

## Shia Influence in the Axiology of Malay Culture

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Abstract: Over the years, there are various research on cultural development seen from socio-historical perspective. The uniqueness of Islam in Malay region as it is diverse and open to outside influences is important to be look at; as it differs greatly from “the Islam” that have been practiced in the Middle East. Based on the discussions, the ulemas or Muslim clerics of this region and the Malays themselves have already practiced the *supra-madhab* model as proposed by many contemporary scholars. Using Shia influences in the Malay culture, this paper attempt to show how sectarianism within Islam was never entertained by the Muslims in this region. In fact, Shi'ism was so embedded in Malay culture. Although being dominated by Sunnism, most of the Shia doctrines and pillars were widely accepted and embraced. The axiology of Shi'ism in Malay culture reflected in many religious texts, classical literature and cultural events. However, as sectarianism rising in this region, the Shia influence and its axiology slowly eroded and were victimized by unnecessary foreign interventions.

Keywords: Shi'ism, sectarianism, Malay Culture, Imam Mahdi, Imam Hussain, Imam Ali, Fatimah, Sufism, Socio-history

### SCHOOL OF THOUGHTS IN ISLAM

Seyyed Hossein Nasr in *Ideals and Realities of Islam* asserted that Islam is a pluralistic religion with diverse traditions. He stated that, “Islam displayed homogeneity, and sectarianism facilitated the participation of a large community with different traditions in Islam.” (Nasr, 1967).

Thus, a definition of Islam that does not favour one *madhab* (school of thought) over another must be supported. This definition of a *supra-madhab* Islam is not something new. According to a traditional *ulama* (Muslim scholar) of the Malay world, Syeikh Daud bin Abdullah al-Fathani in *Warduz Zawahir*, this is an “Islam that does not accord

greater conviction on its own or similar *madhhabs* over the others.” (Syeikh Daud, 1999).

In the same spirit, Taha Jabir Fayyad al-Alwani made an appeal in *The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam*. He proposed the formulation of a methodological framework that takes into account the diversity of Islam (Taha Jabir, 1997).

Meanwhile, according to Abdul al-Majid al-Najjar (1997), “the unity and harmony of a cohesive model that celebrates the diversity of the *ummah* (Muslim community) can be achieved through the use of ‘*aql*’ (intellect), founded on absolute *tawheed* (oneness) for the sake of the Islamic *aqidah* (faith)” (Abdul al-Majid, 1997). The eminent *ulama*, Syeikh Yusuf al-Qaradhawi also emphasised that an attitude of openness in studying differences is necessary (Syeikh Yusuf al-Qaradhawi, 1994: 113).

Furthermore, the luminary of Malay language and literature, Za’ba, in his book *Mencapai Ketinggian Dunia Akhirat* (2009a) had stated the need to discern the strengths of the various *madhhabs* and to use those strengths in order to birth something new.

Za’ba’s other opinions were reflected in the excerpt below, from *Perangai Bergantung Pada Diri Sendiri* (2009b), showing that this supra-*madhhab* idea is not something unusual or impossible to achieve.

Thus it was only the people after, with little exposure, who had constricted this space by ruling that one cannot change one’s *madhhab* to another unless one fully understands the methods of each *madhhab* as well as their own followers do. Although for most of us and our religious folks, the study of the Shafi’i or Hanafi *madhhab* alone would never be entirely complete in our lifetimes. Indeed, these are the views of people with small hearts, narrow minds and low esteem – people who have no hope of advancing independently in the affairs of their religious studies. (Za’ba, 2009b)

This “supra-*madhhab* model” that was propagated by the scholars above could also help to augment the efforts of *taqrib* (rapprochement) between the various schools of thought in Islam by putting the unity of the *ummah* as its focal point.

This was emphasised by the Iranian scholar, Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi in his book that was co-authored by Karim Crow, *Facing One Qiblah: Legal and Doctrinal Aspects of Sunni and Shiah Muslims*, which stated that, “The contemporary context of Islamic unity has brought to the foreground the necessity for a better understanding of all branches of Islamic thought” (Kazemi and Karim, 2005). Meanwhile, the Muslim former Thai Minister

of Foreign Affairs, Surin Pitsuwan stated, in *Imperialism, Globalisation and the Muslim World*, that analysing and reflecting on any particular problem in light of the different *madhhabs* could prevent the Muslim *ummah* from inertia:

A significant advantage of this openness is to enable the *ummah* to move forward and leave the “ancient Islam” which he described as “Islam on their shirtsleeves practising fossilised Islam”. (Pitsuwan, 2003)

In fact, a “supra-*madhhab* model” that transcends all *madhhabs* or schools of thought will enable us to understand the different values, histories, cultures, thinking and ways of life among the *ummah*, that are revealed in their works of art.

The great contribution of the “supra-*madhhab* model” therefore is the impetus to delve into and understand the various methodologies of resolving human issues on community and living that could be imbued into works of literature or art.

This “supra-*madhhab* model” is also in line with verse 103 of Ali Imraan: “And hold firmly, all together, to the rope of Allah and do not become divided.” In other words, if there are any issues of the *ummah* that could not be resolved by existing common frameworks, then there is no wrong in borrowing solutions from other schools of thought.

This “supra-*madhhab*” option allows us to see a broader Islamic framework that is not necessarily pigeonholed into any particular confines.

## THE PHENOMENON OF ISLAM AND SOCIO-HISTORY

Syed Hussein Alatas stressed that to analyse Islam in any district or region requires attention to the social and environmental aspects of the region, the history of the Prophet, the spread of Islam in the region, the study of the Quran and *hadith* (the Prophet’s sayings), as well as philosophy, theology, mysticism, law and history (Alatas, 2007). He outlined what was termed as “socio-history”:

Essentially this socio-historical method is the understanding that every belief, idea of man or major phenomenon should be seen as a fact that possesses an absolute unity with time, place, culture, group and environment, in which such beliefs, ideas or phenomena originate. Thus, to know and understand a particular phenomenon, five questions should be asked:

- i) When did the phenomenon originate ?
- ii) Where ?

- iii) In which culture ?
- iv) Which group is associated with the phenomenon ?
- v) In what environment does the phenomenon occur ?

Before we proceed further, it is necessary to point out that the word phenomenon is used in the widest sense, including also the emergence of a belief or idea. (Alatas, 2007)

The aforementioned “supra-*madhhab* model” was in fact already applied in the Malay world successfully. In this case, the Malay world received outside influence from Shi’ism and took what was best from it. To see the phenomenon of Shia influence in this region, that is, in the Malay culture and how this has integrated within the culture, the aspects socio-history that was emphasised by Syed Hussein Alatas above can be aptly applied.

### SHIA INFLUENCE IN THE MALAY WORLD

According to Nurcholish Madjid, Shia teachings today are seen as a threat in the Malay world because of the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979. Therefore, Shia teachings were cast not only as a religious issue but also a political problem (Madjid, 1989).

Even so, Shi’ism is not foreign to this region. Early missionaries and exponents of Islam in the Malay world believed that Shi’ism was the first to establish itself in this region, based on historiographical accounts, notes and relics. The Alawite Shiites were believed to have arrived in this region at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, after facing intense pressure by the Umayyad Dynasty from the year 674 AD. They arrived in Perlak and Islamised the locals (Musa, 2006). However, according to Hashim Haji Musa in his Keynote Lecture, the influence of Shi’ism declined with the advent of the Sunni missionaries afterwards (Musa, 2006).

A.H. Johns, opined that Islam first arrived in Phanrang (in modern day Vietnam), by citing a French source which referred to a small Muslim community that existed along its coast (Johns, 2002). As Islam in the Malay world is limited to the regions close to Malaysia and Indonesia considering that they are, in the words of A.H. Johns, “the core Islamic areas of the region”, thus the aforementioned case of the presence of Islam in Phanrang, Vietnam draws questions. Johns suggested the possibility that the Muslims referred to in Phanrang were a generation of Shiites (Johns, 2002).

John's assumptions was reinforced by Sayid Alwi al Haddad (1388/1968) who stated that Shia adherents arrived in Southeast Asia through Champa and Vietnam at the time of Al Hajjaj Bin Yusuf al Thaqafi (75 H/695 AD – 95 H/714 AD), an Umayyad ruler who was cruel towards the Shiites. His opinion was based on *Kitab Nukhbah al-Dabr* written by Syaams al Din Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad al Ansari. After settling themselves in Champa and Vietnam, the Shiites then entered the Sila Islands, that comprise Sulu Island, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan in Borneo (Alwi, 1388/1968).

There is also a possibility that the Shiites of Champa and Vietnam were actually a part of the Shiites who moved to China due to pressure from the Umayyads. According to al Nuwairi there was a small group of supporters of the Alawiyyin or Shiites who moved to China during the Umayyad rule (al Nuwairi, 1923-1955).

Thomas Arnold, in his book *The Preaching of Islam*, mentioned an Arabic settlement in the west coast of Sumatera where they had fled the cruelty of Ziyad Bin Abihi (Arnold, 1968). It was believed that these Shiites had also spread Islam in Pasai and Perlak. The descendants of these Shiites had established a Shiite government in Perlak in the year 225 Hijri or 840AD (Hasjmy, 1981).

Furthermore, there are claims of a Shiite government that existed in Muar around the year 1286. Abdul Halim Nasir, in the book *Lembangan Sungai Dalam Peradaban Melayu*, quoted from the book *Tuaniku Rawo* written by Mangaraja Onggang Perlindungan (published in 1964), that allegedly in the year 1286AD, Sultan Muhammad Al Kamil Perkasa Alam who ruled the town of Khalifah in South Aceh had fled to the river basin of Muar when his state was conquered by Pasai, an Islamic kingdom that was founded by Sultan Malik Al Saleh (1265-1297). In Muar, Sultan Muhammad Al Kamil established a Islamic Shiite government, the same *madhhab* that was followed by the rulers of Aru/Berumun, Pasai, and Perlak in northern Sumatra in the year 1295. However, when the Muar Sultanate was destroyed by the Siamese army, Sultan Muhammad Al Kamil and his daughter Princess Ratna Husin escaped and sailed to Aru/Berumun in Sumatra (Nasir, 2007).

In essence, we can acknowledge the existence of Shiites in the Malay world. Nevertheless, it can be said that they are a mysterious group, considering that little is known about who they are.

## WHO ARE THE SHIITES OF THE MALAY WORLD ?

Among the scholars who attempted to unravel the enigma of who the Shiites of the Malay world are, was Jalaluddin Rakhmat. He traced their presence, which according to him originated from the Shi'ites who were attacked by the Abbasids and therefore moved to Yemen. Their leader by the name of Ahmad Muhajir had urged his followers to fight with the pen. Jalaluddin (2000) also stated that "They then dissimulated (*taqiya*) themselves as followers of the Shafi'i *madhhab* in the region of Hadhramaut (Jalaluddin, 2000). According to him, this matter was exposed and recorded in the *al Munjid* dictionary, which explained the word Hadhramaut as "*sukkanuha syi'iyuna syafi'ina'*" or its people as "Shiites who adhere to the Shafi'i *madhhab*". It was the descendants of these *sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet) from Hadhramaut who became missionaries in the Malay world (Jalaluddin, 2000).

Jalaluddin categorised the Shiites of the Malay world into three groups. The first are those who believe that Ali was "the rightful caliph after the passing of the Prophet". He added, "they do not practise Shia rites, but follow the Shia *aqidah* (belief system)". The second group are the practitioners of Shia *fiqh* (jurisprudence), who are the Ja'fari. According to Jalaluddin, they follow the Shia *aqidah* and *fiqh*. Then, there are those who were influenced by the philosophies, *aqidah* and *tasawwuf* (spirituality) associated with Shi'ism, and these are the intellectuals. They use various Shia references. Jalaluddin stated, "they are known to defend Shia teachings". However, Jalaluddin emphasised that this group may not necessarily practise the Ja'fari *fiqh* (Jalaluddin, 2000). Jalaluddin was convinced that the Shia community had already existed in the Malay world, and in the context of his writing, they existed in Indonesia, long before the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979:

I have strong evidence that before the Iranian Islamic Revolution, there were already Shiites in Indonesia, be it the Imamiyyah, the Zaidis, or the Isma'ilis. However at the time, the Shiites were very exclusive, so they did not have the missionary spirit to spread their teachings to others. They held it as their own beliefs. On the outside, they were Sunni followers, accommodating their surroundings. And it could be that among them were the grand *ulamas* who are known as Sunnis. (Jalaluddin, 2000: 149)

After the Iranian Islamic Revolution, there were intellectual groups who were captivated by Shiite philosophers such as Ali Shariati. He deemed

this group of Shiites as the second wave of Shi'ism. According to him, this second wave of Shiites eventually participated in Shia *fiqh* due to the attacks and threats of the Wahhabis:

It was evident then, that due to political considerations and because of Saudi influence, the books that were written to attack Shi'ism proliferated, and its contents were now skewed towards matters of *fiqh* in nature. So there were attacks on the Shia *fiqh*, for example on the concept of *mut'ah*, prostrating on soil, and others. These attacks drove the second wave of Shiites further to learn about Shia *fiqh*. (Jalaluddin, 2000: 150-151)

Jalaluddin continued to explain that the third wave of Shi'ism occurred when Shi'ism was widely spread through thought and *fiqh* to a point where there was a demand to learn about Shia rituals. This led to the beginnings of a group of local Shia *ulamas* who were trained in Qom. Furthermore, according to him, this third wave of Shi'ism was "*fiqh* oriented" (Jalaluddin, 2000: 151). This group was described as "less of an intellectual dimension" and "not very educated". Jalaluddin added that these Shia groups were not necessarily accepting of one another. The second wave of Shiites were in fact rejected by the third wave (Jalaluddin, 2000).

A fundamental teaching of Shi'ism that unites all three categories above, and also adherents of Sunnism is none other than the special position of the Ahl al-Bayt (members of the Prophet's family).

#### THE AHL AL-BAYT WERE ONCE CENTRAL

The tenets of Shi'ism specifically place utmost importance on the purity, sanctity and holiness of the "Ahl al-Bayt", referring to the members of the Prophet's family. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the Ahl al-Bayt still has a significant place in Sunnism. There are many Quranic verses and *hadiths* that could be used as an argument for this statement. This essay will only feature five *hadiths* from three Sunni sources in support of that proposition.

*Hadith* 1477 from *Sahih al-Bukhari* stated that:

Narrated by Abdurrahman bin Abu Laila r.a: Ka'ab bin Ujrah met me and said: "Shall I gift to you a present I got from the Prophet?" I said: "Yes, give it to me!" Then he said: "We asked the Prophet: How should one (ask Allah to) send blessings upon you and your family? For Allah has taught us how to salute you (in prayer)." He said, "Say: O Allah! Send Mercy upon Muhammad and the family of

Muhammad, as You sent Your Mercy upon Abraham and the family of Abraham. For You are the Most Praise-worthy, the Most Glorious. O Allah! Send Your Blessings upon Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, as You sent your Blessings upon Abraham and the family of Abraham. For You are the Most Praise-worthy, the Most Glorious”. (Bukhari, 2002: 201)

*Hadith* 645 from *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal* stated: Fadhl bin Dukain had related to us, Yasin al ‘Ijli told us from Ibrahim bin Muhammad bin al Hanafiah, from his father, Ali r.a, who quoted the Prophet: “Al Mahdi is from us, the Ahl al-Bayt. Allah will set right his affairs in [the course of] one night.” The chain of narration for this *hadith* was verified as *sahih* (authentic) and the phrase *yuslibullahu fi laylatin* in the *hadith* was explained by Ibnu Kathir in *Syarah as Sanadi* as meaning: “Allah will accept his repentance, and give him guidance and inspiration that was not bestowed upon him before.” (Ibn Hanbal and Muhammad Syakir, 2006: 767)

*Hadith* 3871 from *Sunan at-Tirmidhi* related: Mahmud bin Ghailan narrated to us, Abu Usamah told us from Fudhail bin Marzuq from Adi bin Tsabit from al-Bara’ that the Prophet looked at Hasan dan Husayn, then prayed: “Oh Allah! I love them, so love them.” This *hadith* was categorised as *hasan* (good) and *sahih* (authentic) (Mohd Zuhri, 1993: 720).

The appreciation and dedication accorded to the Ahl al-Bayt as shown in the *hadiths* above was not merely because they were the Prophet’s family, but they were also the epitome of religious guidance. This is evident in the following *hadith*, for example:

Nashr bin Abdurrahman al-Kufi related to us, Zayd bin al Hasan – that is, al Anmathi – told us, from Ja’far bin Muhammad, from Ja’far’s father, Muhammad, from Jabir bin Abdullah, he said: I once saw the Prophet performing his Hajj on the day of Arafah, at that time he was giving a sermon on his camel; al Qashwa. I heard him say: “Oh mankind, verily I have left you (something), for as long as you hold firmly to them, thus you will never go astray, that is the book of Allah and my progeny, members of my household.” This is *hadith* number 3,786 in *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, on the primary characteristics of the Prophet’s family. (Nashiruddin al-Albani, 2007: 864)

Since the Ahl al-Bayt occupied a special place of equal emphasis as the Quran in the *hadith*, of course the Quran itself as the revelation of Allah SWT had related the distinction of the Ahl al-Bayt. The following *hadith* demonstrates the “true value” of the Ahl al-Bayt in Islam. This *hadith* can be found in *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, number 3,787 (Nashiruddin al-Albani, 2007: 865).



Qutaibah related to us, Muhammad bin Sulaiman al Ashbahani told us from Yahya bin Ubaid, from ‘Atha’ bin Abu Rabah, from Umar bin Abu Salamah – the Prophet’s stepchild – he said: This verse was revealed to the Prophet, “Verily, Allah only intends to remove from you the impurity [of sin], Oh people of the [Prophet’s] household, and to purify you to your purest,” (al-Ahzab: 33) about his family. He then called Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn, and covered them with clothes. Meanwhile, Ali was behind him, and he too was covered in clothes. He then prayed, “Oh Allah, for they are my family. So remove from them their sins, and purify them to their purest.” Ummu Salamah said, “Am I with them, oh Prophet of Allah.” The Prophet replied, “You are still in your place, and you are still in goodness.”

Both the *hadiths*, characterised as *hasan* (good) and *gharib* (only one source of narration), emphasised that the Quran and the Ahl al-Bayt should never be neglected, while also illustrating who the Ahl al-Bayt refers to.

The above *hadiths*, and many others, clearly accord the highest appreciation to the Ahl al-Bayt, thereby placing their status in an indisputable position.

In light of this, given that the majority of the Malays in the Archipelago are adherents and supporters of Sunnism, it would not be unreasonable to presume that the Malays of this region would also regard the Ahl al-Bayt in their rightful position as was commanded by Allah and the Prophet.

#### THE POSITION AND EXALTATION OF IMAM ALI ACCORDING TO THE MALAYS

Among the efforts carried out by the late Wan Mohd Shaghir Abdullah through the Persatuan Pengkajian Khazanah Klasik Nusantara (Classical Malay Archipelago Heritage Research Union) and Khazanah Fathaniyah (Fathaniyah Heritage) was the gathering of Malay books and manuscripts on the Prophet’s companion and son-in-law, Ali (Shaghir Abdullah, 2004: 95-128).

In the Malay World, Ali’s father, Abu Thalib bin Abdul Muthalib was not considered to have died as an unbeliever. Wan Mohd Shaghir wrote in an article entitled “The Influence and Beliefs of Sayyidina Ali in the Malay World: An Analysis Based on Malay Classical Literature”:

*Ulamas* of the Malay world in the past have mostly taken a position of *tawaqquf* (refrain), as the *hadiths* referring to this issue must still be interpreted according to

*'aqidah* (the fundamental tenets of Islam). Furthermore, past *ulamas* of the Malay world keenly understood the dispute on the *hadiths* relating to this issue, where the Sunni and Shia versions of the *hadiths* were at odds. It is different from this age, where several preachers without much assessment, without interpretation of context, are bold enough to adjudge Abu Thalib as an infidel based on *hadiths* that are, according to them, authentic. (Shaghir Abdullah, 2004: 96-97)

In fact, once upon a time in the Malay world, Ali was referred to by the title of Imam, namely as “*Imam masyariq wal maghrib*” or “Imam of the entire east and west”. According to Wan Mohd Shaghir Abdullah (2004), the appellation “*Imam masyariq wal maghrib*” was usually mentioned in the second Friday sermon but this practice was diminished by the Kaum Muda (The Puritan) movement.

Wan Mohd Shaghir Abdullah (2004) wrote, “an appellation that was very distinct for Saiyyidina Ali K.W.” was:

*Imam Masyariq wal Maghrib*, meaning Imam of the entire east and west. This appellation had never existed for any other companion except him. Before the advent of the Islamic revival era (Kaum Muda) in the Malay world, that phrase would always be mentioned in the second sermon of every Friday. To this day, in several places within the Malay world where the influence of the Kaum Muda/revival movement has yet to pervade, it is still used in the second sermon of every Friday. (Shaghir Abdullah, 2004: 102)

Wan Mohd Shaghir Abdullah then continued that the eminent *ulama* of Patani, Syeikh Daud bin Abdullah al-Fathani quoted a *hadith* that was narrated by Ali ibnu Musa originating from his father Musa and then from his grandfather, Jaafar, then from Baqir, then Zainal Abidin and continuing on from Husayn then directly from Ali, that he heard the Prophet say that *iman* (faith) is the conviction of the heart, admission by the tongue and practice of the tenets.

It is important to understand the *hadith* above as cited by Syeikh Daud bin Abdullah al-Fathani, as the Ali ibnu Musa that was mentioned there is the “Ali ibnu Musa of Nisabur”, who is undoubtedly the figure referred to by the Imamiyyah Shiites of Iran as Imam Redza, whose tomb lies in Mashhad (Syeikh Daud, 1999: 107).

Is this a small sign of ambiguity of the *madhhab* held by the Malays? By deeming the narration of Ali ibnu Musa as a *hadith*, this points to something larger that is not only confined to the Sunni *madhhab*. Would this mean that the Malays have long practised a supra-*madhhab* model in their lives?

## THE POSITION AND EXALTATION OF SAYYIDATINA FATIMAH ACCORDING TO THE MALAYS

In the year 1908, Richard James Wilkinson, an administrator, scholar of the Malay language and historian, had written a note with the title “The Incident of Malay Life” (Wilkinson, 1957). Wilkinson, the acting British Resident of Negeri Sembilan in 1910 and Colonial Secretary between the years 1911 to 1916 was an admirer of Malay culture and customs. One of the old traditions that he managed to record was the “Dondang Siti Fatimah”, which according to Wilkinson was used as a lullaby. This tradition was said to be widely practised in the state of Perak and was sung on the fortieth day of a baby’s life.

The Dondang Siti Fatimah that was documented in 1908 comprised ten stanzas:

Whoever has flakes of paddy,  
Upland rice flakes in the middle;  
Whoever has the heart of a believer,  
The believing heart is the palace of Allah.

Upland rice flakes in the middle,  
Healing stone at the fabric’s base;  
The believing heart is the palace of Allah,  
Enter the paradise of *jannatu’-n-naim* (Garden of Delight).

Healing stone at the fabric’s base,  
People cooking rice under the santol tree;  
Enter the paradise of *jannatu’-n-naim* (Garden of Delight),  
This is the child of the Prophet.

People cooking rice under the santol tree,  
A salver filled with tin;  
This is the child of the Prophet,  
The one named Siti Fatimah.

A salver filled with tin,  
The tin is forged by Undang;  
The one named Siti Fatimah,  
She who is skilled at composing.

The tin is forged by Undang,  
Shoots of winter melon are sweet and sour;  
She who is skilled at composing,  
The child goes to sleep, don’t cry.

Shoots of winter melon are sweet and sour,  
Pterococcus along the rice field;  
The child goes to sleep, don't cry,  
Fatimah is composing a flower.

Pterococcus along the rice field,  
People toiling in the paddy;  
Fatimah is composing a flower,  
Filling the headdress of Ali.

People toiling in the paddy,  
Tapping knife at the end of the pole;  
Filling the headdress of Ali,  
Seeking the audience of the Prophet.

Tapping knife at the end of the pole,  
Please scythe away at its roots;  
Seeking the audience of the Prophet,  
To ask for Dzu'l-fikar (Wilkinson, 1957: 84)

When analysed, the content of “Dondang Siti Fatimah” was meant to introduce the family of the Prophet, namely Sayyidatina Fatimah and her husband, Sayyidina Ali to the younger generation. As such, we find the lyrics or words in this lullaby relating Fatimah and her husband with the “heart of the believer,” the “healing stone,” “entering the paradise of *jannatu'n-naim*,” “skilled at composing (flowers),” “seeking the audience of the Prophet” and ultimately, so that the child would “not cry”.

“Dondang Siti Fatimah” was not simply sung. This tradition of putting the child to sleep with a lullaby would be celebrated with recitations of “Hikayat Nabi” (Tales of the Prophet). Therefore, “Dondang Siti Fatimah” was only the opening performance. The reading of “Hikayat Nabi” will further explain the relationship between Fatimah and the Prophet, and the importance of Ali's position, where the lullaby concluded with the words “Dzu'l-fikar”, which is the sword of Ali.

The “Hikayat Nabi” which narrates the story of Muhammad's prophecy from the very beginning, would end with the Prophet's prayer for Hasan and Husayn, his grandchildren whose tragedy would divide the *ummah*. Hasan and Husayn were the Prophet's grandchildren from the lineage of Fatimah and Ali. An excerpt of “Hikayat Nabi” reads as follows:

So Fatimah Zahra returned to ask the Prophet for clothes, then our Prophet beseeched God's presence, thus Gabriel descended bearing three kinds of clothes.

The Prophet gave Amir Husayn red clothes portending a person being poisoned by King Yazid; blue clothes were given to Amir Hasan portending death by beheading in the field of Karbala; white clothes were given to Muhammad Ali Hanafiyyah presaging the revenge for his siblings. Thus the three went back to Ali. He saw his children wearing all three, accompanied by Fatimah Zahra. (Jumsari *et al.*, 1984: 26-34)

“Muhammad Ali Hanafiyyah” in the above passage is known by the Malays through “Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah” (Tales of Muhammad Hanafiyyah). The significance of “Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah”, a text that is steeped in Shia teachings, cannot be denied among the Malay community of old. This tale was read by nobilities and warriors of the Malacca palace even before 1511. In fact, the Malacca palace placed such high importance on “Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah” at a crucial time to rally the fighting spirit and courage of the Malaccan army in confronting the Portuguese soldiers on the night of the attack led by Alfonso d’ Albuquerque. Taken from “*Sejarah Melayu*” (The Malay Annals):

So Tun Muhammad Unta replied, “Indeed it is true, as you gentlemen have said; therefore, Tun Indera Segara go forth and request for Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah, present it so that they may take heed, for the Portuguese will strike tomorrow”. (Ahmad, 2003: 268)

The fact that they spent this crucial night before fighting their enemy preparing themselves with “Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah”, which is laden with Shia dogma, cannot be simply ignored.

Meanwhile, Wendy Mukherjee (2005), a researcher of traditional Malay literature at the Australian National University, who has extensively gathered and researched ancient manuscripts on Fatimah, had made a conclusion on why Fatimah disappeared from the minds of the Malays.

In an academic article entitled “Fatimah in Nusantara”, Mukherjee opined that the name Fatimah was erased from ancient literature (in this case, Dondang Siti Fatimah is an oral literature) due to the process of de-Shi’itisation over three hundred years between the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. This process had whitewashed any signs of veneration by the Malays towards the family of the Prophet (Mukherjee, 2005). It was very successful. A hundred years later, since 1908, the Malays had become less acquainted with Fatimah’s contributions, and the story of her life was expunged by a wave of extreme aversion towards the exaltation of the Prophet’s family such as Fatimah and Ali. The Malays had also ceased to read “Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah” in the month of Muharram, and have altogether forgotten the tragedy of Karbala.

The genesis of this de-Shi'itisation process, as mentioned by Wan Mohd Shaghir (2004) earlier, had originated from the Kaum Muda (The Puritan) movement.

#### THE POSITION AND EXALTATION OF IMAM MAHDI ACCORDING TO THE MALAYS

The third venerated figure from the Prophet's family is Imam Mahdi. The position and exaltation of Imam Mahdi according to the Malays is very interesting. It also proves the ambiguity of the *madhhab* practised by the Malays.

Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari was an eminent Sunni *ulama* of the Malay world in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His grandfather was of Hadhramaut origins but lived in Morocco. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this family moved to the Philippines and later resided in Banjarmasin. Muhammad Arsyad was born on 17 March 1710, and furthered his studies in Mecca and Egypt. He was also known as a close friend of another *ulama* of the Malay Archipelago, Syeikh Abd al-Samad al-Palimbani. Both were adherents of the al-Khalwatiyyah *tariqa* (Sufi order).

The late al-Banjari wrote about 10 books in various fields. However, only 5 of his books have been found. One of his most famous books is *Sabil al-Muhtadin*, a book on *fiqh* that had become a source of reference in the Malay Archipelago in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This book was written by the decree of Sultan Tahmidullah. Aside from that, he also wrote *Kitab Usuluddin* about the Twenty Attributes, which was never found, *Kitab al-Nikah* on marital issues, and *Kitab al-Fara'id* on the division of inheritance.

His writing that will be discussed here is *al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi' Alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntaẓar* (Arsyad al-Banjari 1994). What is intriguing is that, as a Sunni, this writing characterised Imam Mahdi in congruence to Shia beliefs. This book, beyond its title, is not filled with debates on Imam Mahdi, who is the saviour at the end of times. But what dominated its discourse are the signs of the Apocalypse. Hence, this essay will not discuss the futuristic and sensational matters contained in this book. This means that the discussions regarding who the *Sufyani*, *Yajuj and Majuj* (Gog and Magog) are, the second coming of Jesus or what the *Dajjal* (Antichrist) is, and so forth will not be featured here.

The discussion on Imam Mahdi was only highlighted at the beginning of *al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi' Alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntaẓar*. According to al-

Banjari (1994), he arranged the contents of the book based on several publications of *ulamas* before him, which among others were the writings of Sayid Jaafar Barzanji, Syeikh ‘Abd Qadir al-Qalihi, Syeikh Ibn Hajar al-Haitami and Syeikh Kisa’i (Arsyad al-Banjari, 1994: 177).

Al-Banjari referred to al-Mahdi as “al Muntazar” or the awaited Mahdi. This is an epithet of Imam Mahdi that is common among the Shiites. Imam Mahdi was also said to have been born, and is waiting to appear or emerge. According to al-Banjari “thus on the tenth day of the month of Muharram, Imam Mahdi will appear, as was foretold” (Arsyad al-Banjari, 1994: 185).

Shiites believe with conviction that Imam Mahdi was born on 15 Sha‘bān 255 AH, equivalent to 869AD. In other words, Imam Mahdi was already born and is still alive while awaiting his time to reappear.

In this case, the beginning of *al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi’ Alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar* attempted to explain the signs of his appearance. Al-Banjari in fact stressed the situation of Imam Mahdi as: “Imam Mahdi is in a state of existence (*manjud*) right now as there are no encumbrances (*mani*) on the advancement of his age till the coming of the time that was promised (*ma’bud*)” (Arsyad al-Banjari, 1994: 182).

In *al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi’ Alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar*, Imam Mahdi was also seen as a *mujtahid* (an authority of Islamic law) or *faqih* (jurist), which does not correlate with any of the four *madhhabs* of the Sunni doctrine. Furthermore, Imam Mahdi according to al-Banjari is also *ma’soum* (free and protected from sin):

and he does not defer to any of the (previous) *mujtahids*, the four imams or others, for he is half of all *mujtahids* and manifests it from religion. Whatever that is in its essence (*nafs al-amr*), should the Prophet be alive would have been judged the same, and it follows the *athar* (traditions) of the Prophet with no errors, for with him is an angel to right his deeds. (Arsyad al-Banjari, 1994: 186).

Al-Banjari emphasised the re-emergence of Imam Mahdi as not merely a *‘jabir*, that is “one who comforts and corrects” the destruction among the *ummah* of Prophet Muhammad but also as one who is “harsh against all who are arrogant (*takabbur*) and cruel” (Arsyad al-Banjari, 1994: 178-179).

It was also foretold that Imam Mahdi would end the evil campaign and slander towards the family of the Prophet who are referred to as the “Ahl al-Bayt”; “and through him Allah Ta’ala destroys all the slander, and all those who are evil till not a single one of them is left who despises the family of the Prophet” (Arsyad al-Banjari. 1994: 187-188).

Al-Banjari's statement above relates closely to his statement on the enemies of the Prophet's grandchildren, specifically in this case, Sayyidina Husayn who was martyred in Karbala. Al-Banjari then continued to relate the Sufyani, who will be kings before the Apocalypse, with the descendants of the slanderers of the Ahl al-Bayt:

And it was said in the book of *Iqd al-Durr* that the Sufyani are of the children of Khalid, son of Yazid, son of Abi Sufyani – may Allah curse them from the heavens and earth – and they are the most helped by Allah Ta'ala. Thus Allah Ta'ala bestows mercy upon all His slaves across the land with the appearance of Imam Mahdi' (Arsyad al-Banjari, 1995: 184).

Al-Banjari's stance above is very similar to the Shia view against the enemies or haters of the Prophet's family.

The presence of Shiite elements on the Mahdi highlighted by al-Banjari leads to several unanswered questions. Was al-Banjari a Shiite *ulama* who was dissimulating himself (*taqiya*) as a Sunni, or was he a Sunni *ulama* who was open to adopting Shia sources. Both are possible, based on his propositions. In addition, why did he compose or arrange the book in such a manner considering that his audience was from the Malay world, when all the pre-apocalyptic turmoil highlighted here would take place in the Middle East. Was his reason for doing so merely because the belief in the Apocalypse is part of the tenets of faith? Or was he already practising a supra-*madhhab* model as well?

Among the foremost historians and researchers of this text is the former lecturer of the Department of History at the National University of Malaysia, Mahayudin Hj Yahaya who noted that the book is saturated with Shia teachings. He mentioned in his research *Naskhab Jawi: Sejarah dan Tekes* (Jawi Books: History and Text) that; "there were many *hadiths* that were *da'if* (weak, or *maudu'* meaning fabricated), taken from the Shiites, especially *hadiths* about Imam Mahdi, as according to Shia teachings, the awaited Mahadi (al-Muntazar) would be among the Shia Imams' (Mahayudin Hj Yahaya, 1994: 71).

It is possible that al-Banjari was not ignorant of the position of the *hadiths* he quoted. In the Shia *madhhab*, there are no categorisations of *hadiths* as *daif* (weak) or *sahih* (authentic) as there are in the Sunni *madhhab*. It could be that al-Banjari was aware of this Shia *hadith* and had deliberately selected it as his reference, or otherwise.

In actuality the figure of Imam Mahdi in *al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi' Alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar* was still rooted in Sunni teachings although much of



his characterisation was similar to Shia teachings. This can be deduced from the fact that like other Sunni eschatological narratives, the killer of the *Dajjal* (Antichrist) is Jesus, whereas in the Shia narratives the killer would be Imam Mahdi (Filiu, 2009).

In the Sunni world, referring to Shia historical sources regarding Imam Mahdi is not a foreign concept. In the year 1250, the Shafi'i *ulama* from Syria, Muḥammad Yusuf al-Gandji al-Kurashi wrote *al-Bayan fi akhbār sahib al-ẓaman* to prove the verity of the Shiite Mahdi as according to Shia tradition or historical accounts. Meanwhile in 1252, Kamalal-Din Muḥammad Talha al-ʿAdawi al-Nisibini, another Shafi'i *ulama* authored the *Matalib al-suʿul fi manakib al al-rasul* to address the dispute by some Sunni followers who rejected the notion that Imam Mahdi would be the twelfth imam of the Shiites (Madelung, 1986).

This means that the *ulamas* are in agreement on the existence of Imam Mahdi, thus the Mahdi himself is *supra-madhab*. I have written about how the exaltation of Imam Mahdi is also practised among the Javanese, that he is a figure referred to as Ratu Adil (King of Justice). Ratu Adil is also known by the appellation Satria Piningit, which means a leader of nobility, resoluteness and valour. This is a leader who is unselfish nor puts his kith and kin first, but looks after the needs and interests of the common folk (Tehrani, 2017).

To reiterate, the elusiveness of the discourse on Imam Mahdi and the marginalisation of the *al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi' Alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar* were the ramifications of de-shiatisation. Profesor Martin van Bruinessen once posited that the extinction of Shia elements from the writings of Sunni *ulamas* of the Malay Archipelago today is closely related to the rise of the Puritans (the Wahhabis) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the emergence of the Naqshbandi *tariqa* who were more inclined to the *sharia* (Islamic law) compared to other *tariqas* (van Bruinessen, 2018). This is different to the *tariqa* beliefs of al-Banjari and his great companion al-Palimbani, who were of the al-Khalwatiyyah *tariqa*.

Imam Mahdi was depicted as an active figure, non-trivial and uncompromising towards injustice. Jean-Pierre Filiu, a professor at the Paris School of International Affairs (PSIA) in his research “The Return of Political Mahdism,” coined the term “political Mahdism” to show how the Shia world had turned it into a driving force for progressiveness aside from refuting the strength of their enemies (Filiu, 2009). Jean-Pierre Filiu (2009) emphasized that the belief of Imam Mahdi as a “well

oriented leader” supplies the Shiites with motivation and a destination. In other words, the disappearance of Imam Mahdi from the minds of the Malay believers had opened the door to organisational chaos, de-motivation and a loss of *badaf* (direction).

An importance of the Malay eschatological narratives such as *al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi' Alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar* is to mentally and psychologically prepare the *ummah* to fight against oppression and injustice, not only from the powers of the *Sufyani*, the *Dajjal* (Antichrist), or *Yajuj and Majuj* (Gog and Magog) but also they who possess the characteristics of these entities today, whether they exist in the form of an oppressive system or an insatiable dictator.

### SUMMARY

The development of Islam as seen from a socio-historical perspective illustrates the uniqueness of Islam in this region as it is diverse and open to outside influences. Based on the discussions above, the *ulamas* of this region and the Malays have already practised the supra-*madhhab* model as proposed by many contemporary scholars of today.

However, to give a fairer perspective, Mahayudin Hj Yahya questioned and belittled the knowledge and ability of the past Malay *ulamas* by asserting that they failed to detect the Shia influences hence inadvertently incorporating Shia doctrines into their books, thus influencing Malay culture:

If we look into the discourse pertaining to the various aspects of religion, especially in the field of *usuluddin* (Islamic fundamentals) that are contained within Malay literature, we can clearly see not only the infiltration of foreign influences, but also the obvious acceptance and acknowledgement by the *ulamas*, including Shia teachings from foreign influences that were said to have long taken root in this region. But unfortunately, the Sunni *ulamas* seemed unaware of this situation, in fact they accepted and acknowledged them as their own truths. This is among the reasons why many researchers of Malay literature on Islam have not given enough due attention and consideration to foreign (non-Sunni) elements that have influenced the minds of Sunni *ulamas*, thus influencing the religious thinking and practices of the Malays to this day. (Mahayudin Hj Yahya, 1994: 2-3)

The tone of the excerpt above is accusatory towards the Shiites. The usage of the word “unfortunately” and Shia as a “foreign influence” shows that the scholar failed to recognise the real intent of the past Malay *ulamas* by deliberately centering on an Islamic teaching that is diverse and had taken into account the good influences of other *madhhabs*.

The exaltation of the Prophet's family or Ahl al-Bayt who are central to Shia teachings clearly also has its appropriate place within the Sunni *madhhab*, and this is not something new. As stated by Wan Mohd Shaghbir (2004), the Shia *madhhab* only became problematic after the Kaum Muda (The Puritan) movement gained its hold over the region, particularly in Malaysia.

Stronger foreign influences from the Salafi movement that has its roots in Saudi Arabia and Jordan had later exacerbated the fearmongering of elements or teachings with Shia undertones within the Malay culture, such that Shia influences were gradually diminished or abandoned (Bakar, 2007).

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