

The Sufism Thoughts of Imam al-Shafi'i: A Critical Analysis from the Diwan al-Shafi'i

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m.'s view on Sufism through the *Diwan Shafi'i*. The Diwan is an anthology of his poetry as a premier source that compiled all his fruitful poetries with his figurative language. His expressions about sufism analyzed through qualitative method based on content analysis of documents and materials, mostly derived from secondary sources, published articles and books related to the subject. In this approach, in-depth analysis on his poems are brought forward to determine his thought on sufism. The analysis is focusing on the meaning behind his poetic stanzas. The study found that Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m.'s poems brought some elements of sufism with no doubt.

Keywords: Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m., Poetries, Sufism, Thought, Tasawwuf

Introduction

Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m. is a great figure in the fiqh school of thought. In addition to the profound writing in fiqh works, he has a poetry anthology called *Diwan al-Shafi'i* that gathers his poetic expressions reflecting his stance and thoughts on some issues on ummah including his views on sufism. His view on Sufism can be analyzed through some of his expressions and his life background coloring his Sufism thought patterns. This paper tries to summarize his thoughts towards some elements of sufism by trying to rummage his life series relating to sufism and analyzing the meaning behind his expressions in the poetic quotes from *Diwan al-Shafi'i*.

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Research Methodology

The writing of this article, which highlighted the view of Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m on the Sufism in the Muslim worlds, is based on content analysis of Diwan al-Shafi'i as a premier source, as well as published articles and books related to the subject as a secondary sources. In this approach, textual analysis on his poems are brought forward to determine his stand on sufism. Then the analysis on this issue discusses some important differences and argument controversially between those who are opposing Sufism and the stand of Imam al Shafi'i r.h.m about sufism.

Background Of His Sufism Thoughts

Conflict of the acceptance and rejection of Sufism in the Islamic teaching basically is the extension of the conflict that have occurred between the supporters of salafi school of thought who label themselves as the fiqh, thus rejecting Sufism with those practicing Sufism ever since in their life. This conflict may have occurred due to the difference in approach. Fiqh is a field of knowledge that discusses the tangible practices such as religious obligation, *muamalat*, crime and others, on the other hand, Sufism is concern with the inner aspects and soul cleansing. Thus, there are theories saying that Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m. stance is Fiqh and was rejecting Sufism during his life time. This theory is strengthened by the position of Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m as the founder of the Fiqh school of thought during his time. Accusations that he does not support Sufism has lead to a clash of opinions between the Fiqh scholars and the Sufism scholars. Some of the analysts portray the misunderstanding among the Fiqh scholars and the Sufism Scholars similar to a conflict between Islam and the disbelievers (Mohamad, 2012). In fact, there are those who assume Sufism as the source of retrogression of the Muslim. This is due to the rejection by some school of thoughts towards Sufism knowledge as mentioned by al-Jaza'iri (1991): *Sufism is the most bid`ah dalalah, the biggest and the worst seduction*. A well known sufi scholar, GF Haddad (2010) in his research wrote, the salafi school of thought has the stance that Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m. is a Faqih who holds strongly to his Fiqh thinking and rejecting sufism because it can lead one astray. G.F Haddad further wrote that Ibn al-Jawzi (510-592H) in his book '*Talbis al-Iblis*' has narrated that Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m is the Imam of the Fqh school of thought that rejects Sufism. According to G.F. Haddad, Ibnu al-Jawzi, sufism does not exist during Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m. and he has rejected Sufism and is steadfast to his Fiqh school of thought.

Looking at the aforementioned statements, the researcher sees that the Sufism of Imam al-Shafi'i needs to be clearly analyzed to see the length of his acceptance towards sufism so that his sufism stance is clear and can be accepted by the public. Among the important mechanisms to evaluate his sufism is by analyzing his phrases from the *Diwan al-Shafi'i* and looking at his early sufism life. This analysis is believed to enable to give some lights on his stance towards sufism.

Findings And Discussion

1. Questions on Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m Sufism Stance

Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m Sufism stance can be analyzed through his various poetry phrases as follows:

A Fakih is like a safih (a safih pretending as a great worshipper) are depending on each other (from the aspect of imparting and gaining knowledge).

A Safih will become an ascetic person when he became close to a Fakih. The Fakih person surely is better than the Safih from the ascetic aspect.

When tested by trials, the behaviour of a Safih is overwhelming as compared to a Fakih (Mahmud Rabi': 2005).

He further sang a poetry song as follows:-

Leave the people who when they faced you, they pretend as a great worshipper.

When they are far from you, they are like the wolf with the sheep's skin (Abd Mun'im Khafaji: n.d).

From the aforementioned poetries phrases, the phrase *Safih* and a great worshipper refers to the sufi group pretending as pious. Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m scorn a group of people during his time that were pretending in the name of Sufism for certain interest. In fact, he advised every Muslim to avoid these people. The term *Safih* and a great worshipper were not meant to all Sufism members, it was only meant to the hypocrites in their Sufism practice. In line with the meaning of this poetry. Ibnu Taymiyyah explained that the Sufis are people who are very obedient to Allah and that there were those who deviate but repent and that there were some who do not. There are some pretender and zindiq that were equated to Sufism but were not recognized by the Sufism members themselves (Ibn Taymiyyah: 2006).

In fact the great Sufism Figures such as Junayd al-Baghdadi affirmed that our school of Thought (Sufism) is bound with al-Quran and al-Sunah (al-Qushayriyyah: 1989) and al-Sha'rani explained that Sufism is the essence from individual practice base on the Islamic Law (Sharf: 1991).

Therefore, in other notes, Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m adulates the Sufi as an authentic narration from Ismail al-Tayyan al-Razi who went to Mecca and met Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m. And Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m asked about Musa al-Razi while praising him as an eastener (Raz) who is an outstanding expert on understanding the Quran. Al-Razi had asked Imam al-Shafi'i to describe the characteristics. When the characteristics were mentioned, al-Razi recognized him and mentioned his name as Abu Imran al-Sufi. Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m then explains that both names refer to the same person (Ibn Abi Hatim: 2003). It is clear that Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m did not antagonize him although knowing that he is a Sufi member.

In this study, the researcher also reviews a few writings and opinions of other figures related to Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m Sufism practice. To the Arabic literature Analysts such as GF Haddad (2010), in his writings he described the sufis without Fiqh with the words "In reality, they were nothing more than hypocrites, free thinkers and dissolute people."

In another poetry, the researcher found that Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m also reads special poetries related to Sufism. Among others:

You must put an effort to become a fakih and sufi and do not take only one of it. For the sake of Allah I would really like to advise you that a person who is only fakih but not sufi his heart will not feel the goodness of takwa. But the person who only become Sufism and not Fakih, how does he become a good person? (al-Biq'a'i:1986; al-Zu'bi: 1991)

It is clear that the aforementioned poetry meaning is to call upon a Muslim to approach fikah and Sufism at the same time. This is part of the statement that Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m did not reject Sufism. The meaning of the aforementioned poetry is supported by the following poetry which also explained Imam al-Shafi'i and his thoughts on Sufism:

Truly, a fakih is fakih due to his doings not because of his words or writings. Thus, a leader is a leader due to his moral, not a leader because of his people or his army. Thus, richness is richness due to himself not because of his power or belongings (Rabi': 2005).

A fakih phrase is fakih due to his doings giving meaning that a fakih is due to his sufi characteristic, because fakih's and Sufi's attitudes demanded good moral. Thus, it supports the meaning of the aforementioned poetry that emphasizes the hand in hand Fakih and sufi demands.

Therefore, the researcher sees that the salafi's claim that Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m had rejected Sufism started with the above mentioned phrases. The meaning behind his poetries phrases clearly urge all Muslim to give their commitment in Fiqh and Sufism without ignoring one of them.

Based on the explanations, the poetry clearly reflects that Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m gave an integrated meaning between fakih (fikh) and sufi (Sufism). The aforementioned statements show that Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m. stance does not reject Sufism. He accepted sufism from the sufism meaning that gives the meaning of good moral.

2. Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m relationship with the Sufi members

After knowing and evaluating Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m thinking in his poetries texts, the researcher also examine his relationship with the sufi members during his time.

Among the important mechanism to see Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m acceptance of Sufism is to look at who his teacher was. In this case, Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m had referred to a sufi by the name of Waki' bin al-Jarrah on his recitation problem.

Waqi' is among the most ascetic and most pious teacher (al-Ghayruwani: 1984). Both characteristics are the main characteristics in the Sufism discipline. Because Sufism has not been a structured discipline, it is appropriate to mention that the Sufism teaching has been well accepted by Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m through Waki', his teacher.

Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m. has a good relationship with Shayban al-Ra'i, an early sufi figure. It was narrated that one day he was seated on Shayban lap and asked many questions. And he was asked: a person like you still want to ask questions to a Badawi? Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m. answered that a person like Shayban is able to guide those who are complacent (al-Ghazali, 1992).

Based on both stories, it shows that Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m. made his sufi teachers as references related to the spiritual morals that became the focus in the Sufism teachings. This became the indicator that he accepted the Sufism approach circulating around good moral.

3. Imam al-Shafi'i's Concern On Sufism

The concern of Imam al-Shafi'i on sufis characteristics (Sufism) was found when asked about his successor. Imam al-Shafi'i pointed to al-Buwayti while al-Rabi's has more and better narrations. The students he favors most is Muhammad bin Abd al-Hakam. Abu Talib al-Makki is inclined to explain that the choice is due to his piousness and ascetics surpassing other companions. It is clear that the Sufism aspect related to an individual good moral was not sidelined by Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m, in fact, it became part of the consideration to surrender any position (Sharf: 1991). Therefore, the researcher sees that critiques or rejections towards sufism by the earlier great ulamas is individual in nature not towards the discipline as understood by some of his opponents today. This is the type of critique meant by Imam al-Shafi'i rh.m. in his poetries that scorned the sufi as discussed.

Conclusion

The results of the analyses and discussions indicated that Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m. basically accept and practice sufism as practiced by the previous generation although it was not in the name of Sufism. The Sufism is in the form of integrated practice as a Muslim similar to other Syaria' knowledge that has not been disciplined and named. It is an overall practice by the companions and generations after as the result of Prophet PBUH teachings.

The researcher also summarizes that the rejection of Imam al-Shafi'i is not towards sufism discipline but towards the sufis that pretend showing their sufism, the fact that it is otherwise or the Sufis who have diverted from the Syaria is the stance of the sufism figures. This is a normal attitude among the ulama and sufis. They do not hate and against the human but they are against the attitude and doings that are against the syarak that only look up upon their positions as the slave and Allah as God.

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