

The Suluk of The Salik in the Concept of Seven Stages (Martabat Tujuh) of Abdel Samad al-Palimbani

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Abstract: This article aims to reveal how the idea of Abdel Samad al-Palimbani on Seven Stages (Martabat Tujuh) is considered controversial by some Muslims. The reason is that this idea is part of the concept of embodiment in the frame of philosophical Sufism. The seven stages essentially are to prove humans as the most perfect creation compared to others. This paper uses the library research method based on primary and secondary sources. This paper attempts to reveal al-Palimbani's ideas related to the seven stages concept. These seven stages discussed Salik's position as caliph on the earth. A Salik is always eager to find the best way to arrive at the paran. The idea of The Seven Stages is to know how close a man is to his Creator. For Salik's is to know their position as being who manifests God's Tajalli. Unfortunately, such an idea is not fully implemented, even among Islamic thinkers themselves it has been considered heretical and forbidden. This paper showed that the seven stages are the unique condition that must be understood by all Muslims who are concerned with Islamic esoteric studies to know the autentic reality.

Keywords: Abdul al-Samad al-Palimbani, Philosophical Sufism, Seven Stages, Suluk/Pathway

A. Introduction

The spread of Islam in Nusantara was peaceful, accommodating, and well received. This spreading was carried out by the Sufis communities through local culture, not through war-mongering cavalries. These positions made Sufism and Tariqa the most important aspect in introducing the thoughts and dynamics of

Muslims in the Nusantara.¹ Entering the 17th century would show us a period of mind-forming and Sufism and Tariqa practices. Sufism teachers were actively involved not only in the intellectualization of various Islamic disciplines but also in important reform movements that combined Aqidah and Shari'ah.²

Thus, it is not surprising that Sufism and Tariqa quickly crystallized in Islamic history and civilization in the Malay-Indonesian region. The teachings of Sufism explore the essence of spiritual experience in religious practice as a special attraction for the Muslim community of Nusantara. Because of its nature, Sufism is seen as a more distinctive subject and will only be taught to those who are deemed ready to accept it so that misunderstanding and controversy could be avoided.³

Sufism is considered controversial, because, at a higher level, it is a complicated and complex relationship concept. The complexity is in consequence of the teaching regarding the God and humans relationship and the origins of humans. This teaching is trying to explain the concepts of *Hulul*, *Ittihad*, *Tajjali*, *Wahdatul Wujud*, and the Seven Stages (martabat tujuh), all of which are framed in the map of philosophical Sufism. This process must be passed by the salik on their path (suluk) to achieve the perfection of life. This view is sometimes considered deviant by some Muslims, especially those who are esoterics.⁴

In Indonesia, this controversy began during the first spread of Islam in the Walisongo era. Where the council of guardians decided on the death penalty for Shaykh Siti Jenar for his understanding of oneness, then continued during the Hamzah Fansuri era of Iskandar Tsani's era. Shifting to the Palembang, there was

¹ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah di Indonesia: Survei Historis, Merupakan Periode yang Normatif bagi Pembentukan Pikiran dan Praktik Tasawuf dan Tarekat. Guru-Guru Sufi Terlibat Aktif Tidak Hanya dalam Mengintelektualisasi Berbagai Disiplin Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman Teta* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994).

² Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: Allen & Unwin, 2004), 52.

³ Ali Muzakir, "Wacana Martabat Tujuh di Jambi," *Jurnal Al-Aqidah* 11, no. 2 (2019): 208–18, <https://doi.org/10.15548/ja.v11i2.1423>.

⁴ Raha Bistara, "WAHDAH AL-WUJUD IBN ARABI DALAM IMAJINASI KREATIF HENRY CORBIN," *Academic Journal of Islamic Principles and Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (April 4, 2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.22515/ajipp.v1i1.2344>.

a great Sufi, Shaykh Abussomad al-Palimbani who spread the teachings of the Seven Stages. His teaching was criticized and insulted by some Muslims.⁵

Hence, this paper wants to reveal the true meaning of the idea behind the Seven Stages or *martabat tujuh* which was revealed by Shaykh Abdulsomad al-Palimbani. This idea is considered controversial and must be shunned by Muslims because it leads to heresy. The reason is that for some scholars, in this case, fiqh scholars, the framework of the concept of the Seven Stages is not contained in the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Sufi teachers should have taken the form of a reformation of religious understanding to find harmonization between Sufism and Shari'ah, thus dispelling the suspicion that philosophical-Sufism doctrine will lead to theological error.⁶

B. Methodology

This research uses the library research method. This research seeks to reveal the idea of Abdussomad al-Palimbani related to the Seven Dignities. There are two sources in this study, namely primary and secondary sources. The primary source is from the writings of Sheikh Abdulsomad al-Palimbani himself, while the secondary data is from supporting sources in the form of books, journals, papers, and other related scientific works.

C. The Intellectual Sketch of Sheikh Abdussomad al-Palimbani

The most famous 17th century Ulama from Palembang was Shaykh Abdulsomad al-Palimbani. Shaykh Abdulsomad was born in Palembang in 1150 H or 1737 AD. His full name is Abdus-Samad bin Abdur-Rahman bin Abdul Jalil bin Shaykh Abdul Waham bin Shaykh Ahmad al-Mahdali, while the name that is usually used in his intellectual works is Shaykh Abdus-Samad Ibn Abdurrahman al-Jawi al-Palimbani and Abdus-Samad al-Jawi al-Palimbang. This naming was obtained from his teachers, who were already aware that a foreign student from Nusantara (Jawi) would be given a new title and name.

When Abdulsomad was a child, Palembang was being ruled by Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin I (1727-1756 AD) and at the same time, Palembang was

⁵ Abdul Hadi, "Peran Tokoh Tasawuf dan Tarekat Nusantara dalam Dakwah Moderat," *Ad-Da'wah Jurnal Dakwah dan Komunikasi* 22, no. 01 (2022): 31–49.

⁶ Oman Faturrahman, *Menyoal Wahdatul Wujud: Kasus Abdurrahman Singkel di Aceh Abad 17* (Bandung: Mizan, 1999), 24.

improving and developing Islamic scientific methods and becoming the Central Islamic scholarship in the Malay-Nusantara Region. Because of this fact, Palembang then became the center of civilization and science, even ulamas from far away Arabs came to trade, built settlements, and carried out Islamic science activities both learning and teaching.⁷ The arrival of these scholars made Palembang a city of light bathed in the light of Islamic science that was incomparable at that time.

Al-Palimbani received religious lectures from his father and the scholars who existed at the time. This condition succeeded in making al-Palimbani become an intelligent young man. The memory that he has related to Islamic knowledge is can not be matched to others that he can easily memorize the whole Qur'an. It was his intelligence that then made al-Palimbani quickly become famous among the Muslims who were there. The rapid acceptance of Islamic studies subjects made Palimbani rise one level above society in general.⁸

After having learned enough lessons in his homeland, Abdussomad al-Palimbani decided to deepen his knowledge in Haramain with his close friends, one of whom was Kms Ahmad bin Abdullah. In Mecca, al-Palimbani performed the pilgrimage and is not immediately return to his country, but prefer like others to gain some knowledge. He stayed for several years to explore the religious knowledge around the Arabian Peninsula, one of which was in Haramain.⁹ His love for learning required Palimbani to stay on the Arabian Peninsula for as long as twenty years.¹⁰

Al-Palimbani loved to study Islamic learning in the native land, then he did not return to Palembang after his departure. Abdussomad died in 1819 AD at the age of 82 years. At the same time, the Palembang government was struggling to deal with the colonials, especially in the battles of 1819 and 1821 after his

⁷ Salman Al Farisi, "PENGEMBARAAN ILMIAH DAN PERAN SYEIKH AHMAD KHATIB AL-SYAMBASI DALAM PENYEBARAN ISLAM DI NUSANTARA MELALUI THARIQAT QADIRIYYAH WA NAQSABDNIYYAH," *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses* 4, no. 2 (2021): 165–78.

⁸ Herlina Herlina, "Information Search Process: Studi Proses Pencarian Ilmu Pada Naskah Al-Palembani Abad ke 18M," *JUPI (Jurnal Ilmu Perpustakaan Dan Informasi)* 3, no. 1 (2018): 1–17, <http://jurnal.uinsu.ac.id/index.php/jipi/article/view/1483>.

⁹ Arafah Pramasto, "Analisis Etika Ilmu Pengetahuan dalam Kitab Hidayatus Salikin Karangan Al-Palimbani Abad Ke-18," *Jurnal Dimensi* 9, no. 1 (2020): 125–34.

¹⁰ Choiriyah, "Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar dalam Perspektif Syekh Abdussomad Al-Palimbani dalam Kitabnya *Sairus salikin Ila Ibadah Robbal 'Alamin*: Relevansinya Dengan Aktifitas Dakwah," *WARDAH* 3, no. 2 (2019): 1–23.

death. The battle was directly led by his son-in-law as well as his student Shaykh Muhammad Zen. All Muslim warriors who fought to help the Sultan died on the battlefield. The different results could have been obtained if the Shaykh had not died at that time.

Al-Palimbani left many works and ideas that are still followed by Muslims, especially those who are involved in the mystical world of Islam. One of his phenomenal ideas is the Seven Stages (Martabat Tujuh) which is framed within the framework of the philosophical Sufism concept. There is hardly a Malay-Nusantara scholar who can elaborate an idea as complex as this. Even if there was any, he must have had a deeply religious understanding of all lines of Islamic sciences.

Philosophical Sufism Framework

Sufism and philosophy have a very close and captivating relationship, especially in the journey to find God. There always must be a philosophical framework to explore it. However, the current era affirms an assumption that these two disciplines are contradictory and conflicting. In modest terms, Sufism is defined as the lifestyle of a Sufi which mostly leads to the purification of the soul in order to be closer to God.¹¹ More simply, Sufism is defined as the meaning of Islamic teachings that are full of feelings.

If Sufism and philosophy were combined, there will be an assumption that philosophical Sufism uses philosophical terminology in perspectives and practices.¹² If we pay closer attention to the development of Sufism, the general concept of Sufism is all about God's formulation of ethics, aesthetics, and the unity of existence. And this is the hallmark of philosophical Sufism.¹³

The concept of the unity of being (wahdatul wujud) sees that the world and everything are merely a shadow and a reflection of God. The only real one is God; meaning there is the essence of God in human beings.¹⁴ and humans are always

¹¹ Harun Nasution, *Falsafat dan Mistisisme dalam Islam*, 12th ed. (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 2014), 24.

¹² Ahmad Mustofa, *Akhlaq Tasawuf* (Bandung: Cv Pustaka Setia, 2010), 67.

¹³ Ahmad Amir Aziz, "REKONSTRUKSI METODOLOGI ILMU TASAWUF DI PTAI," *Intelegensia* 07, no. 1 (2019): 1–11.

¹⁴ Kautsar Azhari Noer, *Ibnu Arabi: Wahdah Al-Wujud dalam Perdebatan* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995), 35.

trying to be one (unite) with God. Through the *wahdatul wujud* approach, one is not only able to know and be close to God but also be one (unite) with God.

Based on this, endless debates about philosophical Sufism have emerged for a long time. It was started by the elite group of Islamic intellectuals toward Sufism practitioners who oppose the concept of Sufism. The core reason for this action is attached to the concept of "wahdatul wujud" considered a deviant belief. Besides, there is the assumption that this concept relates to God's will that outlines his creations to unite with their God.¹⁵

The ambiguity in finding the characteristics of philosophical Sufism is due to the existence of many philosophical terms. That's why many experts still mention that philosophical Sufism cannot be considered original Sufism. The result of this condition is the teachings of philosophy still rule over Sufism. The main feature of philosophical Sufism is the combination of rationality and Sufistic.¹⁶ Meanwhile, according to Anwar, the characteristics of philosophical Sufism are a combination of philosophical and rational thought, containing Riyadhah, illumination, and the use of terms and terminology.¹⁷

From the characteristics above, it can be understood that philosophical Sufism is very inclined and identical to a philosophical and rational approach, like philosophical Sufism ideas such as the *wahdatul wujud*, *Ittihad*, *hulul*, and even the Seven Stages. Approval and rejection will certainly appear in this discussion which can be believed as initial judgment concepts. Or we can say that in philosophical Sufism, the concept of the Seven Stages of al-Palimbani can be seen as authentic.

The Concept of the Dignity of the Seven Shaykh Abdulssamad al-Palimbani

Considering to al-Palimbani thoughts, there were already three kinds of divinity-related teachings that were all considered true. First, the teachings of divinity in ushuluddin do not recognize the existence of a God other than Allah.

¹⁵ Lusinta Rehna Ginting and Mely Nadia, "PEMBENTUKAN DAN PERKEMBANGAN TASAWUF FALSAFI.Docx," *Jurnal Bilqalam Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 1 (2021): 50–64, <https://doi.org/10.51672/jbpi.v2i1.48>.

¹⁶ Harun Nasution, *Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspeknya* (Jakarta: UI-Press, 1979), 45.

¹⁷ Carl W. Ernst, *Ajaran dan Amaliah Tasawuf*, ed. Arif Anwar (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Sufi, 2003), 23.

Second, the mortal teaching in monotheism views that there is only Allah. Third, the doctrine of wahdatul wujud considers that the universe is a physical manifestation of Allah. According to al-Palimbani, these three do not contradict each other.¹⁸ and all three can be described in his main work Sairus-Salikin.

The form of Allah SWT for al-Palimbani can be described with the concept of Seven Stages, namely the stage of ahadiyatul ahad, the stage of al-wahidah, the stage of al-wahidiyah, the stage of the spirit world, the stage of the imaginal world, the stage of bodies world, and the stage of the nature of al-jami'ah. Both the discourse on wahdatul wujud and the Seven Stages have become a special attraction for the Sufis of Nusantara, with their various comments.¹⁹ Even Shaykh Naquib al-Attas emphasized that Hamzah Fansuri and Al-Sumatrani were Sufis who were responsible for introducing the doctrine of the wahdatul wujud and the Seven Stages in Aceh.²⁰

Quoting what Syam al-Din elaborated on the concept of the Seven Stages:

I'lam, be aware that in fact, the seven stages of Allah are seven, the first is the stage of Hadijah, the second is the stage of wahda, the third is the stage of the Wahidiyah, and the fourth is the stage of the spirit realm, and the fifth is the stage of imaginary world, and the sixth is the stage of the acidic nature, and the seventh is the stage of the human world. So, Ahadiyah is the essence of Allah Ta'ala, the stage of the substance of Allah is wahda is Erna'a, the essence of Muhammad, it is called the characteristic of Allah and Wahidiyah the nature of man and Adam and all of us, it is named Asma' Allah. Ta'la. Then the spirit of the stage of the essence of all forms. Thus, the imaginary world is the stage of the essence of all forms, then the physical world is the stage of the essence of all bodies, then human nature is the stage of the essence of all human beings. The stage of Hadijah is the primal stage of al-Azal and the wahdah is the stage of Allah and Wahidiyah is the stage of Allah's ahad.

¹⁸ Firdaus Firdaus, "Meretas Jejak Sufisme di Nusantara," *Al-Adyan: Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama* 13, no. 2 (2018): 303–35, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsla.v13i2.3854>.

¹⁹ Sholeh Khudin, "Corak Pemikiran Kalam Ulama SUMSEL Abad Ke-19 Dan Awal Abad Ke-20," *Tamaddun: Jurnal Kebudayaan dan Sastra Islam* 20, no. 2 (2020): 142–63, <https://doi.org/10.19109/tamaddun.v20i2.6760>.

²⁰ Sayed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1970), 24.

Then the realm of the spirits and imaginary world, the stage of ahad, then the nature of ajsam and the human realm, the stage of the human being, the stage of the abad al-abad. As for the stage of ahadiyah and wahdah and wahidiyah, it is the anniyat of Allah. So the realm of spirits and the imaginary world and the realm of ajsam and the human realm is the stage of anniyat al-Makhluk.²¹

The quote above can be described as follows: the first stage is the stage of ahadiyah (oneness) which is the objective form of God and it's not something that is circulated or conceptualized by humans in God's form. God's objective being is His substance, which is the basis for all kinds of manifestations (tajalli). The second stage is the stage of wahdah, which is the self-manifestation of God. This stage is the appearance of oneself in or His essence which is global. Sufi teachers described it as many letters from one core letter. The third stage is Wahidiyah, which is the knowledge that radiates from within God regarding His attributes or His names. This stage results in detailed knowledge of the nature of nature.²²

These three stages are qadim, each of these dignity does not precede others, the mention of the first, second, and third does not refer to the period of time, but is based on the order of human reason and spirituality about which aspect is the base for the other aspects. At the next stage is the formation of nature, the first creature that appears is the nur which is called by several names, namely Nur Muhammad, Ruh Muhammad, and al-Qalam al-A'la (the highest pen). Nur Muhammad was also created along with the spirit world. Among the creation of all these spirits, the highest stage is the human spirits, then angels, jinn, and finally the devil.²³

In the next stage of entering the mithal realm, this realm is the example or the realm of all forms. Mithal realm is described as something complex, lathif,

²¹ Mal An Abdullah, *Syaikh Abdus-Samad Al-Palimbani: Biografi dan Warisan Keilmuan* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pesantren, 2018).

²² Abdul Aziz Dahlan, *Penilaian Teologis atas Paham Wahdat Al-Wujud (Kesatuan Wujud) Tuhan, Alam, Manusia dalam Tasawuf Syamsuddin Sumatrani* (Padang: IAIN-IB Press, 1999), 54.

²³ Fadli Rahman and Ahmad Dakhoir, "The Concept of 'Martabat Tujuh' Al-Burhanpuri (Study of the Creation of the Universe in the Perspective of Philosophical Sufism)," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 8, no. 7 (2021): 87, <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v8i7.2681>.

ghayr mutajjazi, and muba'adh, la mukhraq, muta'alim, and includes the astral world. Thus it can be understood that the mithal world cannot be touched and captured by the five senses.²⁴ Something that can be caught with the five senses is the nature of ajsam. Another name used for it is Alam al-syahadah or empirical nature which means it has the nature of matter, which includes in this world the asas, and the seven layers of heaven and earth.

Another stage is the nature of al-insan. All the very complicated explanations of the seven stages boil down to the important position of man in the universe.²⁵ To obtain Allah's wisdom through inner guarding as the highest goal in Sufism without self-awareness is impossible. Self-awareness means knowing the spiritual/inner aspect. The creation of man is the realization of God's will to manifest Himself. In other words, it can be understood that even though humans are the seventh of the Seven Stages as God's manifestation they are the highest creation.

Thus, the concept of the seventh stage wants to present humans as the most complete creation of God. It is humans who can balance the cosmic system, it is humans who can become the caliphs on earth.²⁶ The reason is, as explained above, even though humans occupy the seventh position, they are the highest creatures in the social line-up of God's creatures. So it should not be a surprise if the burden of becoming the caliph is attributed to humans. Thus, although humans occupy the highest and the most strategic position, they are not trapped in the dichotomy of the coastalistic wahdatul wujud.²⁷

Salik in The Suluk of Seven Dignities of al-Palimbani

In terms of language, suluk is rooted in the word salaka-yasluku which means to travel or to walk the path. In the context of Sufism, the intended

²⁴ Abdul Aziz Dahlan, *Penilaian Teologis atas Paham Wahdat Al-Wujud (Kesatuan Wujud) Tuhan, Alam, Manusia dalam Tasawuf Syamsuddin Sumatrani*, 93.

²⁵ Ahmad Taufik dkk, "KONSEP TEOLOGIS AHLUSUNAH WALJAMAAH DALAM TUHFAH AR-RAAGHIBIIN KARYA ABDUSSAMAD AL-PALIMBANI (SEBUAH KAJIAN FILOLOGIS)," *HALUAN SASTRA BUDAYA* 4, no. 2 (2020): 152–62.

²⁶ Arafah Pramasto, "Idealisme Sosial Kemasyarakatan," *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 20, no. 1 (2020): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsk.v20i1>.

²⁷ Arafah Pramasto, "Kritik Terhadap Pemikiran Kontroversial Bercorak Panteistik di Tengah Umat Islam dalam Karya Syaikh Abdus Shamad Al-Palimbani Abad Ke-18," *SINDANG: Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah Dan Kajian Sejarah* 2, no. 1 (2020): 8–18, <https://doi.org/10.31540/sindang.v2i1.823>.

journey is to follow the path of Allah. The activity is called suluk while the person who is walking the path is called salik. The result of a salik's journey in his suluk is to get close to Allah and to find ma'rifah. Suluk itself is usually done by means of certain spiritual exercises. As if traveling to certain areas on earth.

Answering the problem above, Al-Palimbani describes a path's guide for the seeker is the starting point, and also the ultimate terminal of a human journey. The instructions offered by al-Palimbani related to the paths that will be traversed by the salik along with tickets in the form of books written by the Sufis that can be used as references for each of the stopping points during the long journey, even in the notion of the Seven Stages of al-Palimbani laid out guidelines that are in accordance with the principles taught in Islam.

In Sufism, as explained above, a salik must know and be able to explain Allah's Essence (ahadiyah), Allah's characteristics (Wahdah and Wahidiyah), and Af'al Allah (the spirit realm, the mithal realm, and the ajsam realm). This knowledge aims to find out the return place of every human being after their life in this world.²⁸ In other term, when they want to return safely to His presence, they should learn and practice Sufism, for the best way for a salik is to practice zekr continuously.

Abdel Samad Palimbani explained that the path of Sufism is the path that follows the prophets, the saints, and people who are close to God. The results of a person who performs Tawasuf through the Seven Stages way, for example, will be free from things that are immoral in nature and despicable deeds, both physically and mentally. When a Salik wants to get to Sangkan Paran, he has to go through these stages, first of all, understand the concept of the Seven Stages that had been explained by Shaykh Palimbani with the guidance of the dependable Murshids.

D. Conclusion

Abdul al-Samad al-Palimbani was a well-known Sufi who made the name of Nusantara famous among international scholars. His name echoed all over the world because of his wisdom and the breadth of his knowledge. Philosophical Sufism, which was previously considered controversial among Indonesian Muslims, was re-mixed with the epic idea of uniting the two previous great

²⁸ 'Abd al-Şamad Al-Falimbāni, *Siyar Al-Sālikīn Fi Ṭarīqah Al-Sādāt Al-Şufīyah*, 3rd ed. (Indonesia: Dar Ihya' Al-Kutub Al-'Arabīyah, n.d.), 184.

hymns that were deemed controversial. The idea that was known as the *wahdatul wujud* of al-Palimbani was the idea of The Seven Dignities.

The Seven Stages is a way to know the relationship between man and God. For a Salik to know his relationship with his God in his *suluk*, he must know and implement the concept of The Seven Dignities to know his highest position in this universe. For it is impossible for a human being to ignore the stages that must be trodden by a Salik to be close and united with God. Thus, according to al-Palimbani, a salik must carry out the process of *suluk* to know his true self and to deeply know his God. []

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