaching works such as "*Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*" (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) and "*Minhāj al-'Ābidīn*" (The Way of the

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<sup>4</sup>Harun Nasution, *Filsafat dan Mistisisme dalam Islam*, (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 2008), 56.

Worshippers).<sup>5</sup> These materials serve as the foundation for Sufi thought and practices, indicating that the Sufism practiced by the *Wali Songo* was Sunni Sufism, influenced by Al-Ghazali's ideas.<sup>6</sup>

## Stages of Sufism in Indonesia

Following Sri Mulyani, it seems that the stages of the emergence and development of Sufism in Indonesia can be divided into two phases, namely:

### First Phase - The Stage of Emergence and Growth:

Sufism in the Indonesian archipelago began with the arrival of Islam. Some individuals brought Islam and the Sufism they learned from their homelands. Their Sufi practices were vibrant, influenced by the teachings of Ibn Arabi, Abdul Qadir al-Jilani, and others, such as existentialism (*wujūdiyyah*) and Sufi orders. During this period, several notable Sufi scholars emerged, including Hamzah Fansuri, Shamsuddin of Sumatran, Abdul Ra'uf al-Fansuri, Sheikh Burhanuddin Ulakan, and Nuruddin al-Raniri.

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<sup>5</sup>The article in Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies discusses the role of the book *Ihya' Ulumuddin* in the formation of life views in Islamic boarding schools, especially in Central Java. The teaching method of this book uses the *bandongan* method, which is often the dominant approach in traditional Islamic boarding schools. The article also highlights the importance of updating teaching methods to be more contextual and interactive. Umma Farida And Abdurrohman Kasdi, "Women's Roles In *Ihyā' Ulūm Al-Dīn* And Method Of Teaching It At Pesantrens In Indonesia", *Al-Jami'ah: Journal Of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (2021), 163–90; on the other hand, research from the ghazalian institute explains the structure and stages outlined in *minhāj al-'ābidīn* as a spiritual guide. The book is commonly used in pesantrens to teach students about spiritual journeys, ranging from repentance to achieving motivation in worship. Its stages are highly relevant for building resilience through Islamic *Adab* (Ethics). Ricky Firmansyah, "The Seven Stages Of Change Psychotherapy Ghazalian (Minhajul 'Abidin)", <https://ghazalian.org/2023/02/23/the-seven-stages-of-change-psychotherapy-ghazalian-minhajul-abidin/>, accessed 30 Nov 2024.

<sup>6</sup>Abdullah Nuh, *Sejarah Kerajaan Islam di Jawa Barat era Kerajaan Banten*, (Bogor: Pustaka Media, 1961), 11–2, <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=dvR7CgAAQBAJ>.

## Second Phase - The Stage of Development:

After the death of the prominent Sufi scholars from the first phase, such as Hamzah Fansuri and Shamsuddin of Sumatrani, Sufism, particularly the Sufi orders, evolved in Indonesia. New scholars arose during this time, including Sheikh Abdul Samad al-Palimbani, Sheikh Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari, and Sheikh Dawud al-Fatani.<sup>7</sup>

There is no doubt that Sufism played a significant role in the introduction of Islam to Indonesia. If we look back at the history of Islam's arrival in Indonesia, we see the major contributions of the *Wali Songo* (Nine Saints). These include figures such as Sheikh Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Raden Rahmat, Raden Makdum Ibrahim, Raden Paku, Syarif Hidayatullah, Ja'far Sodiq, Raden Prabowo, Syarifuddin, and finally Raden Said. According to the book "*Serat Wali Songo*", these saints are linked to Sufi teachings through the writings of Sheikh Ibrahim al-Arki, Sheikh al-Sabti, Sheikh Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, Sheikh Abu Yazid al-Bistami, Sheikh al-Rudadi, and Sheikh Semanjon al-Asrani.

A. Renkes, in his book "*Nine Saints of Java*", describes Sunan Kalijaga as someone who studied Sufism under Sheikh Dara Buthie, who was a descendant of Sheikh Kasah, the brother of Sheikh Jamadil Kubra. The most legendary account is of Sunan Kalijaga's studies with the *Wali Songo*, particularly with Sunan Bonang.<sup>8</sup>

For example, Maulana Malik Ibrahim spread Islam when the Indonesian people were under the rule of the Majapahit Kingdom, with most adhering to Hinduism and Buddhism. His message gained immense popularity among the lower classes of Hindus. It was known that the Hindu community was divided into four castes: Brahmana, Ksatria, Waisya, and Sudra. The Sudra caste was the lowest and often faced persecution from the higher castes. Many Sudra and Waisya were drawn to Malik Ibrahim's message about

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<sup>7</sup>Sri Mulyati, *Tasawuf Nusantara: Rangkaian Mutiara Sufi Terkemuka*, (Kencana, 2017).

<sup>8</sup>A. Sunyoto, *Atlas Wali Songo: Buku Pertama yang Mengungkap Wali Songo sebagai Fakta Sejarah*, (Kerjasama Pustaka IIMaN, Trans Pustaka, dan LTN PBNU, 2016), 161–2, <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=bUifvWEACAAJ>.

human equality in Islam, emphasizing that all humans are equal before Allah and that no Arab has superiority over a non-Arab except by piety, which resides in the heart.<sup>9</sup>

Hearing this message, those from the Sudra and Waisya castes felt relieved, empowered, and able to reclaim their rights as full human beings. Malik Ibrahim feared that the predominantly Muslim population of Gresik, led by a still Hindu king, might find their faith under threat. Thus, he sought to convert King Brawijaya to Islam and invited a king named Raden Cerman and his daughter Dewi Sari to meet with Brawijaya for this purpose. However, Brawijaya only agreed to consider Islam if Dewi Sari was willing to marry him. Tragically, Dewi Sari fell ill and passed away. Following her death, King Brawijaya appointed Maulana Malik Ibrahim as the religious leader for all Muslims in the Majapahit Kingdom due to his great affection for her.<sup>10</sup>

Malik Ibrahim's failure to convert the Majapahit king was not a total setback, as during his time, a man from Samarkand named Sheikh Jamadi al-Kiri came to Indonesia to spread Islam. They eventually succeeded in converting the Kingdom of Cempa, and Sheikh Ibrahim married the daughter of the Cempa kingdom, Dewi Candrawulan. Thus, Dewi Dwarawati, the sister of Dewi Candrawulan, became the wife of King Brawijaya.

This marked the beginning of the relationship between Islam and the kingdoms of Indonesia. The presence of Dewi Dwarawati, a Muslim, as the wife of King Brawijaya had a significant impact on the acceptance of Islam in the Hindu Majapahit Kingdom. Although jurisprudence might reject this reality, the positive influence resulting from this event was undeniable.

Shortly after, the decline of the Majapahit Kingdom and the deterioration of its people's morals became evident. King Brawijaya then asked his nephew, Raden Rahmat, to help improve the moral decay in Majapahit. Raden Rahmat was appointed as the Grand Khalifah or Grand Mufti of the Majapahit Kingdom at that time.

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<sup>9</sup>Sri Mulyati, *Tasawuf Nusantara: Rangkaian Mutiara Sufi Terkemuka...*, 15.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

Following the collapse of Majapahit, the first Islamic kingdom in Java, known as the Islamic Demak Kingdom, was established.<sup>11</sup>

## The Entry of Sufi Orders into Indonesia

As the 15th century approached, the concept of Sufi orders began to emerge in the Sufi movement in Indonesia. A Sufi figure named Sheikh Hamzah Fansuri appeared during the reign of Sultan Alauddin Ri'ayat Shah in Aceh (1588-1604). He followed the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence and adhered to the Qadiriyya order, attributed to Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani. This order developed and spread throughout Java, evident through the tradition of *manāqib*, which involves reciting stories about the life and virtues of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani.

After Hamzah Fansuri, who belonged to the Qadiriyya order, another figure named Nuruddin al-Raniri (1596-1658) emerged, known as the Sheikh of the Rifai order. Upon arriving in Aceh, al-Raniri was appointed the Sheikh of Islam, succeeding Sheikh Shamsuddin of Sumatran.<sup>12</sup>

In South Sulawesi, Yusuf al-Maqassari (d. 1627), known as the "Crown of the Khilwati Order", was a prominent Sufi figure who introduced the Khilwati order to Indonesia. Additionally, Yusuf al-Maqassari was associated with the Qadiriyya order during his stay in Aceh while studying the Naqshbandi order under the teacher Sheikh Muhammad Abdul Baqi.<sup>13</sup>

Following this was the Naqshbandi order, named after its founder Sheikh Bahauddin Naqshbandi (717-791 AH / 1318-1389 CE). Sheikh Yusuf al-Maqassari is considered the first Indonesian Sufi scholar to follow this order. He learned it in Hadramaut, Yemen, from Sheikh Abdul Baqi al-Majazi, and took an oath in Medina on the Naqshbandi path from Sheikh Ibrahim al-Kurani. Martin, in his

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<sup>11</sup>Agus Sunyoto, "Sejarah Kerajaan Islam di Jawa th 1500-1700", *Majalah Muhakkamah* (2017), 10.

<sup>12</sup>Ris'an Rusli, *Tasawuf dan Tarekat: Studi Pemikiran dan Pengalaman Sufi*, (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2013), 206.

<sup>13</sup>Martin Van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah di Indonesia*, (Bandung: Mizan, 1992), 141.



book “The Naqshbandi Order in Indonesia”, notes that Sheikh Yusuf al-Maqassari only documented the methods of meditation and the rules of the remembrance practice in his manuscript, without explicitly explaining the references of the Naqshbandi order in any other work.<sup>14</sup> In general, these are the recognized orders in Indonesia that apply Sufi values in Sufi lodges across the country.

The practices of Sufi orders and classical Sufism, which taught Sufi values, played a significant role in the spread of Islam during that period. The traditions and cultures at the time were heavily influenced by the mythological remnants of animism and dynamism, as well as the deeply rooted Hindu-Buddhist beliefs in society. With the introduction of Sufi practices, religious fervor was no longer solely based on mystical elements, but shifted towards rationality and intellectualism.<sup>15</sup> New challenges emerged in the modern era, particularly those related to material concerns, physical and spiritual well-being, hedonistic lifestyles, and so on. Additionally, the arrival of colonial powers, with their missions of conversion, land appropriation, and warfare, necessitated that Sufi da’wah find solutions that moved beyond classical Sufism.<sup>16</sup> Even after the colonizers were expelled, various spiritual movements emerged, causing confusion in the teachings of Islamic spirituality. The elements of syncretism disrupted the purity of the Sufi values that had been taught by the early Islamic scholars in Indonesia.<sup>17</sup>

It is from this context that the author sees Hamka as one of the prominent figures in the pre-independence era, whose influence shaped post-independence Sufi teachings by amplifying the dissemination of Sufi values in Indonesia.

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<sup>14</sup>*Ibid*, 142.

<sup>15</sup>Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction*, (Penerbit UTM Press, 2011), 32.

<sup>16</sup>Efi Susilawati and Heri Kurnia, “Perkembangan Agama Islam di Indonesia Pasca Kemerdekaan”, *Innovations in Multidisciplinary Education Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2024), 87–103.

<sup>17</sup>Jarman Arroisi et al., “Problematika Aliran Kepercayaan dan Kebatinan sebagai Agama Asli Indonesia”, *Fikri: Jurnal Kajian Agama, Sosial Dan Budaya*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2021), 138–55.

## History and Background of Hamka

Hamka was a renowned scholar and figure from the Muhammadiyah organization. His full name was Haji Abdul Malik Karim Abdullah (1908-1981). Hamka, or commonly called Buya Hamka, was born in Sungai Batang, Molik village, on the shores of Lake Maninjau, on the 14th of Muharram 1326 H/17th February 1908 AD. His father was a scholar and the leader of a madrasah called "Sumatera Tawalib" in Padang Panjang. In February 1927, he went to Makkah for a year to pursue knowledge. Upon returning from Makkah, he became active in Muhammadiyah activities. He was a lecturer at various universities, including PTAIN Yogyakarta, UI Jakarta, Muhammadiyah University Padang Panjang, USM Makassar, and UISU North Sumatra. In his academic career, he was appointed as a Professor at Universitas Dokter Mustopo (1966), and in 1975, he was entrusted to serve as the chairman of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI). He was known as both a scholar and a literary figure. He passed away in 1981 at the age of 78. Hamka is highly regarded for his integrity in the fields of scholarship, da'wah, and journalism. His thoughts have spread through various media, his books, his lectures, and the movements of his disciples.<sup>18</sup>

The fields of knowledge he mastered were diverse, giving Hamka an authoritative background in various areas of expertise. In the field of tafsir, Hamka's magnum opus is the renowned *Tafsir Al-Azhar*. In literature, many of his famous novels are well-known for their stories and Islamic values, such as *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck*, *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah*, *Robohnya Suara Kami*, and others. Hamka also contributed his thoughts through works in philosophy and Sufism, such as *Tasawuf Modern*, *Tasawuf: Perkembangan dan Pemurniannya*, *Falsafah Hidup*, *Akhlak Tasawuf*, *Kehidupan Seorang Hamba*, and *Lembaga Hidup*. Even James Rush and Gerard Mousay referred to him as a historian, anthropologist, literary figure, politician, journalist, and Islamologist, as mentioned by Yusuf

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<sup>18</sup>Shobahussurur, *Mengenang 100 tahun Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, Hamka*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Pesantren Islam al-Azhar, 2008).

(Yusuf, 1990).<sup>19</sup> Through these various works, Hamka's approach to purifying Sufism is evident, which is why his interpretation is recognized as *Tasawuf Modern* to this day.

## Modern Sufism According to Hamka

As mentioned earlier, Sufism has many meanings derived from the word "purity," which refers to cleanliness and clarity, like the luster of glass. Additionally, Sufism is also derived from the word "wool," as Sufis often wear garments made from sheep wool, avoiding fine and beautiful clothing that most people typically wear, which carries the scent of worldly life.<sup>20</sup>

This contrasts with Hamka's view of Sufism, where he considers a person practicing Sufism to be someone always concerned with improving their morals. They strive to purify their heart and soul so that this reflects in their behavior and speech. In his book *Tasawuf Modern*, Hamka defines Sufism based on the opinion of Junayd, stating, "Sufism is to move away from blameworthy traits and enter into praiseworthy ones." He cited Junayd's view that Sufism involves purifying the heart from worldly distractions, cleansing it of impurities, struggling against the self, and distancing oneself from carnal desires, while also advising fellow believers and adhering to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) regarding Sharia.<sup>21</sup>

In Hamka's definition of Sufism, it becomes clear that Sufism involves a person being able to purify themselves and being content with what Allah has decreed for them in terms of sustenance and wealth. It is not necessary for one to be poor or rich; gratitude leads a person to act justly in all their dealings. The wealthy should not let their wealth be wasted to become Sufis, nor should the poor live in

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<sup>19</sup>M.Y. Yusuf, *Corak Pemikiran Kalam Tafsir al-Azhar: Sebuah Telaah tentang Pemikiran Hamka dalam Teologi Islam*, (Pustaka Panjimas, 1990).

<sup>20</sup>Muhammad Solihin and M. Rosyid Anwar, *Akhlak Tasawuf: Manusia, Etika, dan Makna Hidup*, (Nuansa Cendekia, 2024), 11–2.

<sup>21</sup>Hamka, *Tasawuf Modern...*, 18.

hardship; they should continue to work for the world while aiming for the Hereafter.<sup>22</sup>

Hamka offers a step that needs to be achieved by spiritual practitioners, which is placing the concept of *tawhīd* (the Oneness of God) in every activity of life. *Tawhīd al-dīnī* means that: the One God is in a transcendent position (beyond and above, separate from His creation) but simultaneously felt close in the heart (*qalb*). This understanding is a combination of the concept of faith (*'aqīdah*) from Islamic theology (*'ilm al-kalām*) and the concept of *ihsān* as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Thus, God is neither placed "too far" nor "too close." This belief is also referred to as the belief of Sufism; borrowing the term from Dr. Simuh.

The teaching of *tawhīd* is emphasized by Hamka, because for him, during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, when Islam was spreading to Indonesia, the teachings of Islam in all Muslim lands were influenced by Sufism, which had deviated significantly from its original path. Whether in Egypt or Central Asia, Islam was permeated by Sufism influenced by various teachings that were not part of its original foundation. After the seventeenth century, many people from Hadramaut came to Indonesia with the Shafi'i school of thought. They brought with them grave veneration and rituals called *ḥawl* (an annual commemoration), which strengthened the influence of the Shafi'i school. Sufism in Indonesia was heavily influenced by Persia (Iran) and India.<sup>23</sup>

Hamka stresses that Sufism is practiced through obedience to the worship prescribed by religion, and by reflecting on the wisdom (the hidden spirit of Islam) behind all forms and types of worship. A person's Sufi life can only be considered successful if they exhibit a high social ethos, high social sensitivity (a *karamah* in socio-religious terms), along with the honor derived from social deeds and services motivated by piety in carrying out the religious shariah. This is referred to as the reflection of wisdom. Sufism is not a goal in itself. Sufism is the fruit of performing true and sincere worship.

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<sup>22</sup>*Ibid*, 19.

<sup>23</sup>Hamka, *Tasauf: Perkembangan dan Pemurniannya*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1993), 226, <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=YyWAngEACAAJ>.

From his writings, it appears that Sufism is about freeing oneself from bad or base morals towards good morals with the intent of drawing closer to Allah, without abandoning the purpose for which humans were created—to be Allah's vicegerents on Earth. Furthermore, for Hamka, Sufism does not distance itself from worldly matters like material wealth, depending on how a person behaves in it. Sufis are those who work for their worldly life with the intention of the Hereafter.<sup>24</sup>

Hamka sees Sufism as the third path to approach Allah, alongside the paths of art and philosophy. He mentions that the purpose of Sufism is to improve character and strive for inner purity. He believes that applying Sufism in the present age should not be "exclusive," meaning that true Sufism is not about escaping to the wilderness but rather about blending into society, as society, according to Hamka, requires spiritual guidance. Looking back to the time of Junayd al-Baghdadi, we find that people could practice Sufism while engaging in trade, as Junayd himself had a cloth shop in the heart of Baghdad, practicing Sufism while farming and earning a living.<sup>25</sup>

However, this path is not directed towards either poverty or wealth. According to Hamka, poverty means possessing as little material wealth as possible, which is believed to be the most likely path to salvation. In the true sense, this does not simply mean lacking wealth, but rather not having the desire to acquire it. This can be compared to an empty heart, from the desire for wealth, just as hands are empty, because they hold nothing. Therefore, the concept of poverty manifests as: having nothing, and the heart also manifests as having nothing. Even so, this concept carries its true meaning. Indeed, it is possible for a Sufi to possess much wealth, yet feel as though they do not own it, with their heart being "distant" from all material possessions.

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<sup>24</sup>Nur Hadi Ihsan and Iqbal Maulana Alfiansyah, "Konsep Kebahagiaan dalam buku Tasawuf Modern karya Hamka", *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2021), 279–98.

<sup>25</sup>Hamka, *Pelajaran Agama Islam*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1989), 17, <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=FCDZzWEACAAJ>.

According to Reynold A. Nicholson, there are several paths in Sufism, including: poverty, mortification, trust in God, and *dzikr* (remembrance). Mortification means separating the soul from the things it desires, thus prompting the individual to resist their own desires. Trust in God involves renouncing personal initiative and will. Meanwhile, *dzikr* means mentioning or remembering God repeatedly.<sup>26</sup>

For Hamka, a rich person is one who has few desires, while a poor person is one who has many wants and needs. True wealth is being content with what one has, accepting it even if it multiplies a hundredfold, because it is a gift from God. One does not feel disappointed if the amount decreases, because it came from God and will return to Him. When wealth is abundant, no matter how much, it reminds us that its purpose is to support charity, worship, and strengthen one's faith in God. Wealth is not loved because it is wealth; it is loved because it is a gift from God and should be used for beneficial purposes.<sup>27</sup>

When discussing the internalization and practice of Islamic spirituality values, which are personal and subjective, Hamka believes that these values must be manifested in social life. These values include: piety (*taqwā*), trust in God (*tawakkul*), which is not fatalistic but active, involving effort and striving to the best of one's ability; sincerity (*ikhlas*); hope (*raja'*); fear (*khauf*); repentance (*tawbah*); contentment (*ridā*); asceticism (*zuhd*); scrupulousness (*wara'*); contentment (*qanā'ah*); gratitude (*syukr*); patience (*ṣabr*); and steadfastness (*istiqāmah*).<sup>28</sup>

For Hamka, *qanā'ah* means being content with what one has. *Qanā'ah* includes five aspects: (a) accepting willingly what one has, (b) asking God for suitable increases, and striving for it, (c) accepting God's decrees with patience, (d) trusting in God, and (e) not being attracted to the temptations of the world. This is what is called *qanā'ah*, and this is true wealth. This concept comes from the saying

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<sup>26</sup>Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *The mystics of Islam*, (London: G. Bell and sons, Limited, 1914).

<sup>27</sup>Hamka, *Lembaga Hidup*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1984), 199.

<sup>28</sup>Hamka, *Tasawuf Modern...*, 335.

of the Prophet Muhammad: "Wealth is not having many possessions; true wealth is the wealth of the soul." This means a person who is content with what they have, not greedy or envious, and not someone who constantly asks for more. If someone continues to ask for more, it indicates they are still poor.<sup>29</sup>

For Hamka, *ikhhlāṣ* means purity, with no mixture, like pure gold that is not mixed with any silver. A pure act towards something is called *ikhhlāṣ*. For example, if a person works solely for a wage, expecting praise from their employer, then their action is not sincere. The opposite of *ikhhlāṣ* is *isyārāk* (associating others with God), meaning mixing one's intention with something else. *ikhhlāṣ* and *isyārāk* cannot coexist. If *ikhhlāṣ* resides in the heart, *isyārāk* cannot enter, and vice versa. If *isyārāk* has taken root in the heart, *ikhhlāṣ* will find it difficult to enter.<sup>30</sup>

### Characteristics of Hamka's Sufism

After all the concepts of Sufism mentioned earlier, Hamka has his unique characteristics, specifically the modernity of Sufism. By modernity, he means providing an understanding that aligns with contemporary times. Therefore, Hamka's concept of Sufism includes several characteristics:

**First**, Sufism should not be detached from social life. Hamka's view of Sufism does not remove a person from the purpose of their creation, which is to be Allah's vicegerent on earth. Some people mistakenly believe that Sufism means retreating from the hustle and bustle or isolating oneself in order to get closer to Allah. However, the Sufism that Hamka refers to is about being a vicegerent of Allah on earth. In practice, through Sufism, an individual learns how to behave as Allah's representative in the world. Moreover, Hamka describes Sufism as a transition from bad behavior to good conduct. A Sufi, or someone wishing to practice Sufism, should not limit their practice or live in poverty and deprivation, as wealth

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid*, 267.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid*, 148.

should be a means to draw closer to Allah through charity, almsgiving, and spending in His way.<sup>31</sup>

**Second,** Hamka considers material wealth to be an important aspect because those who possess ample resources can more easily assist others. Nevertheless, this does not distance the Sufi from their Creator, as their understanding of Sufism focuses on self-improvement or moral enhancement. It is not required for one to live as either materially rich or poor. Furthermore, richness in Hamka's view is spiritual wealth, where a wealthy person is someone who does not harbor excessive desires based on carnal inclinations. A materially rich individual with insatiable desires, whose ultimate goal is merely to satisfy those desires, is akin to a true poor person.<sup>32</sup>

**Third,** Sufism does not equate to surrendering or refraining from effort. According to Hamka, as long as the spirit resides in the body, everyone should work. Work does not imply a desire for increased wealth but rather to dispel laziness, which is a blameworthy trait.<sup>33</sup>

**Fourth,** Non-affiliation with a Specific Order. Although Hamka practices Sufism, he does not belong to any particular order, nor did he establish a sect or method of his own, as is common in the Sufi world. Unlike other reformers and revivalists, Hamka respects those who have joined specific orders and practiced them. This respect is evident in his discussions on the significant impact of Sufism in spreading Islam. Alongside his success in strengthening

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<sup>31</sup>Muhammad Rizqy Nawwari, "Islamic Modernism in Indonesia (Hamka Modern Sufism Study)", *al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2024), 967–75.

<sup>32</sup>Novi Maria Ulfah and Dwi Istiyani, "Etika Dalam Kehidupan Modern: Studi Pemikiran Sufistik Hamka", *Esoterik: Jurnal Akhlak dan Tasawuf*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2016), 95–109.

<sup>33</sup>Nur Hadi Ihsan and Sayyid Muhammad Indallah, "Kemoderenan Dalam Konsep Tasawuf Modern Buya Hamka", *Jurnal Penelitian*, vol. 12, no. 2 (Universitas Darussalam (UNIDA) Gontor, Ponorogo, 2018), 355–78.



the spirit of Muslims to defend their faith, Sufism also invigorated their resolve against foreign colonialism.<sup>34</sup>

He exemplifies this with the Sanusi order, founded by Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali al-Sanusi in Africa, which played an effective role in defending Islam and motivating Libyan Muslims against Italian colonialism. Hamka chose to disseminate his understanding of Sufism in his writings so that the general public could read them without needing to affiliate with a specific order. Thus, people came to refer to Hamka's Sufism as "modern Sufism."<sup>35</sup>

### Hamka and the Purification of Sufism

In his book *"Tasawuf: Perkembangan dan Pemurniannya"*, Hamka discusses Ibn Taymiyyah's efforts to return Sufism to its monotheistic roots. This is also his goal for Sufism in Indonesia. He views Sufism as not merely about isolating oneself in solitude with Allah, but rather, according to Ibn Taymiyyah's teachings, a Sufi is someone who adheres to the truth, dispels falsehood, wakes in the night for prayer, works during the day, and confronts enemies when the homeland is in danger, desiring to leave behind anything that hinders them from that goal to join the ranks of the army.<sup>36</sup> Here, Hamka emphasizes that understanding Sufism should not stop at merely drawing closer to Allah but must also encompass the responsibility of being a vicegerent on earth.

Hamka also did not overlook the concept of unity of existence (*wahdat al-wujūd*). This view of Ibn Arabi was propagated by Hamzah Fansuri when he was the Islamic leader in the Aceh Kingdom, until Nuruddin al-Raniri appeared to counter the understanding of unity propagated by Hamzah Fansuri. This

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<sup>34</sup>Ma'mun Mu'min, "The Role Of Ulama Mysticism In The National Political Movement In Java Year 1825-2011", *Journal of Asian Islamic Higher Institutions*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>35</sup>Mohammad Noviani Ardi and Fatimah Abdullah, "The History of Islam in the Malay Archipelago: An Analytical Study of Abdullah Bin Nuh's Works", *Al-Shajarah* (International Islamic University Malaysia, 2018).

<sup>36</sup>Hamka, *Tasawuf: Perkembangan dan Pemurniannya*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1984), 217.

existential view is not limited to ideas or writings; many Muslims in Indonesia regard it as a truth and belief, notably exemplified by Sheikh Siti Jenar's interpretation of unity of existence, known as *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*. He spread this understanding among his students, causing unrest in the Demak Pintara kingdom at the time, ultimately leading to Sheikh Siti Jenar being sentenced to death.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, a phenomenon that emerged after independence was the proliferation of groups associated with belief systems and mysticism. These groups claimed to be spiritual training platforms aligned with Islamic Sufism. However, upon deeper investigation, it was revealed that the teachings of these belief groups were a mixture of elements from various religions in Indonesia, combined with local cultural characteristics (syncretism).<sup>38</sup>

Another point that draws Hamka's attention is the practice of venerating saints. He disapproves of Muslims overly relying on a saint, forgetting that it is Allah who fulfills prayers. This is a response to the tradition of visiting the graves of saints. The problem lies not in the act of visiting graves but in the belief of the visitors that the saints can fulfill their prayers and wishes.<sup>39</sup> However, rejecting a long-standing practice among Indonesians is not easy. Many people believe that Hamka forbade grave visits, while in reality, what he aimed to do was purify the act of visiting graves from polytheism.

The phenomenon of grave visitation and seeking mystical sites in Indonesia has long been intertwined with cultural and religious practices. While traditionally, practices such as *ziarah* (grave visitation) and pilgrimages to sacred sites were seen as ways to strengthen one's spirituality and moral character, many Indonesians today engage in these practices with different motivations. Specifically, some individuals visit these sites seeking material gains, wealth, or fame, rather than spiritual enrichment or purification. This

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<sup>37</sup>Sri Mulyati, *Tasawuf Nusantara: Rangkaian Mutiara Sufi Terkemuka...*, 71.

<sup>38</sup>Arroisi et al., "Problematika Aliran Kepercayaan dan Kebatinan sebagai Agama Asli Indonesia".

<sup>39</sup>M. Misbahul Mujib, "Fenomena Tradisi Ziarah Lokal dalam Masyarakat Jawa: Kontestasi kesalehan, identitas keagamaan dan komersial", *IBDA: Jurnal Kajian Islam Dan Budaya*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2016), 205–25.

reflects a broader trend where such mystical practices are tied to a desire for prosperity, such as the pursuit of *pesugihan* (a local term for mystical wealth seeking).<sup>40</sup>

Many Indonesians, for example, visit famous graves or mystical locations with the hope of receiving blessings or supernatural assistance that would lead to success in business or personal life, often in exchange for offerings or rituals.<sup>41</sup> This has led to the syncretism of Islamic practices with elements of local animism, where the focus shifts away from enhancing spiritual virtues like sincerity and humility, toward more materialistic and hedonistic goals

These practices have become deeply embedded in some communities, often reinforced by local shamans or *dukun*, who may offer guidance or supernatural services in exchange for compensation. This blend of belief systems reflects a shift from the originally intended spiritual purpose to more self-serving ends, a trend that continues to be a subject of debate in the context of modern Indonesian spirituality.<sup>42</sup>

With these various phenomena, the teachings of Sufism in Islam are expected to return to the fundamental principles of monotheism. This is what Hamka meant by the purification of Sufism, as he stated in his book:

“Return them to the true foundation of Sufism, back to monotheism, which means that Allah is One with no partner,

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<sup>40</sup>Julian Millie and Lewis Mayo, “Grave Visiting (*Ziyara*) in Indonesia”, *Muslim Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, ed. by Babak Rahimi and Peyman Eshaghi (University of North Carolina Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.5149/northcarolina/9781469651460.003.0009>.

<sup>41</sup>Admin, “The Mystical Side of Indonesia: Spiritual Sites and Practices”, *Indonesian TravelHub* (2024), <https://indonesiatravelhub.com/blog/the-mystical-side-of-indonesia-spiritual-sites-and-practices/>, accessed 5 Dec 2024.

<sup>42</sup>Ajhays, “Folk Religion, Witchcraft, Mysticism, Superstitions and Black Magic in Indonesia”, *Fact and Details* (2015), [https://factsanddetails.com/indonesia/History\\_and\\_Religion/sub6\\_1f/entry-3983.html](https://factsanddetails.com/indonesia/History_and_Religion/sub6_1f/entry-3983.html), accessed 5 Dec 2024.

while everything else is part of creation, and that the unity of existence does not imply that everything in existence is God."<sup>43</sup>

It is not about merging with Allah, as the essence of the Lord differs from that of humanity. The truth is to adorn our traits with the attributes of the Lord that we can embody according to our capacities. Hamka concluded his response to existentialism with the phrase, "Embodying the attributes of the Most Merciful within human limits".

From the explanation above, at least three elements of Sufism were subjects of purification in Hamka's reform efforts. *First*, Hamka criticized Sufi practices that overemphasized mystical or magical elements, such as the veneration of saints, excessive grave visitation, or beliefs in saints possessing supernatural powers to grant prayers. He viewed these elements as deviations that corrupted the principle of *tawhīd* (monotheism) and thus needed to be restored to the pure teachings of Islam.

To purify mystical elements, Hamka employed a *tawhīd*-based approach, emphasizing the substantive and immanent connection between humans and Allah in the heart, without intermediaries or beliefs that could lead to *shirk* (associating partners with Allah). This is evident in his corrective stance on the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence), which he regarded as overly philosophical and potentially misleading, blurring the distinction between Creator and creation.

*Second*, Hamka rejected the notion of measuring spiritual success through material wealth. According to him, Sufism should not be a tool for pursuing luxury or social status but a means to draw closer to Allah. His perspective on wealth and poverty included: 1) **Wealth as a Amānah**: Hamka taught that wealth is not an end but a means for doing good. It should be used to support worship and help others, rather than satisfying worldly desires. 2) **Spiritual Poverty**: For Hamka, true poverty lies in the heart being detached from wealth, even when one possesses abundant material resources.

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<sup>43</sup>Hamka, *Tasawuf: Perkembangan dan Pemurniannya...*, 229.

This reflects the attitude of *zuhd* (asceticism), living simply without attachment to worldly possessions.<sup>44</sup>

*Third*, Hamka also critiqued the hedonistic lifestyle prevalent in his time, where worldly pleasures were seen as life's ultimate goal. He argued that true Sufism demands self-control and the purification of the heart from base desires. Hamka believed that the success of a Sufi is reflected in their social contributions. A Sufi must be sensitive to the needs of the community and actively involved in promoting social good, rather than focusing solely on personal pleasure. For Hamka, Islamic spiritual values should be translated into tangible actions that benefit society, such as sincerity (*ikhhlās*), patience (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*syukr*), and contentment (*qanā'ah*).<sup>45</sup>

Thus, Hamka's approach was not only aimed at purifying Sufi teachings from practices found in various Sufi orders in Indonesia but also making them relevant to the challenges of the modern era. Hamka advocated for a dynamic and active Sufism, where practitioners remain engaged in worldly life with an orientation toward the hereafter. He emphasized that Sufism can serve as a solution to the spiritual crises of modern society, provided it remains aligned with the pure teachings of Islam.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that Sufism arrived in Indonesia with the advent of Islam, becoming one of the most essential aspects that cannot be separated from Muslims in Indonesia. We cannot deny that the beliefs held by the Indonesian people prior to the arrival of Islam, represented by Hinduism and Buddhism, significantly influenced the way Muslims practiced their faith in Indonesia. Some Hindu and Buddhist beliefs were integrated into certain religious (Sufi) traditions in the region.

From the time of the Nine Saints (*Wali Songo*) to the evolution of Sufi orders in Indonesia, Sufism was not immune to the influence

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<sup>44</sup>Ai Fatimah Nur Fuad, "Navigating Modernity: Hamka's Responses to the Challenges of Secularism and Materialism", *Jurnal Penelitian Humaniora*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2024), 81–90.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

of prominent Sufi trends of that era, such as the *waḥdat al-wujūd* popularized by Ibn Arabi. Sufism became widely practiced in Indonesia particularly with the entry of various Sufi orders. Therefore, Hamka believed that this phenomenon needed purification to restore Sufism to its noble and pure form, making it a valuable practice that all Muslims in Indonesia could study and engage in without needing to affiliate with a specific order.

Hamka's concept of Modern Sufism represents a significant effort to purify and reform Sufism, bringing it back to the core principles of *tawḥīd* (monotheism) and noble character. By eliminating excessive mystical elements, materialism, and hedonism, Hamka sought to position Sufism as a spiritual path that is relevant, realistic, and beneficial for both individuals and society. This approach not only strengthens spirituality but also creates a balance between worldly and otherworldly aspects.

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