

The Sufism of Abū Al-Qāsim Al-Qusyairī

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to explain concepts of Sufism by Abū al-Qāsim al-Qusyairī, by focusing on explaining his thoughts. It uses qualitative methods based on historical social approaches. By the time of al-Qusyairī's life (376 H / 986 M-465 H / 1073 AD), Sufism was considered to have been deviated from the Qur'an, the hadith, and the religious tradition of the earlier generation of pious Muslims (salaf al-shālih), especially after the rise of the concept of ittihad (union) and hulul (confluence) along with its syathahāt (bewildered utterance). Besides, some Sufism tends to shy away from sharia (Islamic jurisprudence). Al-Qusyairī is a Sufi figure and thinker who wants to return the teachings of Sufism to the Qur'an, the hadith, religious traditions of the salaf al shālih, and especially to the assumed authentic theology (tawhid) of the Sunni school (Ahl al-Sunnah aw al-Jama'ah). This paper concludes that the teachings of Sufism by Al-Qusyairī, as stated in his work "al-Risālah al-Qusyairīyyah fi 'Ilm al-Tashawwuf", likely focus on introducing terms of Sufism such as maqāmāt (stations), al-ahwāl (states), al-karāmāt (grace), and on classical Sufi figures.

Keywords: Sufism, Sharia, haqiqa (reality), maqāmāt (stations), and Sufistic terms

1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are made up of two aspects: physical and spiritual entities, as it is stated by the Qur'an in its explanation about the creation of human. The physical aspect is linked to elements of earth, and the spiritual is directly to God. What is directly linked to God is considered to possess a sort of nobility. The nobility of a spiritual aspect lies in its sacredness; and to achieve this level, one needs to make the so called *laku spiritual*, or spiritual exercises.

In Islam, *laku spiritual* is often referred to as sufism. Sufism, like the human heart, is the source of inner life and the center for the whole orchestration of Islam as religion. If Islam is a human's body, Sufism is its heart. That is why defenders of Sufism argue that Sufism is the heart of Islam.[1]

The development of Sufism in Islam has undergone several phases. *Firstly*, it is called as *zuhud* phase (*asceticism*). This phase began in the first and beginning of the second century of *Hijra*, as a reaction to political conflicts in Muslim society after the assassination of the caliph of Uthman ibn Affan and a civil war between Ali and Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan (the *Shiffin* war), which resulted to a split in Muslim society. As such has caused many people to avoid getting involved in political issues, seen as detrimental to one's piety. Apart from that, it was also a reaction to the lavish and exaggerated lifestyle of some of the rulers and authorities of the Umayyad dynasty, after the expansion of Islam to Syria, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia.[2]

Secondly, the phase in which the appearance of two distinct schools of Sufism in the third and fourth centuries *Hijrah*. They are, firstly, the school of *sunni* Sufism. Followers of this school enclosed their Sufism closely to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and followed the practice of *al-Salaf al-Shālih*. Secondly, the school of *semi-philosophical* Sufism. Figures and followers of this school tend to express *syathahāt* (bewildered utterance), and they recognized various *maqāms* (stations) of a spiritual experience, ranging from *maqām fanā'* (station of disappearance) to *maqām hulul* (station of confluence).[3] Thirdly, the phase in the fifth century *Hijrah*, in which the first school of Sufism developed exponentially, while in the contrary, the second school began to disappear, and was to be reborn in the sixth and seventh century *Hijra* in a different form and by a different Sufi-philosopher figure. The disappearance of the semi-philosophical Sufism was perhaps due to widespread accusation that the school is at odds with sharia law, and its leaders such as al-Hallāj, because of such accusation, was assassinated. This has in turn led to the prohibition of Sufism of this school, and many people walked away from Sufism.

Therefore, Sufism of the fifth century tended to carry out some renewals, that is, by returning its teachings to the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Among the most prominent Sufi figures of this century was Abū al-Qāsim al-Qusyairī, who tried to return the teachings of Sufism to the essence and foundation of Islam (the Qur'an and the Sunnah), through his great work entitled, *al-Risālah al-Qusyairīyyah fi 'Ilm al-Tashawwuf*. His importance, according to Al-Taftāzānī,

is due to its attempt of reforming the teachings of Sufism, which was then followed by al-Ghazālī.[4]

Obviously, he was the one who defended Sufism from those who regarded it incompatible with the sharia law, and made it popular again throughout the Islamic world. Because of such roles of al-Qusyairī, this paper attempts to explore his ideas on how to integrate Sufism with sharia law, and to examine the extent to which his Sufistic teachings are shaped by the social conditions in which he lived.

This paper is consisted of three parts. In the beginning, we will explain briefly the biography of al-Qusyairī, and after that explore the socio-political and intellectual conditions that become the backgrounds of his life. In the last part of the paper, we will examine the thoughts of al-Qusyairī and his teachings of Sufism, by putting them in the contexts of his biographical accounts and socio-political backgrounds.

2. SOCIO HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AL-QUSYAIRI'S LIFE

2.1. A Short Biography

The full name of al-Qusyairī is "Abd al-Karīm Abū al-Qāsim al-Qusyairī. His lineage was 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin ibn Abd al-Mu'kbin Thalhah Ibn Muhammad. He was born in the month of Rabbi al-Awwal (unspecified date), 376 H / 986 AD, in Astawā, and had passed away on Sunday morning, 16th Rabi' al-Akhir, 465 H / 1073 AD, in Naghābur, the capital of Khurasan, at the age of 87.[5], [6] Furthermore, al-Qusyairī had received a number of titles, such as *al-Imām*, *al-Ustādz al-Shaykh*, *Zain al-Islām*, *al-Jami 'bain al-Syarī'ahwa al-Haqīqah*, and many more. These titles indicate the high position of al-Qusyairī in his society, especially in relation to his expertise in Islamic knowledge and Sufism.[5]

When al-Qusyairī was growing up, he migrated to the Nishapur area, one of the centers of science in Khurasan at that time. It was here that he met Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq, a famous Sufi master. Al-Qusyairī always attended his teacher's lecture, and from that teacher, he learned and deepened his knowledge about Sufism. Yet, before pursuing the Sufism lesson, his teacher urged him to study shar'a. Therefore, al-Qusyairī studied Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) with a fiqh scholar, Abū Bakr Muhammad Ibn Abū Bakr al-Thīsī, and studied the science of *kalām* (theology) and *ushūl fiqh* (basic principles of Islamic jurisprudence) to Abū Bakr Ibn Fārūq. Besides, he also studied *ushūluddīn* (sciences of basic religion) to Abū Ishāq al-Farayānī, especially about *aqidah* (theology) of the school of Imām Abū al-Hasan al-Asy'arī.[5]

In the area of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), al-Qusyairī was the follower of *al-Syāfi'*, referring to a fiqh school founded Al-Imām Muhammad Ibn Idrīs al-Syāfi'ī. In the area of theology, he was an adherent of al-Asy'arī, referring to Al-Imām Abū al-Hasan al-Asy'arī. It means that al-Qusyairī is one of the strongest defenders of the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa*

al-Jamā'ah theology (the Sunni school), and he was an opponent of the Mu'tazilah and Syi'ah (the Shi'ite) school.[3] As a result of his confrontation with both the Mu'tazilah dan Syi'ah schools, al-Qusyairī was put pressure and was put in jail by Tughril Bek for the report of al-Kunduri, a *saljuk* prime minister who belonged to Mu'atazilah theology.

2.2. Political and Intellectual Conditions

Al-Qusyairī spent much of his life in Nishapur. At that time, Nishapur was under the rule of the Buwaihi Dynasty. This dynasty was ruling in the capital of Bani Abbas, Baghdad, from 915 M-1055.M/334 H-447.H.[7] This dynasty was a loyal adherent to the Shi'ite Islam. In the field of the theology, Shi'ite has the same basic understanding as that of the Mutazilah school. Therefore, it can be concluded that during the reign of the Buwaihi Dynasty, the Mu'tazilah theology had the opportunity to develop again, although they had been outclassed by the popularity of the al-Asy'arī school of theology (*Ahl al-Sunnahwa al-Jamā'ah*).[8]

The religious mission of Baghdad's ruling government, during the Buwaihi era, seemed to have diminished. This is due to the difference between the *madzhab* (school) of the caliphs and the amirs (local governors) of the Buwaihi dynasty. Nevertheless, the Buwaihi dynasty did not completely destroy the remnant of Sunnī influences in Baghdad from the Abbasid era. This is because the Buwaihi is loyal adherents of the Zaidiyah Shiite school, a sub-school in the Shiites that recognizes the leadership of the caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar, and Utsman. These caliphs were considered as *mafḍhul* leaders, not *afḍhal* leaders among the Shiite Muslims.[9]

However, rulers of the Buwaihi dynasty only recognized the theology school of the caliphs of Baghdad. While in practice, they enforced the practice of Shiite ritual ceremonies inside the palace. As a way to unite the two dynasties, it was decided that the 10th of Muharram (*al-'Āsyūra*) is a day of national mourning to commemorate the death of Imam Hussein as a *syāhid* (martyr).[10] Also, The Bawaihi dynasty forbade mentioning the name of the caliph of the Abbasid dynasty in the Friday sermon, and was replaced by the name of the caliph of the Buwaihi dynasty.[10]

One positive fact about the period of the Buwaihi dynasty in Baghdad was that the development of science had progressed quite rapidly, compared to the previous period.[11] During the Buwaihi period, there were cultural and science centers, which become the center of attention among the scholars, such as Bashrah and Kufah. But, one of the most important in the field of philosophy is the emergence of philosophy studies centers. For example, Bashrah had become the center of the congregation of *Ikhwān al-Shafā*, a group of renowned philosophers of the fourth century Hijra.[12] They loyally adhered to the Shiite theology and received a great honor from the Buwaihi dynasty.

If before the third century Hijra, the use of the term “the *zuhhād* community” was widespread in society, but in the third and fourth centuries of Hijra, the term was not used anymore. The more commonly used term were now the Sufi people. They liked to develop and discuss previously unknown concepts in Sufism. While many of these Sufis were still referring to the Qur'an and the Sunnah for their foundation of Sufistic thoughts, a few of them have walked away from both texts, some even completely ignored the rules the concept of sharia law.

Thus in the fifth century, they made a renewal of returning Sufism to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and re-combining between Sufism and sharia. And it is Al-Qusyairī who had been in the front line of this renewal movement in Sufism. There is an ample reason why al-Qusyairī persistently sought to return the teachings of Sufism to the fundamentals of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, or to combine Sufism and Shari'a together. This is because he was a loyal follower of the Sunni school. As a loyal adherent of the Sunni, his main ambition is to return the fundamental teachings of Sufism, into Sufism of the Sunni, which is different from that of the Shiite school. Not the least, there were also a tendency among the Sufis to ignore the sharia altogether.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Al- Qusyairīs Thoughts and Teachings of Sufism

Al-Qusyairī was one of the main Sufi figures in the fifth century Hijra. The position of al-Qusyairī is very important, especially because of his works entitled “*al-Risālah al-Qusyairīyyah*” which discussed Sufi figures and their teachings of the *Sunnī* school living in the third and fourth centuries Hijra. This means the book has conserved the teachings of Sufism at that time, both from the theoretical and practical aspects.

The teachings of Sufism of al-Qusyairī tend to return Sufism to the fundamentals of the Sunni school, namely the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the tradition of the early generation of Muslim scholars (*salaf al-shālih*). This is because the teachings of *ittihād*, *hulūl*, and expressions of *syathahāt*, had been developed widely by that time. According to Ibn Taymiyyah as quoted by Layli Mansur, that the book of *al-Risālah* by al-Qusyairī was compiled to reject influences of the teachings of *hulūl* and *ittihād*, which were considered detrimental to Islam.[12]

According to al-Qusyairī, the teachings of the Sufism must be based on a true understanding of *tawhid* (the belief in God's oneness), so that Sufism can be freed from heresy and superstitions.[5] Al-Qusyairī states the true *tawhid* is a *tawhid* that is based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah. He also states that a *tawhid* that is not justified by the Qur'an and the Sunnah is a denial of Allah the God, and as such is not *tawhid*. Every *ma'rifah* (act of seeing) to God that is not

followed by humility and sincerity of the soul, is false and thus, as such is not *ma'rifah*. [3]

Al-Qusyairī's statement above implicitly shows his rejection to the *Syathahī* Sufi, or a Sufi whose speaking is claimed to be a combination between the divine and human characters, or widely know as *syathahāt*. This claim is considered by al-Qusyairī as an understanding that contradicts the true *tawhid*. Moreover, expression of an extreme *syathahāt* is often (miss)understood as the confluence between the Sufi's soul and the God in the Sufi's physical body, such as what was popularly expressed by al-Hallaj; “*Ana al-Haqq*” (I am *al-Haqq*, or God), and that of AbūYazīd's: *Subhānī, Subhānī, ma A'zhamā Sya`nī*” (glory to me, glory to me, my shape is the greatest).[2] To an extent, the *syathahāt* expression, esoterically, can be understood as an expression of the unconscious Sufi, triggered by the powerful and overwhelming divine experience. Yet, al-Qusyairī opted to understand the *syathahāt* from a theological and sharia point of view.

In his *al-Risālat al-Qusyairīyyah fī 'Ilm al-Tashawwuf*, al-Qusyairī has explained in details his thoughts on the teachings of Sufism. They are examined as follows:

3.1.1. The first:

As a preface, al-Qusyairī presented a topic on the basics of faith, which is called *tawhid*, arguing that the true *tawhid* is fundamental to the correctness of the teachings of the Sufi. In this section, al-Qusyairī explains the concept of *ma'rifah*, the attribute of God, on faith, and others.[5] Additionally, al-Qusyairī states that to reach *ma'rifah*, the first obligation of a servant is to have a correct *tawhid*, that is a *tawhid* that does not have any elements of *bid'ah* (heresy).[13] A sanctity of a worship is only possible to achieve through the true *tawhid*. [5] This is the kind of *tawhid* that becomes the foundation of the Sufism teachings among the Sunni Sufi masters.[5]

Ma'rifah means seeing the God, here Allah: that Allah is the only One. The One who is neither born or giving birth, has neither a match or a spare, has neither resemblance, or can be resembled, has neither a shape or a similarity, and is not similar to anything. To know God, a servant must know His creation, how he was created: then he knows the Creator. People who do not know the *makhliq* (creature), will never know the *khāliq* (creator). This statement is a reflection of a proverb “*Who does not know himself, will not be able to know his Lord*”.

3.1.2. The Second:

A discussion of terms commonly used in the Sufism (*mushthalāhāt al-tashawwuf*), such as, *al-Waqt*, *al-Maqām*, *al-Hāl*, *al-Qabdh wa al-Basth*, *al-Haibah wa al-Uns*, *al-Tawājjud wa al-Wujūd wa al-Wujūd*, *al-Jam' wa al-Farq*, *al-Fanā' wa al-Baqā'*, *al-Ghabah wa al-Hudhūr*, *al-*

Shawu wa al-Sakr, al-Dzauq wa al-Syarb, al-Mahwu wa al-Itsbat, al-Sitru wa al-Tajalli, etc.

Therefore, Al-Qusyairī explained the terms of the Sufism in detail in 27 words by commenting on the Sufis. The terms commonly used by the Sufis are presented by al-Qusyairī in a complete and quite comprehensive form. These terms seem rather difficult to be interpreted because they are of Sufi expressions having derived from their spiritual experience. It seems that al-Qusyairī wanted to explain that these Sufi-specific terms are to be known and understood by all those who want to deepen the teachings of Sufism. If someone wants to deepen the teachings of Sufi, he should know and understand the terms of Sufism for the first. Knowing the terms of Sufism will make it easier to learn the teachings of Sufism.

What is interesting in his description about the terms popular in Sufism presented is the part of "*al-Syarī'ahwa al-Haqīqah*" (shari'a and essence). Al-Qusyairī does emphasize that the sharia and the *haqiqa* (reality, here, referring to Sufism) are inseparable. The practice of sharia law must reach its reality, and the achievement of reality cannot leave its sharia.[14] Al-Qusyairī states that every sharia that is not reinforced by the reality, it will not be accepted (*ghair maqbūl*), whereas a reality that is not supported by sharia will be useless (*ghair al-mahshūl*).[14] This explanation is interesting because for many Sufi assuming that their *maqam* (station) had reached the reality, shari'a is no longer important for them, while at the same time some of the jurists formally emphasized the fulfillment of shari'a aspects (of a worship) rather than an achievement of the reality. Yet, for al-Qusyairī, both the sharia and the reality are strengthening each other.

3.1.3. The Third:

A discussion of the *maqāmāt* and the path that a person must undertake, namely *al-Taubah, al-Mujāhadah, al-Khalwahwa al-'Uzlah, al-Taqwā, al-Wara', al-Zuhd, al-Shamt, al-Khauf, al-Raja', al-Huzn, al-Ju'waTark al-Syahwah, al-Khusyu' wa al-Tawādhu', al-Khafat al-Nafs, al-Ghaibah, al-Qanā'ah, al-Tawakkul, al-Syukru*, etc. Al-Qusyairī describes these *maqāmāt* as a collection of Sufi paths that a *sālik* (Sufi traveler) should pass in order to become closer to God (*taqarrub ila Allāh*). Here, Al-Qusyairī seems to make a suggestion that it is a must for a *sālik* to walk a long journey in order to reach the reality as to be as close as possible to God.[5]

In this paper, the writer wishes to present some of the *maqāmāt* stated by al-Qusyairī. Almost all literature of Sufism places *al-Taubah* (repentance) as the first station,[15] as it is according to al-Qusyairī in his work "*al-Risālat al-Qusyairiyah fī Ilm al-Tashawuf*". It seems that repentance is the first way for a *salik* to be closer to God. Repentance is seen as a way to purify a soul from a sin. A *salik* must purify the soul from sin in order to make it holy. This is because the most holy essence, or the God, can only be approached by a holy soul of His servant. Thus the next station offered by al-Qusyairī is *mujāhadah*. It is a serious effort made by a *sālik* in both guarding and

restraining his worldly desire from going astray and committing wrongdoings. This station is also closely related to an effort of purifying the soul. And the next station discussed by al-Qusyairī is *al-Khalwah wa al-'Uzlah* (contemplation and self-isolation). It means that to retreat and get away from the crowd. The aim of this station is to avoid a *sālik* from bad environmental influences and to keep him/herself only with God, hoping for an enlightenment.

The essence of all stations presented by al-Qusyairī is that a *sālik* must always maintain the purity of his or her soul, keep striving to be obedient and devout, and has admirable qualities.

3.1.4. The Fourth:

Talking about *al-ahwāl* (mental conditions) and *al-karāmāt* (miracles). this section discusses the *karāmāt* of guardians embodied in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, the definition of guardians, maintenance of a guardian, the fear of guardians of Allah, seeing Allah with *bashīrah* (heart's eyes), and many more. Al-Qusyairī did not explain the *al-Ahwāl* as thoroughly as when he did with other terms in Sufism and *maqāmāt*. Instead, he was quite thorough when discussing about the guardians, *shaykh*, and the disciples. Thus, it seems that Al-Qusyairī wants to emphasize the quality of mental conditions and the privileges that have been granted by Allah to the saints, *shaykh*, and the disciples. The mental conditions and privileges that they get are of course the abundance of God's gifts through the *mujāhadah* and *riyādah* that they did.

If the *maqāmāt* is meant as an attempt by a *salik* to ascend up the stairs to Allah, the station of *ahwāl* is commonly called *taraqqi* (or ascending) with *kasb* (effort) that requires struggle and resistance. So *ahwāl* is the inner strength which is only granted by Allah through His grace (*wahbiyah*), and as such only come with a sense of *tanazzul*, or a feeling by a Sufi traveler of his or her closeness to the God.

3.1.5. The Fifth:

This part is a discussion about a number of famous figures in Sufism, such as Abdullah al-Abhuri, Ruwaimibn Ahmad, Ibrahim ibn Adham, Ali Al-Ashbahani, Hatim al-Asham, Abū Sa'īd bin al-A'rabī, Abū al-Khair al-Aqthah Ahmad, Ahmad al-Anthakī, Abū Hamzah al-Bazzār, Abū Ubaid al-Bisri, Abū Yazid al-Busthamī, and many other figures, number of which is amounted to 83. This part focused on biographies of these figures and their prominent characters. Apparently al-Qusyairī also wanted to introduce these Sufi figures to people who are beginner in and want to learn Sufism. Therefore, the figures that he presented here are those Sufis are similar to him, namely the *Sunni Sufi masters*.

4. CONCLUSION

Referring to the explanations above, it can be concluded that, Al-Qusyairī is at once a Sufi master and scholar. As a Sufi master he wanted to return the teachings of Sufism to the fundamentals of the Sunni school, they are, the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and traditions of the earliest generation of devout Muslim scholars, salaf al-shālih. This is even crucial when it comes to tawhid: it must be the tawhid of the Sunni school theology. This research finds out that, as a Sufi scholar, al-Qusyairī wants to introduce basic terms and teachings of Sufism to those who are not familiar with, yet want to study Sufism. Thus, his book, *al-Risālah al-Qusyairīyyah fī 'Ilm al-Tashawwuf*, focuses on discussing specific terms in Sufism, on maqāmāt, ahwāl, on karāmāt, and on classical Sufi figures.

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