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Reconciling the Interpretation of Sufism and Sharia: Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili's Views on Women's Leadership

Sabila Phutri Balqis

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Sabilaphutribalqis@gmail.com

M. Jamil

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

jamilsiahaan@gmail.com

Mardian Idris

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

mardianidris@uinsu.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines the thought of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili in his efforts to reconcile two often perceived opposing dimensions of Islam, sufism (spiritual dimension) and sharia (legal dimension), particularly in the context of the issue of female leadership. As a prominent 17th-century scholar from Aceh, Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf held significant authority in both fiqh and mysticism and was known for his integrative and moderate approach. Using a qualitative library research method, the study analyzes his primary work, *Mir'at al-Tullāb*, along with supporting secondary literature. The findings reveal that Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf did not dichotomize sufism and sharia but sought to harmonize them within a holistic Islamic framework. Regarding female leadership, he adopted a

conciliatory stance, neither outrightly rejecting nor fully endorsing it, choosing instead a contextual and moderate interpretation, also informed by contemporary fatwas from Haramayn scholars.

Keywords: 'Abd al-Ra'ûf al-Singkili, Female, Leadership

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas pemikiran Syekh 'Abd al-Ra'ûf al-Singkili dalam merekonsiliasi dua dimensi utama ajaran Islam tafsir tasawuf (spiritual) dan syariat (hukum) terutama terkait isu kepemimpinan perempuan. Sebagai ulama berpengaruh di Aceh abad ke-17, Syekh 'Abd al-Ra'ûf al-Singkili memiliki otoritas dalam fikih dan tasawuf serta dikenal karena pendekatannya yang moderat dan integratif. Menggunakan metode penelitian kepustakaan, penelitian ini menganalisis karya utama beliau, *Mir'ât al-Tullâb*, dan literatur pendukung lainnya. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa Syekh 'Abd al-Ra'ûf menolak dikotomi antara tasawuf dan syariat, serta mengedepankan harmoni dalam merespons isu-isu sosial-politik, termasuk kepemimpinan perempuan. Dalam hal ini, ia tidak memberikan dukungan atau penolakan secara mutlak, tetapi lebih pada posisi kompromis yang mempertimbangkan konteks zamannya, termasuk fatwa scholar Haramayn.

Kata kunci: 'Abd al-Ra'ûf al-Singkili, Kepemimpinan, Perempuan

Introduction

Humans are the highest creatures of Allah SWT compared to other creatures of Allah SWT. Humans are gifted physically with a brain so that they have the ability to think, the ability to choose what is good and what is bad. With the advantages that Allah has given, humans should be able to manage the environment well. Allah SWT made humans as caliphs on earth only to worship and serve Him. Humans are ordered to carry out all the commands of Allah SWT, starting from prayer, fasting, zakat, and all things that bring benefits to humans themselves and avoid the prohibitions of Allah SWT to prevent damage and chaos on this earth (Aprianti et al., 2023).

As a guide for humankind, this is one of the factors in which the Quran was revealed so that all humans do not get lost in pleasures that can make them fall into and are not tempted by deception that makes people move away from the guidance outlined in the Quran. The Quran is the last divine book given to the Prophet Muhammad as guidance in order to develop his people. In the Quran there are various values that are unique, complicated and complicated as well as extraordinary (Mansur, 2016). Nothing

is constant in the life of this world, the same goes for understandings of the Quran which have continuously developed in society, even from the time of the Prophet until the modern era, but the Quran that we currently read and study has not changed without a bit, this is because Allah SWT and His Messenger are the ones who protect it, by Q.S. Al Hijr [15]: 9, and with there still being many experts in interpreting and memorizing the Quran among the wider community (Dozan & Al Basir, 2020). Syeikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili is an Acehnese scholar who seeks to "reconcile" the teachings of the seven natural dignities known in Aceh as *wahdatul wujud* or *wujudddiyah* (pantheism) with the understanding of the sunnah. Even so, Shaykh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Singkili still rejected the *wujuddiyyah* understanding, which considered the unification of God and servants. This kind of teaching was then brought by his student, Abdul Muhyi Pamijahan, to Java (Solihin, 2005). The philosophical basis of the Sufism thought of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili is that there is an affirmation and strengthening of monotheism, a reinterpretation of the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* which places humans as God's shadow, the idea of creating nature through the process of transmission, and building awareness of servanthood through the effort to die *ikhtiyari* by mortal means in *zikrullah* as a way to recognize the nature of existence and *ma'rifatullah* (Rivauzi, 2017).

Various studies have examined the thoughts of the figure of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili through the works he produced. Berhan et al. (2020) studied the book *Mir'at al-Tullab*, especially regarding marriage. Muttaqin further (2020) also studied the book *Mir'at Al-Tullab* related to the application of *Islah fiqh* in communal conflicts during the time of 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili. As in the research by Martiani et al. (2023), who analyzed the hadith of buying and selling and usury by studying the book *Mir'ati Al-Thullab Fi Tashil Ma'Rifat Al Ahkam* by Abdurrauf Al-Singkili. In his study, it was found that in the book *Mir'at al Thullab*, there is a chapter on buying and selling and usury, which provides in-depth insight into the perspective of Islamic Sharia law related to economic transactions. Other research was conducted by Othman et al. (2019), which examines aspects of muamalat in the book *Mir'at Al-Thullab* by Shaykh Abdul Rauf Ali Al-Singkili. In this book, there are 35 discussions related to the muamalat fikah. This is also confirmed by research related to the legal characteristics of muamalah, which has been researched by Darmawan (2020). Previously, in research by Rahman (2018), which examines the interpretation of *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* by 'Abd Al-Rauf Al-Fanshuri and discusses more

about biographical discourse, political-theological contestation, and interpretation methodology.

In contrast to previous studies, some studies focus more on the implications of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili's thoughts in the context of education. Such as in the study by Hermawati et al. (2024), who examine the contribution of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili's thoughts to Islamic education. In his findings, it was revealed that Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili's thoughts contributed to the development of Islamic education by establishing Islamic education institutions, acting as teachers, spreading Islam with sufism, and providing the development of Islam in the Nusantara, especially in the Aceh region. This is also in line with the findings by Arif and Siraj (2020), who examine the contribution of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili to the development of Islamic education in Malay, namely that Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili has played a significant role in advancing Islamic education in the Nusantara. Various efforts carried out by Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili include establishing Islamic educational institutions, developing many works, introducing and implementing a new orientation in Islamic education, namely by focusing on the balance of the external aspects of Islamic teachings and their internal elements. Furthermore, the thoughts of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili regarding women's leadership have been carried out by Purwanti (2022), but more examined from the perspective of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili's thoughts related to the interpretation of the Quran, Surah An-Naml, verses 29 to 35. Considering various previous studies, it appears that research related to women's leadership studied through the work of the book *Mir'āt al-Ṭullāb* is still rarely done. Therefore, this study aims to elaborate further on this matter, namely to examine the views of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili on women's leadership by focusing on how to reconcile the two main dimensions of Islamic teachings, Tafsir Tasawuf (spiritual) and sharia (law), which are examined from the book *Mir'āt al-Ṭullāb*.

Theoretical Review

Leadership is one of the essential aspects in every society and organization that plays a crucial role in shaping the direction and success of an entity. Leadership has been a topic that has always been relevant throughout the history of human civilization, especially in the context of social and religious life (Arif, 2020a). In the Islamic

perspective, leadership has special characteristics that serve as a philosophical foundation and practical guideline for leaders and their followers. Islamic values emphasize aspects of justice, trustworthiness, and wisdom in leading (Arifin, 2023).

The issue of women's leadership is a unique and urgent issue to discuss, especially in Islamic discourse. This often becomes a long debate because leadership is a reciprocal contract between the leader and the people, which demands justice, security, and integrity. (Zakaria, 2013). Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili was considered to have high qualifications to carry out the mission of reconciliation between sufism and shari'a. His expertise in religious sciences and his extensive experience while studying in the Middle East supported him in this regard. As a Qadi in the Sultanate of Aceh, he played an important role in combining the spiritual and legal dimensions of Islam (Arif, 2020a).

Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili's full name is 'Abd al-Ra'uf bin 'Ali al-Fansuri al-Jawi. He is of Malay descent and comes from Fansur, Singkil (Singkel), which is located on the northwest coast of Aceh. Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili comes from a religious family; his father was a Sheikh named Ali al-Fansuri, a scholar, who built and led an Islamic boarding school on the island of Java. At first, Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili studied with his father and several scholars in Fanshur and Banda Aceh. After that, he studied in several places, such as Doha, Qatar, Yemen, Jeddah, Mecca, and Medina while performing the Hajj. He studied in the Middle East for around 19 years. Various works have been produced covering multiple fields of Islamic science, especially interpretation, hadith, sufism, and fiqh. (Kurdi, 2017; Wardani, 2022).

In a study, it has been revealed the lineage of the *qirā'āt* chain of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Sinkilī which he used in the *Turjumān al-Mustafīd*. In the study of the *Turjumān al-Mustafīd*, it is stated that 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Sinkilī has a lineage of *qirā'āt* chain through his teacher, Ibrahim al-Kuranī. From Ibrahim Al-Kuranī, it is connected to many Egyptian isnads, including his teacher Sultan al-Mazzahī, then attached to his teacher Sheikh al-Fudhalī, then connected to his teacher Sheikh Syihādzah al-Yamānī, on whom the line of *qirā'āt* of the scholars of the Nusantara is widely relied upon. From the lineage of Sheikh Syihādzah al-Yamānī, his *isnad* continues to his teacher Nāshiruddin al-Thabalāwī then continues to Imam Zakariā al-Anshārī. From Imam Zakariā al-Anshārī continued to his teachers, namely Imam Zainuddīn Abu anNa'im Ridhwān Bin

Muhammad al-Uqbī asy-Syāfi'ī, Imam Ibnu Hajar al-‘Asqalānī and Imam Jalāl al-Dīn al-Mahallī, teachers of Imam Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūthī (Amnar & Huda, 2022).

Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkilī is known as a figure who takes a stance to align and harmonize conflicting views, and responds to differences with gentleness and tolerance. Through his various works, Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkilī emphasizes that sufism must run in harmony with the sharia. Through obedience to the sharia, humans will be able to gain the actual experience of reality (Rosyadi, 2020). Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkilī was a central figure in the spread of Islam in Kilangan Aceh Singkil. In addition to spreading Islam directly, Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkilī also played a role in education by establishing Islamic schools (Wati et al., 2023).

Method

This study uses the type of library research with a qualitative approach to the Quran, *tafsir* books, and related books. This paper analyzes the main work of Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkili, namely the work entitled *Mir’āt al-Ṭullāb*, accompanied by other supporting literature. Research that uses a method to obtain information data by placing facilities available in the library, such as tafsir books and other history books. The type of research in writing and discussing this journal is a type of qualitative library research, namely by using references from tafsir books and from various literatures that are relevant to the study, especially those related to the thoughts of sufism and sharia in the view of Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkili and the issue of women's leadership in the context of Islam.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive, analytical, and interpretative methods. Descriptive analytical is used to describe the contents of the text systematically and objectively. In contrast, the interpretative approach is used to interpret the meaning of the text based on the historical, social, and thought contexts of Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkili. This approach aims to reveal the integration between sufism and Sharia in his thoughts, and how it can be used as a basis for understanding the position of women in Islamic leadership.

Result

Reconciliation of Sufism and the Shari'a of 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili

The return of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili from the Middle East has begun a new era in the history of the intellectual tradition of Islam in Aceh in particular, and the Nusantara in general. As a student involved in the Middle Eastern scholar network, where the mutual approach between sufism and Sharia is its main characteristic, of course, Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili has a high commitment to creating a balance of understanding between the two aspects of Islamic teachings in the Nusantara. Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili is considered to have the qualifications to carry out the mission of reconciliation between sufism and Sharia because of his good mastery of the Sharia sciences (*al-ulūm al-zāhir*), such as *'ulūm Qurān*, including the interpretation of the Quran and *'ilm al-qira'ah*, the science of hadith, Islamic law (*fiqh*), *ilm al-kalām*, and so on, where all of these sciences were studied by Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili with scholars who were experts in their fields during his stay in the Middle East. This is also proven by his works in every branch of science. Apart from being demonstrated by his writings, the authority of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili in the field of *fiqh*, for example, is also proven by the fact that he was appointed as the chief judge (*qādī*) of the Aceh Sultanate from his return from Arabia until his death (Huda, 2015).

Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili's approach in reconciling sufism and Sharia in a general context that includes the dissemination of the sciences of Sharia and sufism to the Muslim community of the Nusantara, combining discussions of *aqidah*, sharia, and *akhlak* in a sufism treatise, supporting sufism with the Quran and hadith, basing sufism on sunni *aqidah*, emphasizing the importance of *al-maqāmāt*, emphasizing the practice of sharia, and integrating *akhlak* with sufism.

Spreading the Knowledge of Sufism and Sharia to the Community

The first approach of Shaykh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili to reconcile sufism with Shari'a were to spread the Shari'a sciences through writing works in various fields of exoteric sciences (*al-ulūm al-zāhir*) and esoteric sciences (*ilm al-bāṭin*) such as Turjumān al-Mustafid in the field of Quranic interpretation, Sharh Latif alā Arbain Hadīthan li al-Imām al-Nawāwī in the field of hadith, Sullam al-Mustafidīn in the field of *ilm al-kalām*, al-Mawā'iz al-Badīah in the field of *akhlak*, Tanbih al-Mashi al-Mansūb ilā Tariq al-

Qushāshi, Umdat al-Muhtājīn ilā Sulūk Maslak al-Mufridin, and Daqa'iq al-Hurūf in the field of sufism.

The spread of sharia and sufism sciences is seen as one of the efforts to reconcile sufism and sharia because it is the foundation and prerequisite for carrying out the mission of reconciliation. This assumption is based on several historical facts. First, in general, disputes and conflicts between Sufi scholars and sharia scholars are caused by the unbalanced emphasis given by the scholars to Islamic teachings. On the one hand, sharia scholars (*mutakallimūn*, *muhaddithūn*, and *fuqahā*) emphasize the external aspect, while Sufi scholars emphasize the internal dimension. This approach sometimes leads to an excessive (extreme) attitude where one group claims that their understanding is correct, and the other understanding is wrong. This, as recorded in history, led to the emergence of accusations of heresy (*zindīq*) by sharia scholars against Sufi scholars, which sometimes led to the death penalty (execution) as discussed above. Second, the absence of sharia knowledge can pose a significant risk to students of sufism because this will be a factor that causes deviations. Therefore, to prevent the emergence of such deviations, the mursyid of sufism advises people who will take the Sufi path to equip themselves first with sharia knowledge before studying the science of sufism.

Therefore, efforts to realize the balance of life of diversity in Islamic society, in this case Muslims in the Nusantara, between the aspects of sharia and the dimensions of sufism are very much needed. To create this balance, adequate treatises that represent these two aspects of Islamic teachings are certainly also a necessity. This is where the significance of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili's efforts in compiling works on the sciences of sharia lies. Based on this, it can be assumed that Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili attempted to transform the religious attitudes of the previous Muslim society in the Nusantara, namely a strong tendency towards sufism, in a balanced understanding of the exoteric aspect (sharia) and the esoteric dimension (sufism).

Combining Aqidah, Worship, and Akhlak in Sufism

The second approach used by Shaykh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili in reconciling sufism and Sharia is to combine the discussion of *aqidah*, sharia, and *akhlak* with sufism. Among the works of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili that represent this type are *Tanbih al-Māshī ilā Tariq al-Qushāshī* and *Umdat al-Muhtājīn ilā Sulūk Maslak al-Mufridin*.

Although these two works are intended as treatises on sufism, in reality, these books also discuss issues of *aqidah*, sharia, and *akhlak*.

Supporting Sufism with the Quran and Sunnah

Undoubtedly, as the primary dimension of Islamic teachings and one of the legitimate branches of Islamic sciences (*al-'ulum al-shar'iyyah*), sufism is rooted in revelation, namely the Quran and the Sunnah. However, since the beginning of its development, accusations against sufism have always emerged, both from scholars, Muslim scholars, and orientalists who stated that sufism did not originate from Islam, but was something new in Islam that appeared as an influence from religion or tradition as a consequence of contact between Muslims and other religious communities.

Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili was a Sufi scholar who was committed to adhering to the Quran and the Sunnah, as stated in the following statement:

“Understand and stick to the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet, and you will surely get guidance and always be on the right path. Rasulullah SAW, who never spoke based on his desires, said “I have inherited two things to you, namely the book of Allah and my sunnah, so interpret the Quran with my sunnah then surely your eyes will not be blind, your feet will not slip, and your hands will never break as long as you hold on to both”

Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili's commitment to adhering to the Quran and Sunnah can be seen from the fact that he always supported his sufism teachings with verses from the Quran and Sunnah, both *'amali* sufism and philosophical sufism. In the context of philosophical sufism, for example, Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili quoted several verses from the Quran and hadith to explain the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd*. Several concepts of al-Manazil al-Harawi are completely based on the teachings of the Quran, such as the concept *Al-Yaqzah*, *Al-Tawbah*, *Al-Inabah*, *Al-Muhasabah*, *Al-Tafakkur*, *Al-Tazakkur*, *Al-Firar*, *Al-Sima'*, *Al-Riyadah*, and *Al-I'tisam*.

Al-Yaqzah based on QS. Al-Saba'[34]:46

“Say, (O Prophet), “I advise you to do only one thing: stand up for the sake of Allah—individually or in pairs—then reflect. Your fellow man is not insane. He is only a warner to you before the coming of a severe punishment.”

Al-Tawbah, based on QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 11

“O believers! Do not let some men ridicule others; they may be better than them, nor let some women ridicule other women; they may be better than them. Do not defame one another, nor call each other by offensive nicknames. How evil it is to act rebelliously after having faith! And whoever does not repent, it is they who are the true wrongdoers.”

Al-Inabah, based on QS. Al-Zumar [39]:54

“Turn to your Lord (in repentance), and fully submit to Him before the punishment reaches you, for then you will not be helped.

Al-Muhasabah, based on QS. Al-Hasr [59]:18

“O believers! Be mindful of Allah and let every soul look to what deeds it has sent forth for tomorrow. And fear Allah, for certainly Allah is All-Aware of what you do.”

Al-Tafakkur, based on QS. Al-Nahl [16]:44

“We sent them with clear proofs and divine Books. And We have sent down to you (O Prophet) the Reminder, so that you may explain to people what has been revealed for them, and perhaps they will reflect.”

Al-Tazakkur, based on QS. Ghafir [40]:13

“He is the One Who shows you His signs and sends down rain as a provision for you from the sky. But none will be mindful except those who turn to Him.”

Al-Firar, based on QS. Al-Dzariyat [51]:50

“So proclaim, O Prophet: “Flee to Allah! I am truly sent by Him with a clear warning to you..”

Al-Sima', based on QS. Al-Anfal [8]: 23

“Had Allah found any Goodness in them, He would have certainly made them hear. ‘But’ even if He had made them hear, they would have surely turned away heedlessly.”

Al-Riyadah, based on QS. Al-Mu'minun [23]: 60

“And who do whatever good they do with their hearts fearful, knowing that they will return to their Lord”

Al-I'tisam, based on QS. Ali Imran [3]: 103

“And hold firmly together to the rope of Allah and do not be divided. Remember Allah’s favour upon you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts, so you—by His grace—became brothers. And you were at the brink of a fiery pit, and He saved you from it. This is how Allah makes His revelations clear to you, so that you may be rightly guided.”

This discussion proves that Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili has used various approaches in reconciling sufism with sharia such as spreading the sciences of sharia, in addition to sufism, to the Muslim community through the compilation of several works in various fields of science, linking Islamic *aqidah*, acts of worship, and religious *akhlak* with sufism; supporting sufism with the Quran and hadith; basing Sufism with orthodoxy (sunni *aqidah*), emphasizing the importance of acts of worship, emphasizing the importance of *al-manāzil* (*al-maqāmāt*), and integrating *akhlak* with sufism. The use of these approaches shows the high commitment of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili to adhere to the Quran and hadith as sources of Islamic teachings and orthodoxy. This is to ensure that sufism always remains within the framework of sharia or orthodoxy and prevents various forms of deviation.

Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili has tried to reconcile sufism with the sharia by emphasizing and integrating acts of worship and *akhlak* by encouraging the students of sufism to practice various voluntary worship and dhikr and praiseworthy *akhlak* as ordered by the Messenger of Allah SAW. The efforts of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili in this case are very valuable to prevent deviations in the context of practicing Sharia and *akhlak* among people who follow the Sufi path. Thus, it can be said that Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili has tried to return sufism to its roots, namely, seriously busying oneself with worshipping Allah and migrating from despicable *akhlak* to praiseworthy *akhlak*.

Giving Emphasis to the Importance of Practicing Sharia

The practice of sharia is one of the main dimensions of Islamic teachings, which is called the dimension of al-Islām, besides the dimensions of belief (*al-īmān*) and sufism (*al-ihsān*) as mentioned in a famous hadith narrated by 'Umar bin al-Khattab. *Al-Islām* reflects submission and obedience to Allah, which is referred to in the Quran as "*al-amal al-ṣālih*". Carrying out *al-amal al-ṣālih*, according to the Quran, is one of the keys to salvation and happiness in the afterlife. As in the words of Allah SWT in QS. al-Kahfi [18]: 110.

“Say, (O Prophet), “I am only a man like you, but it has been revealed to me that your God is only One God. So whoever hopes for the meeting with their Lord, let them do good deeds and associate none in the worship of their Lord.”

The Prophet Muhammad SAW as a role model for Muslims, has exemplified the importance of good deeds in Islam. The Prophet was known as someone who had a strong interest in deeds of worship. Allah rebuked him because he was excessive in carrying out sunnah worship. As Allah SWT says in QS. At-Thaha [20]: 2

“We have not revealed the Quran to you (O Prophet) to cause you distress.”

In the context of the Nusantara, historical facts prove that the first sufism to develop in this region was philosophical sufism as reflected in the writings of Hamzah Fanṣūrī and Shams al-Din al-Samatra'i. Although the figures of philosophical sufism did not ignore the importance of good deeds, in their lives, in the context of their teachings, they placed more emphasis on the metaphysical aspects of sufism such as the ontological status of nature and God, the concept of creation, and so on (Abdullah, 1990).

Here we discuss the attention of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili to the practice of the Shari'a related to acts of worship such as voluntary acts, dhikr, and *wirid*. 'Abd al-Ra'ūf's main attention to acts is proven by the fact that the discussion of voluntary acts of worship, dhikr, and *wirid* takes up a significant portion in his treatises on sufism, such as *Tanbih al-Māshī* and *Umdat al-Muhtājīn*, where these two books are considered his main works in the field of sufism. According to 'Abd al-Ra'uf, acts of worship are very urgent and inherent in the teachings of sufism. Therefore, it is a must for students to be serious in prayer to attain knowledge (Arif, 2020b).

“Keep yourself busy in worship with an honest and sincere attitude, with the intention of carrying out the rights of your Lord, you will surely be included in

the group of experts in wisdom. The author of the book al-Hikam said, "The will of the expert in wisdom is to be right in worshiping and carrying out God's rights." Allah Taala said: "Even though they were not ordered except to worship Allah by purifying obedience to Him in (practicing) His religion." (Singkel, n.d.)

"Even though they were only commanded to worship Allah 'alone' with sincere devotion to Him in all uprightness, establish prayer, and pay zakat. That is the upright Way. (QS. Al-Bayyinah [98]: 5)

"And worship your Lord until the inevitable comes your way" (QS. Al-Hijr [15]: 99)

Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili had a strong commitment to adhering to the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. In his emphasis on obeying the Prophet Muhammad, Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili sometimes argued with the doctrine of sufism. As a Sufi who believed in the doctrine of Nūr Muhammad in the concept of the creation of the world, Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili emphasized that the obligation to emulate the Prophet Muhammad is closely related to the idea of the creation of humans as part of the universe. This is because, according to the theory of Nūr Muhammad, the first thing created by Allah was Nūr Muhammad (Arif, 2020b).

Leadership and Statehood

After living for quite a long time in various Middle Eastern cities and gaining sufficient knowledge, finally Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili was permitted by his teacher al-Kūrānī to spread his knowledge to the Muslim community in his homeland. At this time, the Aceh sultanate was ruled by a queen, namely Sultanah Şafīyyat al-Din (reigned 1641-1675), who succeeded her husband, Sultan Iskandar Thānī. Not long after his arrival in Aceh, Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili was visited by a palace official, Khatib Seri Raja bin Hamzah al-Āshī. Al-Ashī raised several difficult questions regarding religious matters. Voorhoeve, as quoted by Azra, states that al-Ashī's position was *keureukon katiboy mulo*, namely the sultanah's secret secretary. Thus, Voorhoeve believed that al-Āshī was sent by the sultanah to investigate the religious views of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili. It seems that Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili passed the test and was thus trusted by the sultanah to become Qādi Mālik al-Ādil or *mufti*, a position previously held by al-Raniri.

Women's leadership in Islam is something that is debated, in the context of Aceh at that time controversy arose, although not as widespread as the conflict and polemic between al-Raniri and the followers of Hamzah Fansuri and Shams al-Din al-Samatra'i on the issue of understanding the doctrine of *wahdat al-Wujud*. In fact, in the era of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili, the Aceh Sultanate was ruled by four queens in succession, namely Sultanah Şafiyyat al-Din Syah (1641-1675), Sultanah Nūr al-Alam Naqiyyat al-Din Syah (1675-1678), Sultanah Zākiyyat al-Dīn Syah (1678-1688), and Sultanah Kamalat Syah (1688-1699). This shows the greatness of the figure of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili and his wisdom in suppressing differences and creating stability and peace in the Aceh Sultanate.

Another essential role of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili in the political life of Aceh was his efforts to create peace in the Aceh Sultanate after the conflict and tragedy in the issue of understanding the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd*. Although this polemic occurred in the context of religious life, it also involved the political authority that caused the tragedy in Aceh's history. Throughout his involvement in the Aceh Sultanate, Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili successfully resolved this issue through his thoughts, namely offering an orthodox interpretation of the doctrine of *wahdat al wujūd*. The moderate approach used by Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili succeeded in recreating peace and harmony in Acehnese society. Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili tended to reconcile two conflicting views rather than rejecting one of them. (Asrori, 2018).

Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili was one of the leading scholars of the Nusantara who made a significant contribution to the field of Islamic science, especially fiqh. His monumental work, *Mir'ātu ath-Thullâb fî Tashîl Ma'rifat al-Ahkâm al-Syar'iyyah li al-Malik al-Wahhâb*, became one of the first fiqh books written in Malay with Jawi-Pegon script. This book became an essential reference during the Aceh Sultanate and, until now, is recognized as a great work in the treasury of Islamic science in the Nusantara (Laffan, 2015).

This book is of the Shafi'i madhhab (school of thought), by the conditions of Acehnese society at that time. Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili demonstrated his expertise by discussing legal issues through a contextual question-and-answer pattern, referring to various classical books and paying attention to existing social and political considerations

(As-Singkili, 2015). The writing of this book was carried out at the request of Sultanah Shafiyyat al-Din and became a reference standard for *Qadi* in Aceh, replacing the dominance of the book *al-Sirath al-Mustaqim* by Nuruddin al-Raniri, which focuses more on worship (Azra, 2018).

Thus, the contribution of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili through his work *Mir'âtu ath-Thullâb* not only became a guideline for Islamic law in Aceh, but also became evidence of his efforts in interpreting Islamic law in a comprehensive, relevant, and contextual manner with the social and political realities of his time.

Discussion

Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili was a scholar of the Shafi'i madhhab (school of thought) by the conditions of the Acehnese kingdom society at that time, which adhered to the Shafi'i madhhab until now. However, in this case, according to his interpretation, the Shafi'i madhhab does not allow women to be leaders. The Shafi'i madhhab does not allow women to be leaders in terms of head of state, prayer leader for men, or becoming criminal judges (Arianti & Fahrizal, 2023). Likewise, the interpretation of 'Abd al-Ra'uf As-Singkili in his interpretation of Tarjuman al-Mustafid, who interprets QS. An-Nisa [4]: 34

“Men are the caretakers of women, as men have been provisioned by Allah over women and tasked with supporting them financially. And righteous women are devoutly obedient and, when alone, protective of what Allah has entrusted them with. And if you sense ill conduct from your women, advise them first; if they persist, do not share their beds, but if they still persist, then discipline them gently. But if they change their ways, do not be unjust to them. Surely Allah is Most High, All-Great.”

The interpretation, which says that they are hardened towards women because Allah SWT has given men greater authority over women in terms of knowledge, reason, and guardianship (Al-Jawi, 1951). Interpretation of verses in QS. An-Nisa' [4]: 34, according to classical scholars, talks about male leadership. Allah SWT has excelled in everything over him. "Men are leaders for women." This editorial explains that Allah has chosen men as leaders over women, that is, he is the leader, head, dignitary, judge and decision maker for him and women if they deviate, "Allah has preferred some of them

(men) over others (women)" namely, because men are more important than women, and better than women (Ishaq, 2008).

In this verse, there is a significant difference between Bisri's interpretation and Gus Mus's oral interpretation. In Tafsīr al-Ibrīz, this verse is interpreted as granting power to the husband over his wife. The granting of power is due to the superiority that has been given to men over women in terms of knowledge, intelligence, control of territory, and others, and based on the obligation to provide a living that is imposed on the husband. (Irsad et al., 2024)

The verse above illustrates that men are the ones who deserve to be leaders, not the other way around. This is reinforced by the words of the Prophet in a hadith which states:

"Dari Abu Bakrah, dia berkata, "Sungguh Allah memberi manfaat kepadaku dengan satu kalimat pada saat perang Jamal, ketika sampai kepada Nabi Muhammad saw. bahwa kaum Persia telah mengangkat putri Kisra sebagai raja, beliau bersabda, "Tidak akan beruntung kaum yang menyerahkan urusan mereka kepada seorang perempuan (mengangkat seorang perempuan sebagai pemimpin mereka)." (HR. Bukhari). (Al-Asqalani, 2020)

Imam Sawqani explained that the meaning of the hadith is that women are not experts in governance, and people should not make them leaders. This is reinforced by Ibn Jarir explaining that women's thinking is lacking and imperfect, especially in matters of men. (Syawqani, 2005). Meanwhile, Yusuf Qardhawy's explanation is that the hadith from Abi Bakrah is a *sahih* hadith. This is based on the fact that the one who quoted the hadith was Imam Bukhari. As for the consideration of the matan, it can be understood textually and contextually. In terms of textual Islamic law analysis, it is clear that it is forbidden for women to be leaders in a state or even an organization. However, the contextual understanding that the hadith is related to the appointment of Persian women as candidates for leaders, even though many candidates around them were adequate to carry out the task, is only because the law of the kingdom requires it. (Qardhawy, 1997).

The number of scholars agree that it is forbidden for women to be leaders when the leadership is in a large area or the highest position. The woman plays the role of the highest leader in government affairs. This is based on the fact that in the text of the hadith,

there is the word "wallu amrakum," which means to order you all, which is interpreted as a caliph in Islamic politics, so that this makes it forbidden for women to be leaders. Almost all classical scholars, such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Taimiyah, al-Mawardi, and others, emphasize that the caliph is the right of men, not women. (Azhar, 1996).

The issue of women's leadership is still a hot topic in contemporary Islamic thought. Moreover, in today's era, many people raise the issue of gender equality. Textual commentators consider that the Quran gives more rights to men than women. This textual approach is very dependent on pre-modern interpretations of several Quranic texts. Although this view of "*unequal equality*" may have been accepted in pre-modern times and may be in line with the context of that period to justify women's inequality (Izzad, 2018).

After Iskandar Muda died, the Aceh Sultanate was led by Iskandar Thani (1636-1641), the husband of Safiat ad-Din, the son of Iskandar Muda. However, his leadership was short and unable to maintain the splendor of Aceh. The decline occurred under the leadership of queens, such as Taj al-Alam Safiat ad-Din (1641-1675), Nur al-Alam Naqiat ad-Din (1675-1678), Inayat Syah Zakiat ad-Din (1678-1688), and Kamalat Syah (1688-1699). Political and economic instability were the leading causes of this decline, with prolonged conflict as the root of the problem. (Nufiar, 2019).

When Sri Alam was crowned sultanah, there was conflict with Abdul Rahim (Maharaja Lela), who opposed women's leadership. After Queen Safiat ad-Din, a power struggle occurred between supporters and opponents of female leadership. Groups that supported women's leadership, including the sagi commanders and Qadhi Malik al-Adil, succeeded in passing Kamalat Syah as leader (Nufiar, 2019). However, Kamalat Syah did not last long after a *fatwa* from Mecca stated that women should not be leaders in the Islamic kingdom. This fatwa weakened his position, and he was eventually removed through a royal deliberation (Said, 2000).

Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili, as Qadhi Malik al-Adil, was involved in this conflict and showed that the scholar had an essential role in the process of political succession. He tried to give legitimacy to female leadership, although in his works, he did not explicitly mention gender requirements for leadership (Said, 2000). The arrival of the envoy of the Sharif of Mecca to Aceh became an opportunity for those who opposed

female leadership to ask for a fatwa. The fatwa that arrived from Mecca further weakened the position of Queen Kamalat Syah, who was eventually replaced by Sultan Badr al-Alam Syarif Hasyim Ba al-'Alawî al-Husaynî, establishing the Arab dynasty Jamâl al-Layl in Aceh (Hasjmy, 2001). Overall, this period reflects the tension between tradition and modernity, as well as the role of the scholar in politics and the legitimacy of leadership in the Aceh Sultanate (Zainuddin, 1999).

Likewise, the Meccan delegation did not immediately provide an answer to the problem, but took the matter to the meeting of the Haramayn scholars. The answer finally came from Mecca to the Aceh Palace during the reign of Sultanah Kâmalat al-Din (1098-1109/1688-99). The Chief Mufti in Mecca reportedly sent a fatwa stating it was against the Shari'a for an Islamic kingdom to be ruled by women. As a result, Sultanah Kâmalat al-Dîn was removed from the throne, and 'Umar bin Qâdhî al-Malik al-Adil 'Ibrâhîm was appointed as Sultan Badr al-Alam Syarif Hasyim Ba al-'Alawî al-Husaynî, and founded the Arab Jamâl al-Layl dynasty in Aceh (Ahmad, 1990).

Shaykh 'Abd al-Ra'ûf al-Singkili is known to have had a significant influence through his contributions in spreading Islamic teachings. His method of interpretation combines textual and contextual approaches, with an emphasis on tawhid, tasawuf, and Islamic law, which strengthens a moderate understanding of Islam (Zainuddin et al., 2024). Thus, Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ûf As-Singkili is known as a moderate scholar who can reconcile sufism and sharia and is wise in dealing with community issues (Assingkily & Sidik, 2024; Azra, 2018).

Conclusion

This research examines the thoughts of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ûf As-Singkili, the great Acehnese scholar of the 17th century, who played an essential role in uniting the two dimensions of Islamic teachings, sufism (spiritual) and sharia (law). Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ûf As-Singkili emphasized the importance of mastering sharia knowledge before studying sufism, to prevent deviations. In his treatises, he combines discussions of *aqidah*, sharia, and *akhlak* to produce a comprehensive and moderate understanding of Islam. In dealing with social issues such as women's leadership, he does not take extreme positions. He prefers a contextual and compromise approach, including referring to the fatwa of the

Haramayn scholar, although he does not explicitly discuss this issue in its entirety. Overall, Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'uf As-Singkili succeeded in combining sufism and Shari'a in one complete and moderate Islamic framework. She proved that these two aspects can be integrated to build a harmonious religious life, and is able to provide contextual solutions to socio-religious issues, including women's leadership. Her thoughts and works are a very valuable intellectual legacy for the development of Islam in the Nusantara. They are relevant to be used as a reference in facing the challenges of the times and building a progressive and just Islamic society.

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