

## Reforming Sufism in Malaya: The teachings of Tuan Tabal and his followers

W. Mohd Azam Mohd Amin\*

**Abstract:** This paper examines the efforts made by ‘Abd al-Ṣamad ibn Ṣāliḥ (1840-1891) and his descendants, who were the members of the Aḥmadiyyah Idrīsī order (*ṭarīqah*), to reform Malay Sufism during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century. Under the leadership of ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, the order attracted thousands of followers and its central issue was reforming the doctrine of “the unity of existence” by reconciling it with the “unity of consciousness” (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*), the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī (d.1624). The reform efforts continued by Wan Musa (1874-1939), Nik Abdullah (1900-1935) and Nik Muhammad Salleh (1920-1972). They, however, adapted the framework of Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (1703-1762) in their undertakings.

**Keywords:** Sufism; Malaya; Tuan Tabal; Aḥmadiyyah order; unity of existence.

**Abstrak:** Kertas kerja ini mengkaji usaha-usaha yang dibuat oleh ‘Abd al-Samad ibn Salih (1840-1891) dan keturunannya, yang merupakan ahli-ahli kumpulan (tarekat) Aḥmadiyyah Idrīsī, untuk mengubah tasawuf Melayu pada abad ke sembilan belas dan ke dua puluh. Di bawah kepimpinan ‘Abd al-Samad, kumpulan itu yang menarik beribu-ribu pengikut dan isu utamanya adalah untuk membuat pembaharuan kepada doktrin “kesatuan wujud” dengan menyatukannya dengan “kesatuan kesedaran” (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*), ajaran Syaikh Ahmad Sirhindī (d.1624). Usaha pembaharuan ini diteruskan oleh Wan Musa (1874-1939), Nik Abdullah (1900-1935) dan Nik Muhammad Salleh (1920-1972). Walau bagaimanapun, mereka telah menyesuaikan dengan rangka kerja Ṭarīq Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (1703-1762) dalam usaha mereka.

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\* W. Mohd Azam Mohd Amin is Associate Professor at the Department of Usuluddin and Comparative Religion, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Email: [wm\\_azam@yahoo.com](mailto:wm_azam@yahoo.com).

**Kata kunci:** Tasawuf; Malaya; Tuan Tabal; perintah Ahmadiyya; perpaduan kewujudan.

Reforming Sufism from foreign influence and innovation (*bid'ah*) was the agenda of many personalities and groups. Starting with al-Junayd (d. 910), who tried to purify Sufism by purging some of the foreign doctrines such as pantheism (Abdel-Kader, 1976, pp. 37-47), reform efforts were continued systematically by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), Ahmad Sirhindī (d. 1624), Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1762) and others. These and similar efforts were termed by late Fazlur Rahman as 'Neo-Sufism'. He referred to the movement led by Ahmad ibn Idrīs (1758-1837) as the best example of Neo-Sufism (Rahman, 1979, p. 206). This movement is not to be confused with the Aḥmadiyyah Qadyāniyyah movement initiated by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) in Qadian of India. Aḥmadiyyah has been officially excluded from the mainstream Islam as Ghulam Ahmad claimed himself to be one of the prophets of Islam (Nadwi, 1979; Maudoodi, 1979).

Rahman (1979, p. 206) remarked that one of the features of the neo-Sufi movement was that it advocated the idea of the Muhammadan way (*ṭarīqat Muḥammadiyyah*) in order to bring Sufis back to the domain of *Sunnah*. Moreover, instead of the "unity of existence" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), Sufis should aim towards emulating the personality of the Prophet or "union with the Prophet" because, as explained by Rahman, "he is the legitimate goal for the Ṣūfī". Fahey indicated that one of the striking features of this movement and its offshoots is meeting the Prophet in dreams and eventually meeting him while awake (O'Fahey, 1990, pp. 3-4).

In line with this, the idea of reformism also became the agenda of Malays in the archipelago including Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and others as many of their scholars studied in the Middle East and the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. However, contrary to the above contention, Abd al-Samad ibn Salih and his descendants of the Aḥmadiyyah Idrīsiyyah order 1840 to 1976 adopted a different approach. This study analyses their writings and works.

### **Abd al-Ṣamad and the Aḥmadiyyah order**

The founder of the Aḥmadiyyah *ṭarīqah* was Ahmad ibn Idrīs ibn Muhammad ibn 'Alī (1758-1837). He was born in a village known as

Masyur located in the 'Arayish province of Fez on the coast of Morocco (O'Fahey, 1990, pp. 1-3; Rahman, 1979, pp. 206-211). It is claimed that Ahmad met the Prophet and Khid̄ir in a dream and that they taught him prayers and litanies (O'Fahey, 1990, p. 4; Pauzi, 2001, p. 39). Thus initiated, he eventually established his new order known as the Aḥmadiyyah Idrīsiyyah.

Ahmad attracted many disciples, one of whom was Ibrāhīm al-Rashīd (d. 1874), who then succeeded him (O'Fahey, 1990: 48). In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under the leadership of Ahmad ibn Idrīs and his successor Ibrāhīm al-Rashīd, the Aḥmadiyyah order became one of the most active and popular orders in Mecca. Many students from different parts of the world joined this order including Sayyid Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Dandarāwī of Egypt, 'Abd al-Ṣamad ibn Muhammad Ṣālīḥ (1840-1891) and Muhammad Sa'īd bin Jamaluddin al-Linggī (1875-1928) of Malaya (Pauzi, 2001). They were later on known as followers of the Aḥmadiyyah al-Rashīdiyyah order (Che Zarrina, 1993, pp. 163-164).

After receiving the permission (*ijāzah*), 'Abd al-Ṣamad (nicknamed Tuan Tabal), introduced the order to the people in Kelantan, located at the east coast of Malaya (Muhammad Yunan, 1989, pp. 11-12). The order subsequently spread to Negeri Sembilan. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this effort at spreading the order was carried forward by Tuan Tabal's children and students (Napizah, 1991). Tuan Tabal is regarded as the pioneer as he was the first Malay to introduce the order in the region, followed by Muhammad Sa'īd in Negeri Sembilan. It is estimated that the adherents of the order exceeded 60,000 members throughout the country. However, according to al-Attas (1963, pp. 33-34), this number is misleading.

### The writings

Tuan Tabal's teachings were well-accepted by the people, which led to the establishment of the Aḥmadiyyah order in Kelantan. Besides teaching, Tuan Tabal also wrote books in the Malay language with Arabic titles: *Bidāyat al-Ta'lim al-'Awwām fī Ṭaraf min Arkān al-Islām* (A Beginner's Guide to the Teaching of the Pillars of Islam at a Glance) (1906a); *Kifāyat al-'Awām fī mā Yajib 'alayhim min Umūr al-Islām* (A Sufficient Beginner's Guide to Obligations of the Tenets of Islam) (1906b); *Jalā' al-Qulūb bi-Dhikr Allāh* (Illumination of the Hearts

through the Remembrance of God) (1935); *Minhat al-Qarīb al-Mujib wa-Mughnī al-Rāghibīn fī al-Taqrīb* (God's Gift to those Who are Keen to Draw Nearer [to Him]) (1936); *Munabbih al-Ghāfilīn* (Explanation to the Inadvertents) (1955); *Munyat Ahl al-Awbah fī Bayān al-Tawbah* (Desire of the Penitents for the Explanation of Repentance); and *Bab Harap* (Chapter on Hope) (Muhammad Yunan, 1989, pp. 11-12).

Most of Tabal's works deal with Islamic Jurisprudence, Islamic belief and theology, and Sufism. Following the style of al-Makkī (d. 996) and al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), he tried to present the three subjects in a package as they are inseparably joined. Books of this nature are *Kifāyat al-'Awwām*, *Bidāyat al-Ta'līm*, *Munḥat al-Qarīb*, and *Munyat Ahl al-Awbah*. In general, the opening chapters relate to *'aqīdah* and are followed by *fiqh* with the last chapter on Sufism.

The three brief treatises, namely, *Jalā' al-Qulūb bi-Dhikr Allāh*, *Bab Harap*, and *Munabbih al-Ghāfilīn* were on Sufism. The author discussed the importance of *'aqīdah* and *fiqh* before discussing Sufism. Following the methodology of the *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, *Bab Harap* and *Munabbih al-ghāfilīn* discuss Sufism in general while emphasizing the importance of maintaining the stations (*maqāmāt*) especially hope (*al-rajā'*). These books also stress the practices of the remembrance of God (*dhikr Allāh*) and observing good character (*ḥusn al-khulq*) as preparations for death. Nevertheless, these books do not mention the methodology of *dhikr* after the manner of the Aḥmadiyyah *ṭarīqah*, nor do they mention meeting the Prophet (SAW) in dreams or while awake.

The absence of writing on the methodology of the Aḥmadiyyah approach to *dhikr* is presumably because it comprised daily activities performed by the community. Thus, the writing of such a manual was not needed as it is inappropriate to practise *dhikr* without initiation and the obtaining of permission (*ijāzah*) from a master. Furthermore, unlike the founder of the *ṭarīqah*, Ahmad ibn Idrīs, Tuan Tabal's writings did neither emphasize nor mention the phenomena of meeting the Prophet (SAW) in a dream or during the waking hours.

### **The *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence)**

In contrast to other books written by Tuan Tabal, *Jalā' al-Qulūb* (written in 1870 and published in 1935) was specifically written on the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, a doctrine drawn and interpreted from the teachings

of Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240). The book was written probably because this doctrine was very popular among Malay Muslims in this region though it was very difficult to understand. It was an issue that was debated and discussed by Malay Muslim scholars since the time of Hamzah Fansuri (died approximately 1550-1600), Nur al-Din al-Raniri (d. 1658) and others. The discussion continued during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the writings of scholars like Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari (d. 1778), Daud al-Fatani (died approximately 1840) and others. It is better to discuss the idea of the *waḥdat al-wujūd* briefly as a backdrop to what follows.

While Ibn ‘Arabī himself did not explicitly mention *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the doctrine was drawn from his writings that there was only one absolute being, that is, God. In so far as the other beings are concerned, they were only the manifestation of the absolute Being’s self-determination (*ta‘ayyun*) and appearance of powers (*tajallī*) (Ibn ‘Arabī, 2003, p. 35; cf. al-Qāshānī, 1987, pp. 80-81; Ansari, 1986, p. 336). This process of God’s self-determination as interpreted by scholars, occurs in five stages: (1) *aḥadiyyah* (unity), (2) *waḥdah* (unicity), (3) *wāḥidiyyah* (oneness), (4) *ta‘ayyun rūḥī* (self-determination in soul), and (5) *ta‘ayyun jasadī* (self-determination in body) (Affifi, 1979; Al-Qāshānī, 1987; Ansari, 1986; Ibn ‘Arabī, 2003). The first stage describes that He, the absolute Being is absolutely one (*aḥad* or *aḥadiyyah*) as He has yet to start the process of self-determination, a stage that is also referred to as blindness (*al-‘amā’*) or indetermination.

The second stage is when the absolute Being begins the process of self-determination; a stage which is called unicity (*waḥdah*), as He presents internally to Himself the ideas of all things that are to appear in the future. These initial ideas are called prototypes (*al-a‘yān al-thābitah* or *al-a‘yān al-mumkināt* or *al-ma‘dūmāt*), all of which eternally comprise the absolute Being’s knowledge (*‘ilm*). These prototypes are eternal in nature because they only exist as one of the attributes of the absolute Being, i.e., knowledge.

The third stage is called oneness (*wāḥidiyyah*) in which the absolute Being presents to Himself internally the objects as patterns of their ideal prototypes (*al-a‘yān al-thābitah*). However, these objects have not appeared physically and subsist solely in the knowledge of the absolute Being. The relative “non-being” of these objects is called *ma‘dūm* (non-existence).

The fourth stage is called *ta'ayyun rūhī* or *ta'ayyun mithālī* in which the absolute Being presents to Himself internally the particular determination of soul of the subsisting objects of His intention. This state remains one of non-existence as it takes place in the absolute Being's knowledge.

The fifth stage is called *ta'ayyun jasadī* in which the absolute Being presents to Himself internally the particular determination of bodies of the subsisting objects of His intention. This determination is finite compared to previous determinations (*al-a'yān al-thābitah*) which are infinite. This finite determination of the objects remains in the state of non-existent because they subsist in the absolute Being's knowledge. This "absolute Being" is none other than God (Al-Qāshānī, 1987, pp. 14, 81-84, 327-328; Ansari, 1986, pp. 102-106; Ibn 'Arabī, 2003, pp. 35, 64-68, 89).

### **The Malay interpretation of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.**

The most important Malay treatise specifically composed to explain the process of *ta'ayyun*, i.e., the self-determination of God along with the Sufi nomenclature is Shaykh Daud al-Fatani's *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi fī Rumūz Ahl al-Ṣūfi* (Daud al-Fatani, 1953, pp. 15-27; Faudzinain, 2006). Shaykh Daud al-Fatani is a prolific Malay scholar with more than fifty works to his credit. The dates of his birth and death are debated, as data is scarce. The year he was born ranges between 1718 to 1769 while the year of his death ranges between 1846 to 1879. It is known that he studied in Aceh before going to Makkah and Madīnah where he spent more than forty years. He wrote extensively on *fiqh*, *'aqīdah*, Sufism and other disciplines.

In his *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*, Daud al-Fatani interpreted the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in seven stages of existence (Daud al-Fatani, 1953, pp. 15-27). He did this because many of his contemporaries misunderstood and equated it with another doctrine, known in Malay parlance as the *martabat tujuh* (the seven levels). The *martabat tujuh* is an interpretation that led to the concept of unification of God and man in seven levels (Johns, 1965, pp. 129-137). Daud al-Fatani expounded much on the first level of *aḥadiyyah* (unity) which is the grade of *lā ta'ayyun* (non-determination) and *kunh al-dhāt* (the absolute essence). According to him, this stage may be likened to a sheet of blank white paper on which nothing appears. For this reason, the level is also called

*itlāq* (absolute) (Daud al-Fatani, 1953, p. 15). In order to explicate the matter without any intention to equate God with man, Daud al-Fatani compares this stage with the *dhihn* (human intellect) in which there is no activity or intellection. Once the mind begins active intellection, it leads to the next level.

The second level, or *wahdah* (unicity), is the *ta'ayyun awwal* (first determination), also called *ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyyah* (the reality of Muhammad). This level is like a dot on a piece of white paper from which all letters come into existence. Nothing physically exists; yet all exist in *ijmāl* (generality) and are concentrated on this dot. Daud al-Fatani (1953, pp. 16-17) compares this level with man's intellect in which intellection had begun and if the activity continues, it leads to the third level.

The third level is *wāḥidiyyah* (oneness), the *ta'ayyun thānī* (second determination). This level is like the letter "alif" which originates from the dot on the piece of white paper. It also signifies the perfection of the dot from the aspect of generality to the aspect of (*tafṣīl*) particularity and differentiation, or the perfection of *ta'ayyun thānī* from the *ta'ayyun awwal*. It is also called the *ḥaqīqat insāniyyah* (the reality of mankind). According to Daud al-Fatani (1953, pp. 17-18), these three stages are uncreated (*qadīm*) and divine in nature and as such are termed *a'yān thābitah* (ideals or eternal prototypes) because they eternally subsist in the knowledge of God. These ideal prototypes are not tangible entities and do not physically exist but rather subsist in the knowledge of God. Following these stages, Daud al-Fatani (1953, p. 16) suggested that God pronounces the word "kun" (be) which is the beginning of the fourth level, or the *'ālam arwāḥ* (world of spirits) in which spirits and souls are created by God without any intermediary. This stage is also called the level of existence (*martabat wujūdiyyah*) because all are created entities.

After this stage, the finer prototypes are created in the fifth level, that is, the *'ālam mithāl* (world of idea or imagination). These prototypes do not physically exist but remain in a stage of exquisitely delicate imaginations. At the sixth level, *'ālam ajsām* (world of bodies), the details and particular forms of entities are created of four elements; fire, wind, water and soil. From these stem further four kinds of organisms; *jamādāt* (inanimate beings), *nabātāt* (plant organisms), *ḥayawānāt* (animal organisms) and *insān* (humankind). These four elements take the



form physically at the seventh level which is the last level of existence. This last stage is referred to as *'ālam insān* (the world of man) in which the worlds of ideas and bodies combine and occur physically (Daud al-Fatani (1953, p. 18).

It should be noted that Daud al-Fatani adopted the first three nomenclatures employed by al-Qāshānī (d. 1330), namely, *aḥadiyyah*, *waḥdah*, and *wāḥidiyyah*, as indicated above, but changed *ta'ayyun rūḥī* and *ta'ayyun jasadī* (the fourth and fifth stages) to *'ālam arwāḥ* and *'ālam mithāl* respectively. Moreover, he added two more stages, which are *'ālam ajsām* and *'ālam insān*, making all the stages of existence seven. This is probably a more systematic and detailed interpretation of the original doctrine as they are implied in the works of Ibn 'Arabī.

### **Tuan Tabal's explanation**

Tuan Tabal's explanation of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, however, differs from that of other Sufis, including the Malay Sufis. He began by suggesting that this doctrine is the result of reaching the highest stage during the process of illuminating the heart with the remembrance of God (*jalā' al-qulūb bi-dhikr Allāh*). He emphasized that the *waḥdat al-wujūd* is an inward dimension that exists in man's heart or soul and not in the physical world. In other words, it is an experience, an imagination and perception that occurs in human understanding but has no part in the tangible world which is subject to the law of nature. In order to attain it, the heart should be trained to fully concentrate on Allah (*tawajjuh ilā Allāh*) so that a feeling of love for God is developed (Abd al-Samad, 1936, pp. 9-11).

In order to develop this love of God, apart from *tawajjuh*, one should replace all blameworthy qualities with praiseworthy qualities. After the feeling of love towards God is anchored in one's heart, one should acknowledge that God is one in terms of His essence (*dhāt*) and actions (*af'āl*) and that no room exists for any other essences or actions other than His. Therefore, any kind of hidden association of any partner with God (*shirk khafī*) in one's heart must be avoided as it hinders the process of the heart's illumination. Thereafter, the heart should also be trained to totally surrender before Him, so that any engagement with worldly affairs that leads to the dis-remembrance of God should be avoided (Abd al-Samad, 1935, pp. 12-13).



The heart must also be equipped with two noble qualities, i.e., patience (*ṣabr*) and mildness (*ḥilm*) so that one can withstand God's tribulations (*balā'*). Both qualities are important in treating the creatures of God as they are sometimes treated badly by harm, abuse, destruction and other such activities. One has to remember that by acting in such ways one has already failed the test of God as every incident in this world is derived from God's plan and estimation. In line with this, one has to train the heart to be content (*riḍā*) with God's predestination and feelings of restlessness, anger and frustration should be removed (Abd al-Samad, 1935, pp. 13-17).

The heart should also be cleansed of qualities that lead to perdition like pride (*kibr*), conceit (*'ujb*) and ostentation (*riyā'*). These qualities prohibit the heart from glorifying God and lead one to adopt boastful behaviour. Therefore, qualities like cautiousness (*wara'*) and poverty (*faqr*) must be developed so that one will diminish the base animal desires (lusts). One should persist in this quality until a stage of real poverty (*al-faqr al-ḥaqīqī*) is attained in the sight of God. Furthermore, after losing one's individuality before God, one must also negate the existence of others in one's heart to include one's self because the absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqīqī*) is only God. Once a Sufi has undergone the process of illuminating the heart, they may then ascend to the stage of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Abd al-Samad, 1935, pp. 17-20).

At the stage of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence), one's heart acknowledges and bears witness only to the absolute Being (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqīqī*) because everything in this universe has metaphorical existence (*wujūd majāzī*) and originated from Him. At this stage, one can also witness the unity (*aḥadiyah*) of actions and attributes (*al-af'āl wa-al-ṣifāt*) of God from whom all actions and attributes originated. Therefore, although one acknowledges and witnesses only the absolute Being (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqīqī*), ultimately one should not compartmentalize other essences, actions and attributes, all of which are manifestations (*majāzī*) of the real (*ḥaqīqī*) One. In this ocean of unicity (*aḥadiyyah*), one should be able to differentiate between the unity in the multiplicity (*waḥdah fī al-kathrah*) and the multiplicity in the unity (*kathrah fī al-waḥdah*). He equates this stage to the ocean as the reality (*ḥaqīqah*) from which everything originated and that even the waves are manifestations (*majāzī*) that cannot be separated from the ocean (Abd al-Samad, 1935, pp. 21-25).

## The analysis

A number of important points can be derived from the discourse on *wahdat al-wujūd*. The *wahdat al-wujūd*, which is an interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teaching, is a process of self-determination that takes place within the absolute Being. Since the absolute Being is none other than God, it also leads to the concept of God’s knowledge and mind. This is also seen in Daud al-Fatani’s interpretation as he made the concept of mind the basis of his framework. In order to help people understand the seven-stage process that took place within God, he expanded the process by employing the mind of man as part of the framework.

However, detailed analysis of Tuan Tabal’s discussion shows that the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* that is alleged to have taken place within the absolute Being or God’s mind, actually took place in man’s soul. According to him, it is a spiritual journey of man’s soul from one station (*maqām*) to another that results from the observation of certain rules and regulations. Therefore, it is only related to one’s consciousness towards the existence of God and regards *wahdat al-wujūd* as one of the highest stations that can be achieved by a man who undergoes the spiritual journey.

Another point deduced from Tuan Tabal’s explanation is that he did not use the difficult terms found in the original theory and its interpretation. Terms like *ta’ayyun*, *al-‘amā’*, *al-a’yān al-thābitah*, *thubūt* and others are not found in his writings. He also never mentions terms like *lā ta’ayyun*, *kunhi al-dhāt*, *ta’ayyun al-awwal* and *ta’ayyun al-thānī*. Furthermore, he avoids discussing *‘ālam rūḥ*, *‘ālam mithāl*, *‘ālam ajsām* and *‘ālam insān* in his writings. The four basic elements of creation and the four kinds of creation are also absent in his writings. Although he understands these terms, their prior usage did not exert any influence on his treatise and that he opted for a completely different path from that of his predecessors.

He preferred to write in a simple manner, one which is easily understood by laymen as *Jalā’ al-qulūb* is meant for public consumption. Unlike suggestions made by predecessors, he began the process by placing it within the context of man’s experience. He modified the discussion with the use of common terms well known to Sufis like stations (*maqāmāt*), a term that includes the love of God (*maḥabbat Allāh*) and man’s trust in God (*tawakkul*), as well as patience (*ṣabr*),

contentment (*riḍā*), poverty (*faqr*), annihilation (*fanā*'), etc. He also used terms like deep concentration toward God (*tawajjuh ilā Allāh*), purification of the heart (*tazkiyat al-qalb*) and others that are prevalent in most Sufi writings.

As the “process” is one that takes place within man, Tuan Tabal also paid due attention to ethics (*akhlāq*) in his discourse. The highest station achieved is that of practising praiseworthy qualities (*al-akhlāq al-maḥmūdah*) while avoiding the blameworthy (*al-madhūmah*), which will directly lead to *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Although he employs the term *tajallī* in his explanation, this refers to a state in which the purified heart persists in the remembrance of God. In metaphorical language, the purified heart is the station in which the slave of Allah (SWT) experiences God’s presence. For this reason, he employs another Sufi term, “*takhallī*”, which refers to the efforts of purifying the heart from bad qualities such as ascribing partners to God (*shirk*), arrogance (*takabbur*), disloyalty (*khiyānat al-amānah*), and others. By contrast, the heart should be equipped with the noble characteristics such as acknowledging that God is one (*tawḥīd*) in addition to sincerity (*ikhlas*), contentment (*riḍā*), trust (*tawakkul*), etc. One must begin the process of soul purification by reducing the habits of excessive sleeping and eating as both lead to the imbalanced development of desires and lust (*al-nafs al-ammārah*), qualities that lower man and impede or obstruct the “process”.

Another point to note in Tuan Tabal’s discussion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is that he emphasized its positive aspects, especially the relationship between man and man, and man and the universe. According to him, a thorough understanding of this doctrine, especially *wujūd ḥaqīqī* (real existence) and *wujūd majāzī* (metaphorical existence), helps improve one’s perception of others, both men and creatures. Since creatures are also *wujūd majāzī* or manifestations of the *wujūd ḥaqīqī*, Tuan Tabal said that one should respect and appreciate them because they are creatures of God. As such, one will not hurt or harm men and creatures like animals, plants or the environment as they are *wujūd majāzī*, akin to the relationship between oceans and their waves. For this reason, perhaps, God has prescribed the *Sharī’ah* (Islamic Laws) that govern the relationships of man with man, the environment and with God.

With such an understanding, one achieves spiritual contentment because everything that is, comes from God, including the good and the

bad. The latter is prescribed by the *Sharī‘ah* in order to test man’s level of submission to God. Under the doctrine of *tawakkul* and *riḍā*, man must accept that everything comes from God who designs them as a form of test. Therefore, according to Tuan Tabal, this is a positive aspect of the *waḥdat al-wujūd* doctrine that benefits those who understand the concept. It can be seen, therefore, that the teaching on *waḥdat al-wujūd* by Tuan Tabal is easy to comprehend because he uses simple language and excludes difficult taxonomies used by other writers.

It must be noted that Tuan Tabal’s writings are a composite of the *wujūdiyyah* and *shuhūdiyyah* schools. Traditional Sufism as mainly represented by al-Ghazālī exerted tremendous influence on Tuan Tabal’s worldview such that he took a moderate approach to the doctrine’s explanation. He put great emphasis on the practical aspect of Islamic ethics rather than the more philosophical discussion from the *wujūdī* school. He seems to have positioned himself on a middle path between the *wujūdī* and *shuhūdī* in the sense that he maintained the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* as an established doctrine which he never criticized but rather interpreted it differently.

Although never mentioned in his writings, his overview of this doctrine inclined more towards the *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (unity of consciousness) of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī, as he emphasized the aspects of man’s experience and consciousness. However, his explanation was not similar to that of Sirhindī’s who vehemently criticised the doctrine and its founder. Besides, Tuan Tabal subscribed, with deep understanding, to the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabī and he admirably presented his interpretations and in a simple manner. For this reason, Tuan Tabal succeeded in presenting both approaches to Malay society.

In summary, although Tuan Tabal subscribed to the Aḥmadiyyah order, he did not discuss the issue of the Prophet or that of the order’s founder who claimed meetings with both the Prophet and Khidr. In fact, he attempted to purge this controversial topic from his readers’ mind and decided to practise it while allaying tension with other established Sufi orders in Malaya, such as the Qādiriyyah and Naqshabandiyyah (Al-Attas, 1963, pp. 51-67). It is perhaps because he knew that despite Ahmad’s claim of founding a new order (*tarīqah*), the linkage (*silsilah*) of the order can be traced back to the Prophet through the Shādhiliyyah order whose founder was Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (1197-1258), the order previously subscribed by Ahmad (Danner, 1991, pp. 26-48).

It is worth mentioning that there were efforts to reconcile the *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* as suggested by Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī. In his reconciliation effort, al-Dihlawī opined that both theories are only contradictory in their terminologies and points of emphasis whereas their spirit is the same. Both theories recognised that God is the absolute Being (*wujūd al-muṭlaq*) and the universe, including creatures, are a contingent or metaphorical beings (*wujūd al-majāzī*). Ibn ‘Arabī employed the terms *tajallī* and *ta‘ayyun* (self-determination or manifestation) to refer to the process of how the Absolute Being created contingent beings. The use of the terms of *tajallī* and *ta‘ayyun* led to a misconception that God and creatures are united in one being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Sirhindi, however, employed the terms “shadow” (*ẓill*) and “image” in reference to contingent beings or creatures which then led to the understanding that God and creatures are two different beings (*ithnayyat al-wujūd*) (Ansari, 1984, pp. 150-164; Asiri, 1952, pp. 10-15). Based on al-Dihlawī’s teaching (Al-Dihlawī, 1974, pp. 16-38; Jalbani, 1980, pp. 1-27, 57), the terminologies for manifestation (*tajallī*) and shadow (*ẓill*) render a common meaning based on an unreal existence that is dependent on the absolute existence. Therefore, both meanings can be reconciled and a new interpretation was needed to harmonize the contradiction. He suggests that there are two types of existence (*wujūd*): the self-existence or necessary existence, and that of contingents. Thus, according to al-Dihlawī, both writers emphasized different issues. Ibn ‘Arabī stressed the eternal knowledge of God who is Self-existent (*wujūd li-dhātihī*) whereas Sirhindi stressed the contingents (*wujūd li-ghayrihī*), which is this new terrestrial universe. As such there is no conflict between the theories.

### The descendants

After the demise of Tuan Tabal, his third son, Haji Wan Musa (1874-1939) continued to practise and disseminate the Aḥmadiyyah order (Muhammad Salleh, 1974, pp. 153-169). He received basic education from his father who then sent him for further studies to Mecca, where he stayed for five years. He probably met Sayyid Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Dandarāwī in Mecca. He continued the activities of the Aḥmadiyyah order in his *surau* (a prayer hall) which is located at Jalan Merbau, Kota Bharu (Nik Abdul Aziz, 1983, p. 13). Wan Musa was appointed as the *Muftī* of Kelantan on 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1909. He was also interested and aware of current issues on reform of the Muslim *ummah* (Ismail,

1988, p. 208; Hamdan, 1990, p. 80). For this reason, he reviewed the writings of reformist scholars such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897), Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) and Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935); magazines such as *al-‘Urwah al-Wuthqā*, *al-Imām*, *al-Manār*, etc., (Nik Abdul Aziz, 1983, p. 29).

According to Nik Abdul Aziz who is the spokesman of the Tuan Tabal’s family association, the writings of the reformers did exert great influence on Wan Musa’s worldview because those scholars propagated the idea of Muslim unity under the banner of Islam or *pan-Islamism* (Nik Abdul Aziz, 1983, pp. 37-43). Furthermore, he was also introduced by his son Nik Abdullah (1900-1935) to ‘Ubaydullah Sindhi (1872-1944) who is one of the eminent followers of the teaching of *Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī* (which is simply known as *Ṭarīq* in Kelantan), (Khālid, 1969, pp. 97-114; Nik Abdul Aziz, 1983, pp. 37-43). Since Wan Musa did not meet ‘Ubaydullah in person, discussions on certain religious issues were made through correspondence, probably after 1927 as highlighted by Muhammad Salleh (1974, pp. 161-163) and Nik Abdul Aziz (1983, p. 41). He was also interested in al-Dihlawī’s books and their interpretations, one of which was the *‘Abaqāt*, written by Shāh Muhammad Ismā‘īl Shahīd (1781-1831), the grandson of al-Dihlawī (Muhammad Yunan, 1989, p. 46). His involvement in Sufism, especially with the Aḥmadiyyah order remained intact as he kept on practising without reforming them. It was after his reading of the reformers’ writings and his correspondence with ‘Ubaydullah along with the introduction to the *Ṭarīq* that he became known as a revivalist. Unlike his father who attempted to remould the concept of *wahdat al-wujud*, Wan Musa was more inclined toward reforming the society’s comprehension of *taqlīd* in *fiqh*.

Wan Musa is said to have been open-minded regarding disputes between the schools of jurisprudence. However, some contemporary controversial issues did arouse anger and debate between the traditional scholars of Kelantan such as raising dogs and the disapproval of the administration’s use of *zakāt* money to build a state mosque (Kelantan Council of Islamic Religion (MAIK). Hence, he was severely criticized leading him to resign from the post in 1916 (Ismail, 1988, p. 210). We may assume that many of his positions inclined towards reformists’ views which led to dispute between the classical perspective of the traditional scholars (*kaum tua*) and the reformist view (*kaum muda*).

Another prominent Sufi reformer is Nik Abdullah, who is a son of Wan Musa. He received his early education from his father and local scholars, and was initiated into the Aḥmadiyyah order by his father. He pursued higher education in Mecca from 1926 to 1930 and met ‘Ubaydullah who introduced and taught him the methodology of the *Ṭarīq*. In 1933, he went to Egypt for a few months during which he met Rashīd Riḍā who advised him to continue his studies in Mecca under the guidance of ‘Ubaydullah, until he returned home in 1934 (Nik Abdul Aziz, 1983, pp. 40-41).

Nik Abdullah started to teach religious knowledge in accordance with the *Ṭarīq* where the schools of jurisprudence were assimilated with Sufism and philosophy. For this purpose, the study of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* and their exegesis were given great emphasis by Abdullah. Thus, most of the books written by al-Dihlawī such as *al-Fawz al-Kabīr fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, *Hujjat Allāh al-Bālighah* and *al-Inṣāf fī Ta’wīl al-Aḥādīth* became major text books. The study of primary *ḥadīth* collections like *al-Muwaṭṭā’* and others were also part of the syllabus since one can directly deduce (*istinbāt*) legal values from these primary sources after the Qur’ān (Nik Abdul Aziz, 1983, pp. 53-57).

Special attention was given to the study of each school’s methodology of jurisprudence like the methodology of Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 767), Mālik (d. 795), al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 820), and Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), as contained in their books. After a student demonstrated sound knowledge in these subjects, he was exposed to exegesis of the Qur’ān and *aḥādīth* as made by famous exegetes like al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), Ibn Ḥajar (d. 1448) and others. One was then allowed to read books from scholars who represented the schools of jurisprudence such as al-Shaybānī (d. 805), al-Nawawī (d. 1278) and others. By practising this methodology it was hoped that a student would be able to access original works before reading secondary sources. Hence, one was expected to practise the *taṭbīq* or accommodating all the schools, following the steps of al-Dihlawī who confessed that he was Shafi‘ite intellectually but Hanafite in practice (Al-Dihlawī, 1996, pp. 348-349). This approach of study was new to the Malays of that time whose previous method was that of listening to the readings of teachers from specific books of the Shafi‘ite school.

The study of *taṣawwuf* was also reformed from the traditional methodology that emphasized the ritual practice of the Aḥmadiyyah



order in deference to methods that accommodated many Sufi orders. This effort was made by al-Dihlawī who attempted to reconcile at least seven of the established orders such as the Qādiriyyah, Naqshabandiyyah, and others as stated in his book, *al-Qawl al-Jamīl* (Al-Dihlawī, 1938). By taking this approach and unlike his grandfather, no serious discussion on *wahdat al-wujūd* was made by Abdullah and his students thereafter.

One controversy reflecting Wan Musa and Nik Abdullah's open-minded personality was that of rearing dogs and the issue of their saliva. It started when Musa's son, Haji Nik Abdullah (1900-1935), who was reputed for his knowledge, returned from his studies in Mecca in 1934. His popularity attracted the attention of the Sultan, Tengku Ibrahim Ibn Sultan Muhammad IV, who was very interested in rearing dogs. In order to understand the practice from the Islamic perspective in detail, the Sultan invited Abdullah to his palace for a discussion. Although it was against the views of the local traditional scholars who were mainly the Shāfi'ites, Abdullah approved the intention of the Sultan to rear dog based on the tradition of the Prophet (SAW) about the cleansing of utensil that has been licked by dog (Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, 1996, pp. 5-16). Abdullah's approval evoked the anger of the local traditional scholars that led to the open debate (*majlis muzakarah*) organised by the Sultan in 1937 between them and the reformers that include Wan Musa. Although the Sultan inclined toward the reformers, the debate ended without official decision or even statement when the Sultan left the matter up to the society to make decision as both parties had their own arguments (Muhammad Salleh, 1974, pp. 153-169; Roff, 1974, pp. 258-260).

The reformation of Sufism continued in 1939, during which the centre of the Aḥmadiyyah order was taken over by the *Ṭarīq*. The centre was run by another son of Wan Musa by the name of Nik Muhammad Salleh (1920-1972). Salleh received his early education from his father who taught him the Malay and Arabic languages until the age of fourteen. Before he left for Mecca in 1936, he studied many of al-Dihlawī's books such as *al-Fawz al-kabīr*, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bālighah*, and Ibn Khaldūn's *al-Muqaddimah* under his elder brother, Nik Abdullah (Muhammad Salleh, 1974, pp. 164-165).

In Mecca, Salleh met and studied under the guidance of ʿUbaydullah for some time who then advised him to pursue his studies in Deoband,

India. He went there from 1936-39 during which he studied *ḥadīth*, the Hanafite School of jurisprudence, philosophy, logic, astronomy and other subjects. After returning from Mecca in 1939, ‘Ubaydullah went to Jami’ah Milliyyah Islamiyyah of Delhi and in order to study under ‘Ubaydullah, Salleh moved from Deoband to the Jāmi’ah Milliyyah in 1939 until the death of ‘Ubaydullah in 1944. He returned to Kelantan in 1946 (Muhammad Salleh, 1974, pp. 164-165).

Like his father and elder brother, Salleh is reputed both for his knowledge and out-spokenness. He continued to teach the *Ṭarīq* to the public in his father’s *surau* in Kota Bharu. Unlike his father and elder brother who left no substantial writings, he kept up attempts to reform the society from the phenomena of *taqlīd* by discussing several issues, one of which was the issue of *zakāt al-ḥiṭrah* for children in his book, *Risalah Masalah Fitrah dan Fitrah Kanak-Kanak yang belum Baligh* (An essay on the question of *ḥiṭrah* and the *ḥiṭrah* of children who have not reached puberty). He discussed the issue from all four schools of jurisprudence in which the *ḥiṭrah* is payable by all persons who are able to fast during the fasting month, indicating that children and slaves were exempted. This book was virulently criticized by the Council of Religion of Islam of Kelantan (MAIK) and many other scholars.

One of these scholars was Haji ‘Abas from Besut in Terengganu, who previously represented the reformist group (*kaum muda*) led by Wan Musa in the *majlis muzakarah* (Amilah, 2006, pp. 151-175). The refutation of ‘Abas can be seen in his book entitled *al-Qawl al-Haqq* (Haji ‘Abas, 1947). Many other books of Salleh like *Filsafat Berumahtangga* (The Philosophy of Marriage) and *Sinaran I’tiqad* (Illumination of belief) were also subjected to severe criticism from local scholars (Muhammad Salleh, 1974, pp. 167-168).

In teaching the public, Salleh was assisted by his brother Nik Mahmud and brother-in-law, Nik Hassan, who also studied under ‘Ubaydullah in India. With their help, he succeeded in establishing a school named the *al-Iṣlah* School. However, his wish to implement the *Ṭarīq* in this school was never achieved as his family members objected (Muhammad Salleh, 1974, 168-169; Nik Abdul Aziz, 2003, pp. 9-11). It is said that all of them did not seriously practise the Aḥmadiyyah order as they disseminated the *Ṭarīq* rigorously to the public. One of the reasons for change was probably the simple explanation of *wahdat*

*al-wujūd* by al-Dihlawī who at the same time offered a reconciliation theory between the *waḥdat al-wujūd* of Ibn ‘Arabī and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* of Sirhindī (Nik Abdul Aziz, 2003, pp. 9-11). In addition to this, the *Ṭarīq* emphasized the study of criticism of *ḥadīth* (*takhrīj al-ḥadīth*) in its syllabus which then led to criticism of weak *ḥadīth* in the writings of Sufis.

The legacy of Aḥmadiyyah order cannot be underestimated in contemporary time. While the order waned in Kota Bahru, it flourished in another Kelantan district, Bukit Abal of Pasir Puteh, which is about thirty kilometres from Kota Bharu. There, the followers of the order studied under a master namely, Haji Daud ibn ‘Umar (1903-1976), and the central issue remained the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. This is evident from the writings of one of the loyal disciples of Haji Daud namely, Muhammad Mustafa al-Jiasi. He authored two books on Sufism entitled *Mengenal Diri dan Wali Allah* (Knowing oneself and the Saint of God) and *Ramuan Ilmu Tasawwuf* (Ingredients of Sufism) in which short chapters about the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* are allocated (Muhammad Mustafa, 1976; Muhammad Mustafa, 1978). Under the leadership of one of the children of Haji Daud, this order has become popular.

## Conclusion

Islamic revivalism in this region, especially in Malaysia, took place as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century and involved many areas that include Sufism. The effort to reform philosophical Sufism was taken up by Tuan Tabal and his family, by following al-Ghazālī’s methodology of reconciling Sufism with the *Sharī‘ah*. Although he subscribed to the Aḥmadiyyah order whose main ideas are centred on the philosophical issues like *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the likes, Tuan Tabal tried to remould it using concepts from the *waḥdat al-shuhūd* of Sirhindī’s perspective and strictly followed the Shafi‘ite school of thought.

The situation changed slightly during the time of Wan Musa who had been influenced by reformers’ view discussing *fiqhī* issues beyond the boundary set by the Shafi‘ite school of thought. This evoked the anger of traditional scholars of his time, some of whom practised *taqlīd*. The return of Abdullah who studied under ‘Ubaydullah, intensified the tension between the traditional and reformist groups when he allowed the king to rear dogs in the palace.

The methodology of the *Ṭarīq* also exerted impact on Tuan Tabal's family as the former emphasized authentic *aḥādīth* as the basis for all aspects of its practices. Since many Sufi practises and doctrines are based on weak and even baseless *aḥādīth*, the offspring of Tuan Tabal appear to have sidelined the Aḥmadiyyah and relied rather on the *Ṭarīq*. As a result, the discussion of philosophical Sufism and the practice of *taqlīd* waned.

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