

CHAPTER SIX

ON SEVEN STAGES OF BEING

6.1 Introduction

As we have mentioned in our preceding chapter, al-Falimbānī has written as many as fifteen works, according to one opinion.¹ Of all the works, the most celebrated and widely read even until now are only two namely *Siyar* and *Hidāyat*. These works in general are well received by the Malay communities. They are not only still widely studied in the traditional *madrasahs* or *pondoks* throughout the Malay Peninsula but also in many mosques in Malaysia up to the present day. This is understandable, since they are basically the translations of and adaptations from *Hujjat al-Islam* al-Ghazālī's *Iḥya'* and *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* respectively. The Malays are known for being at peace with al-Ghazālī's teachings and fond of him ever since they knew him mostly through the works of al-Falimbānī.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Islam in the Malay Archipelago was said to be in the following mould: in terms of *fiqh*, they are Shāfi'ites, in creed are Ash'arites and in *tasawwuf* are Ghazālians.² They also follow the ways of the scholars of the past in terms of spiritual affiliation (*tarīqah*) such as their connection with the *tarīqah* of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, Abū al-Hasan al-Shādhīlī and others.

The intellectual and religious conflict in the Malay Archipelago re-emerged only at turn of the twentieth century. In the sixteenth and seventeenth

¹ Shaghir is one of them, see his Shaghir, *Samad*, 2; also Nico J.G Kaptein, see his 'Abd Al-Samad al-Palimbānī', 25.

² Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning*, 27; Nurman Said, 'The Significance of al-Ghazālī and his works for Indonesian Muslims: A Preliminary Study', 22.

centuries, the conflict was between *wujūdiyyah* of al-Fansūrī and *wujūdiyyah* of al-Rānīrī, both of which were themselves affiliated with Ṣūfī orders. It was what al-Rānīrī claimed as a conflict between *wujūdiyyah muwahhid* vis-à-vis *wujūdiyyah mulhid*.³

Up to eighteenth century, the opposition was directed against the philosophical brand of Sufism coupled with the call for return to ‘an orthodox scripturalist form of Sufism’.⁴ It was not an attack on the Sufism *per se* but rather to a certain form of Sufī doctrines and practices.⁵ However, at present the conflict between the so-called the ‘reformers’ and the ‘traditionalists’ groups is more of the latter’s denouncement of any form of Sufī practice and regard it as a form of heretical innovation (*bid‘ah dalālah*) contravened the Prophetic Sunnah and Shari‘ah. It was a clash between Ṣūfī versus ‘anti-Ṣūfī’ groups.

Historically, it began after the eighteenth century when Sufism started to be attacked on all sides.⁶ Reform movement took the form of struggle against all forms of innovations (*bid‘ahs*) and Sufism was deemed as one of the *bid‘ahs*. The Malay Archipelago, like other parts of the Muslim world were not spared from the wave of reform movements led by the major catalysts of Muslim reformism such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d.1314/1897), Muhammad ‘Abduh (d.1323/1905), Rashīd Ridā (d.1353/ 1935) and others. In the Malay Archipelago, this conflict which had emerged at the turn of the twentieth century and was known as a polemics between ‘*Kaum Muda*’ (Young Faction) and ‘*Kaum Tua*’

³ Al-Attas, *Mysticism*,

⁴ Azra, *Opposition*, 685-686.

⁵ At present, Sufism as a whole is unfortunately being attacked by the modernists or reformists, see Wan Suhaimi Wan Abdullah (2012), *Beberapa Wajah dan Faham Dasar Tasawuf Menurut Al-Attas Berdasarkan Karyanya The Positive Aspects of Tasawwuf*, 203.

⁶ Azra, *Opposition*, 685.

(Old Faction). The former was represented by the Reformers and the latter was the Traditionalists.⁷ Among the leading proponents of the Malay reform movement were such people like Shaykh Muhammad Tahir Jalāl al-Dīn (d.1375/956), Sayyīd Shaykh al-Hādi (d.1352/1934) and a few others. Though the intensity of the polemics has subsided now, yet, it has never been completely died down. One may beg to question as to how could the Malay reformers be influenced by the trend affecting the Middle East. As we have mentioned earlier that as early as sixteenth century, the Malays were sent to the Arabian Peninsula and in the later years to Egypt, particularly Al-Azhar University to further study. These young Malays then were passionately influenced by the ideas of these reformists and once they returned to their home country upon the completion of their studies, they spread these reformists' ideas to the local people. However, these ideas were certainly not welcomed by the traditionalists, generally, who were amongst the 'aged people' (hence known as 'Kaum Tua') and had been practising Islam for tens of years since their childhood. The conflict started. The adherents of the 'traditional Islam' mostly among the old Mecca-educated Malay scholars condemned the attempts since they felt the status quo of Islam was seriously affected by this 'new version of Islam', as it were. This resistance mostly came from the scholars of traditional religious schools or *pondoks* and *madrasahs*.

⁷ Professor William R. Roff has written quite an extensive works on this issue, for further details see his article *Kaum Muda and Kaum Tua: Innovation and Reaction amongst the Malays*; also his *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. Likewise his edited work, *Kelantan: Religion and Society*. Amongst the issues debated include heretical innovation (*bid'ah*), blind imitation (*taqlīd*) and others. Working under the guidance of Professor Roff, a Malaysian by the name of Saadan Man, in the year 2004 submitted a dissertation to the University of Edinburgh for the award of Ph.D. His thesis bears the title '*Islamic Reform: The Conflict Between The Traditionalists and Reformists Concerning Matters of 'Ibādah in Contemporary Malaysia*'. The work contains argument from both sides from the perspective of the jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

Al-Falimbānī's works too had not escaped from scrutiny by the adherents of this reform movement. In his four-volume *magnum opus* of *Siyar*, there is a small section of a couple of pages in the final volume on the chapter of *tawhid* and *tawakkul* on which al-Falimbānī differed from al-Ghazālī.

6.2 Historical Context

Looking at the historical context of Sufism in the Malay Archipelago, what al-Falimbānī had done in spreading the Seven Stages teachings is in fact emulating the traditions of his preceding Sufi masters such as al-Fansūrī and al-Sumatrānī, who in turn were influenced by Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Jīlī and others. The widespread of the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabī in the Malay world in the first place should not be underestimated. Suffice it to recapitulate here as we have demonstrated at the beginning of Chapter Two that the arrival of Islam in this region, according to some scholars was brought by the Sufis who were inclined towards *wujūdiyyah*. The earliest proponent of *wujūdiyyah* doctrine in the Malay Archipelago as we mentioned before is the sixteenth century Sufi poet, al-Fansūrī. We have briefly alluded before that al-Fansūrī is regarded by many as the most celebrated Malay mystic and the ‘first to pen mystical ideas’ into the Malay world following the school of Ibn ‘Arabī, so much so that there are scholars who regarded him as ‘a veritable of Ibn ‘Arabī of the Malays’.⁸ The doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* was therefore not something new but had been a subject of discussion of the Malay scholars since the sixteenth centuries. In fact, al-Fansūrī’s doctrine of the ‘Unity of Existence’ is nothing more than ‘a Malay reproduction and exposition of the famous of Ibn ‘Arabī admirably rendered’.⁹ Al-Attas further acknowledges that the

⁸ Al-Attas, *Some Aspects*, 23; Riddell, *Transmission*, 104.

⁹ Al-Attas, *Some Aspects*, 23.

Malay cosmology was basically a reproduction of an expression of Ibn ‘Arabī Sufi doctrine.¹⁰ Other scholars even predicted and went far back that the Southeast Asia *wujūdiyyah* might have been due to the indirect influence of Abū Mansūr al-Hallāj (d. 309/922). Zoetmulder, for example, believed that Hallāj who was directly involved in the spread of Islam to India might have spread his teachings to the Gujerati Muslims who later brought the ideas to the Malay Archipelago.¹¹

We have demonstrated earlier that the arrival of Islam in the Archipelago was in the form of syncretistic Sufism, hence the Muslims in this region for centuries prior to al-Falimbānī had already been preoccupied themselves with mystico-philosophical and theological discussion. The first Ṣūfī work, according to al-Attas was the *Durr al-Manzūm* of Abū Ishāq, a Ṣūfī of Mecca was made known in the Archipelago some time around 863/1459.¹²

There were also many instances pointing to the public discussion and debates on Islamic mysticism held in this context. To mention a few of them in order to enlighten the contextual milieu and the resistance to the *wujūdiyyah* in those centuries are for instance: the condemned to death of Sheikh Siti Jenar by the Nine Saints (*Wali Songo*) of Java in the fifteenth century, for adhering to heterodox mystics doctrines; a debate concerning Fixed Prototype (*al-a‘yān al-thābitah*) between two scholars Muhammad al-Yamanī and Abū al-Khayr ibn Shaykh ibn Hajar, both of whom came to Aceh from Mecca in 947/1540; and the refusal of the Achenese people to study *fīqh*, *usul al-fīqh*, *akhlāq* and rhetoric from al-Rānīrī’s

¹⁰ Al-Attas, *Some Aspects*, 23.

¹¹ Riddell, *Transmission*, 71.

¹² Al-Attas, *Mysticism*, 193.

uncle, Muhammad Jaylani ibn Hasan Muhammad al-Humaydī but insisted on him teaching *tasawwuf and kalām*.¹³

Later, beginning from al-Fansūrī (d. *circa* 1001/1607),¹⁴ and followed by his disciple, Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrānī (d.1039/1630),¹⁵ the *wujūdiyyah* teachings were even more spread throughout the Archipelago. Even al-Fansūrī's archrival, Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1069/1658) was a strong advocate of *wujūdiyyah* as demonstrated in his works.¹⁶ For al-Rānīrī, he claimed his *wujūdiyyah* was a *wujūdiyyah muwahhid*, (unitarian *wujūdiyyah*) and accused that of al-Fansūrī as *wujūdiyyah mulhid* (deviant *wujūdiyyah*). Coming to the seventeenth century, 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī (d.1071/1661),¹⁷ and Yūsuf al-Maqassārī (d. 1110/ 1699),¹⁸ also discussed *wujūdiyyah* in their works. Azra claims that al-Sinkīlī refuses to accept the ideas of *wujūdiyyah* and was in favour of the idea of God's transcendence over His creation, as opposed to al-Fansūrī's *wujūdiyyah*. Yet, al-Sinkīlī at the same time talks about *a'yān al-khārijīyyah* as the 'emanations of Absolute

¹³ Azra, *Opposition*, 665.

¹⁴ See his major works such as *Asrār al-'Arifīn* (Secrets of the Gnostics), *Sharāb al-'Ashiqīn* and *al-Muntahī*. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas had extensively studied these works and produced a book entitled *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*.

¹⁵ C.A.O van Nieuwenhuijze, has studied al-Sumatrānī's thought including the latter important mystical work such as *Jawhar al-Haqā'iq* for his dissertation, *Samsu'l-Din van Pasai: Bijdrage tot de kennis der Sumatraansche mysticjk*. See also al-Sumatrani's *Nūr al-Daqā'iq* which its manuscript was examined by A. H. Johns. Johns Romanised *Nūr* with notes and published it as 'Nūr al-Dakā'ik by the Sumatran mystic Shamsu'l-Dīn ibn 'Abdullāh', *JRAS* (1953): 137-151.

¹⁶ See his major works on Sufism such as his *Tibyān fī ma'rifat al-adyān* and *Hujjat al-Siddiq li-Daf' al-Zindīq* which the facsimile form of the original manuscripts were published in P.Voorhoeve, *Twee Malaise Geschriften van Nūruddīn ar-Rānīrī*; again *Hujjat al-Siddiq li-Daf' al-Zindīq* in Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *A Commentary on the Hujjat al-Siddiq of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī*; also *Asrār al-Insān fī ma'rifat al-rūh wa al-Rahmān* in Tudjimah's doctoral dissertation; *Latā'if al-Asrār li-Ahl Allāh al-Atyar of Nur al-Dīn al-Ranīrī*, translated by Muhammad Zainiy Uthman, UTM Press, 2011. Al-Attas has demonstrated that in reality al-Rānīrī's *wujūdiyyah* and that of al-Fansūrī is identical (Al-Attas, *Some Aspects*, 28).

¹⁷ See his work *Daqā'iq al-Hurūf* which was Romanised and translated into English by A.H. Johns, 'Dakā'ik al-Hurūf by 'Abd al-Ra'ūf of Singkel', *JRAS* (1955): 55-73 and 139-158.

¹⁸ Al-Maqassārī wrote several works on Islamic metaphysics. *His Zubdat al-asrār fī tahqīq ba'd mashārib al-akhyār* was studied by Nabilah Lubis, *Menyingkap Intisari Segala Rahasia Karangan Syekh Yusuf al-Tāj al-Makasari*.

Being’, *a ‘yān al-thābitah, Nūr Muhammad* and others,¹⁹ which are all central themes of the *wujūdiyyah* doctrine. Likewise, in the case of al-Maqassārī who, in spite of his emphasis on the transcendence of God, yet has spent great deal in discussing on various issue pertaining to ‘pantheistic’ Sufism such as allegorical being (*al-mawjūd al-majāzī*) vis-a-vis real being (*al-mawjūd al-haqīqī*) and others. All this indicates that they too had to get involved in *wujūdiyyah* discussion in spite of their preferences was otherwise. Their involvement in these issues was inevitable since the surrounding Malay communities were then largely strongly preoccupied with these *wujūdiyyah* topics for discussion.

Then came al-Falimbānī with his *Siyar* and *Hidāyat* in the eighteenth century. Even after al-Falimbānī, the discussions of *wujūdiyyah* continued to flourish as found the works of his younger contemporary, the nineteenth century by Dāwūd al-Fatānī (d.1263/1847)²⁰ and later in the works of Muhammad Nafīs al-Banjārī (d.1226/1812)²¹. The continual discussion on the degrees of existence for four centuries by the Malay scholars shows that the idea of *wahdat al-wujūd* was deeply rooted in the Malay scholars and communities. Works and ideas from their

¹⁹ Azra, *Opposition*, 680.

²⁰ The discussion on the degrees of existence can be found in his *al-Manhal al-Sāfī fī bayān ramz ahl al-Sūfī*. This *al-Manhal* was a subject of study by Mohd. Zain ‘Abd al-Rahmān for his master thesis, namely: *An Annotated Translation and Transliteration of al-Manhal al-Sāfī fī bayan ramz ahl al-sūfī of Shaykh Dawūd al-Fatānī*, unpublished MA Thesis submitted to the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Kuala Lumpur, 2000. El-Muhammady also discusses this *al-Manhal* in a paper “Martabat Tujuh” presented at a conference *Munaaqashah Sufi Peringkat Kebangsaan 2004*, 12-14th. August 2004, Negeri Sembilan Malaysia, 1-45.

²¹ He discusses the degrees of existence in his work, *al-Durr al-Nafīs*. The work was a subject of several studies including by Wan Muhammad Wan Ali for his MA thesis namely, *Suntingan dan Anotasi Sebuah Kitāb Tasawwuf Melayu Kurun Ketiga Belas/Kedelapan belas Masihi: al- Durru ‘n-Nafīs Karangan ash-Shaykh Muhammad Nafīs al-Banjariyy (rahimahu’LLāh)*, (*Editing and Annotation of the 13th/18th century Malay Sufi Treatise: al-Durr al-Nafīs*), unpublished MA Thesis submitted to Institut Bahasa, Kesusasteraan dan Kebudayaan Melayu (IBKKM), UKM, 1973; also the most recent one is by Muhammad Khairi bin Mahyuddin, *Exposition on al-tawhīd by Shaykh Muhammad Nafīs al-Banjārī: An Analytical Study of His Book ‘al-Durr al-Nafīs’*, unpublished MA thesis submitted to the International Islamic University Malaysia, 2006.

preceding scholars were often quoted and sometimes copied in verbatim by succeeding scholars, most of the time without any proper acknowledgment. These central ideas of the predecessors were generally further elaborated, and explained while any vague statements were clarified and defended. The scenario of the Malay scholars in these centuries and their adherence to the *wujūdiyyah* is best described in the words of Azra:

The fact that the Malay-Indonesian scholars, in the eighteenth century continued to cling to the central doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabī is hardly surprising. Despite criticism of the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd*, it is in fact the fundamental and central doctrine of all kinds of Sufism.²²

Like Ibn al-‘Arabī, al-Fansūrī and al-Sumatrānī were not spared from being accused of pantheism and heretic (*zindīq*) by ‘orthodox’²³ Sunnī scholars such as al-Rānīrī.²⁴ Later, the eighteenth century scholar al-Falimbānī, was also accused of the same charge. Though the accusations against al-Falimbānī specifically were not heard of during his life time, but nonetheless the grounds for the attacks were almost the same as to the other *wujūdiyyah* proponents. It will be demonstrated here whether the accusations were valid, or the critics have actually misunderstood the teachings of the *wujūdiyyah* scholars.

²² Azra, *Networks*, 138; Martin Lings too admits that *wahdat al-wujūd* holds a central place in all the orthodox mysticism of Asia, Martin Lings, *A Moslem*, 121.

²³ In the case of Malay Archipelago, we follow the convention where scholars of Malay world generally group al-Rānīrī and al-Sinkīlī among the ‘orthodox’ Sufīs, while ‘al-Fansūrī, al-Sumatrānī are accused of ‘heterodox’ Sufīs’. See for example in the writings of al-Attas, *Some Aspects*, 26.

²⁴ Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī (d. 1068/1658) who was appointed as the *muftī* of Kingdom of Aceh in the mid-17th century ruled that all theological works that opposed his own to be heretical. This includes Hamzah Fansūrī’s writings, in addition to those of his students, which were banned and later burned. Fansūrī beliefs are still debated and banned by orthodox Muslims in parts of Asia. Further in-depth theological discussion on Fansūrī-Ranīrī polemic can be found in al-Attas’ works namely: ‘Raniri and the Wujūdiyyah’; also in *Comments on the Re-examination of al-Raniri’s Hujjatu’l-Siddiq: A Refutation*; also *A Commentary on the Hujjat al-Siddiq of Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī*; and finally *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansurī*.

6.2.1 *Wujūdiyyah* Teachings of Hamzah al-Fansūrī

Before delving into the *wujūdiyyah* teachings of al-Falimbānī, it would be better to briefly see the influence of at least two of his main predecessors mentioned before namely al-Fansūrī and al-Sumatrānī.²⁵ This will surely shed some light on the development of Malay *wujūdiyyah* doctrine, more importantly on its relation with al-Falimbānī’s Seven Stages doctrine which is our main discussion in this chapter. As mentioned before, al-Fansūrī drew much on Ibn ‘Arabī’s five grades of beings and articulates it in his prose works²⁶ and then systematised the doctrine in the form of a framework as succinctly summarised by Riddell in the following table below:

Grade	Name	Nature
1	Non-determination (<i>huwa/ lā ta’ayyūn</i>)	Innermost Essence of God, beyond knowledge, inconceivable, indeterminate, non-manifest.
2	First-determination (<i>al-ta’ayyūn al-awwal</i>): Individualised Essence (<i>ahad / wāhid</i>).	Knowledge (<i>‘ilm</i>), being (<i>wujūd</i>), vision (<i>shuhūd</i>), light (<i>nūr</i>), balance of opposites
3	Second Determination (<i>ta’ayyūn al-thānī</i>): Inclusive Unity (<i>wāhidīyyah</i>)	Fixed prototypes, Reality of things, Forms of knowledge, Spirit of relationships. Unity in diversity.
4	Third determination (<i>al-ta’ayyūn al-thālith</i>): the Relational Spirit (<i>rūh idāfī</i>)	Humanspirit, animalspirit, vegetable spirit
5	Fourth determination (<i>al-ta’ayyūn al-rābi’</i>)	Relational spirit separates from the divine Essence; Materialisation of all created things

Table 6.1. Al-Fansūrī’s Five Grades of Being

Source: Adapted from Riddell, *Transmission*, 107.

²⁵ On the background of these two scholars, refer to Chapter One.

²⁶ Riddell, *Transmission*, 107. Al-Fansūrī’s five archetypes or epiphanies which emanates from *a’yān al-thābitah* (Fixed Prototypes) are similar conceptually to Ibn ‘Arabī’s five Descents (*tanazzulāt*) of the Divine Presence in His theophanies namely, (1) *hadrat al-dhāt* (Presence of the Essence), (2) *hadrat al-Sifāt wa’l Asmā’* (Presence of the Attributes and Names), (3) *hadrat al-af’ al* (Presence of Divine Acts), (4) *hadrat al-mithāl wa al-khayāl* (Presence of the Image and the Active Imagination), (5) *hadrat al-al-hiss wa al-mushāhada* (Presence of the sensible and visible) (Corbin, *Creative*, 225, 360-1). It is the fact that al-Fansūrī calls God’s First Epiphany as *‘al-ta’ayyūn al-awwal*’ similar to that of Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysical system of archetypes, which nobody prior to Ibn ‘Arabī has ever used the term (Affifi, *The Mystical*, 47-53).

In his prose works: *Asrār al-‘Arifīn* (The Secrets of the Gnostics), *Sharab al-‘ashiqīn*²⁷ (The Drink of Lovers) and *al-Muntahī* (The Adept), al-Fansūrī displays that he was deeply influenced in particular by Ibn ‘Arabī and al-Jīlī and strictly adopted their interpretation of *wujūdiyyah*. For instance, ‘rather than God being presented as transcendent and unattainable for the individual believer’, al-Fansūrī gives an ‘insight [...] where God is identified with all elements in the universe, even the ordinary individual.’²⁸ God is the only true Reality and other realities are merely manifestations of the one true Reality, God. *Wujūdiyyah* teachings of al-Sumatrānī.

6.2.2 *Wujūdiyyah* Teachings of Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrānī

Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrānī had a gift of linguistic ability capable of writing beautifully in both Arabic and Malay. According to Johns, ‘he was the first Jāwī scholar known to have written in Arabic alongside a number of prose writings in Malay’.²⁹ His principal work in Arabic was *Jawhār al-Ḥaqā’iq* (Jewel of True Realities), in which he articulates his system of ‘Seven Stages of Being’. The ideas were also expressed in his other works including *Mir’āt al-Mu’minīn* and *Nūr al-Daqā’iq*.³⁰

What is interesting to see is that this idea of ‘Seven Stages’ originates from an Indian writer, al-Burhanpūrī (d. 1071/1590) and not his master, al-Fansūrī. It seems now that Sufism in the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago began to make a

²⁷ Another version is *Zīnat al-muwahhidīn*, Cod.Or.7291 (II), Library, University of Leiden, where it contains a summary of the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* not only from the works of Ibn ‘Arabī but also of al-Qunāwī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Irāqī and al-Jīlī.

²⁸ Riddell, *Transmission*, 106.

²⁹ A.H. Johns, ‘Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrānī’ in *EI2*.

³⁰ C.A.O van Nieuwenhuijze had made extensive study on al-Sumatrānī for his doctoral dissertation; see C.A.O van Nieuwenhuijze, *Samsu’l-Dīn van Pasai*, Leiden, 1945.

shift, as portrayed by al-Sumatrānī who drew much on Indian scholars, such as al-Burhanpūrī, than from the Arab writers. As Johns observes,

‘...comparative study of Hamzah and Shams al-Dīn’s writings points to a shift in influence upon Acehnese mystical thinking from Arab writers (Ibn al-‘Arabi and al-Jīlī upon Hamzah) to Indian writers (al-Burhanpūrī upon Shams al-Dīn).’³¹

Tuhfat, according to al-Attas, seems to clarify the *wujūdiyyah* doctrine of the Absolute Being, of its stages of Determination. In al-Fansūrī’s schema of ontological descent, the first determination (*al-ta‘ayyun al-awwal*), the second determination (*al-ta‘ayyun al-thānī*) and the third determination (*al-ta‘ayyun al-thālith*) are all uncreated. The third determination, however, has the ‘double aspect of being created and uncreated’ depending upon how it is viewed.³² Al-Attas claims that in the *Tuhfat*, however, only the first and second determinations are uncreated while the rest are all created, including the third determination. On the hand, what we have found is that the three determinations are all uncreated (*qadīm*), as mentioned by al-Burhanpūrī. Not only that they are also the priority (*al-taqdīm*) and posteriority (*al-tā’khīr*) in the sense that their order is not chronological but rather a mental construct or logical (*‘aqlī*) and not temporal (*zamānī*) sense.³³

In al-Burhanpūrī’s ontological schema, the distinction between God and Man is more clearly expressed unlike in that of al-Fansūrī’s works. The adoption of Burhanpūrī’s schema by al-Sumatrānī rather than that of his own master al-Fansūrī is perhaps due to the milieu then that emphasised on a more explicit position of God-Man relationship. The stress on the position was necessary due to

³¹ Riddell, *Transmission*, 112-113.

³² Al-Attas, *Mysticism*, 200, n. 48.

³³ Johns, *Gift*, 130-131.

the prevalent belief of pantheism. Riddell has summarised al-Sumatrani's Seven Stages as follows:

Grade	Name	Content	Characteristics
First	<i>Ahadiyyah</i>	The Essence of God	Uncreated and Eternal
Second	<i>Wahdah</i>	The Attributes of God (the Reality that is Muhammad)	Uncreated and eternal-multiplicity in unity
Third	<i>Wahidiyyah</i>	The Names of God (the Reality of Man)	Uncreated and eternal – unity in multiplicity
Fourth	<i>'Alam al-Arwāh</i>	The World of Spirits	Created and particular – God's Being manifested
Fifth	<i>'Alam al-Mithāl</i>	The World of Ideas	Created and particular – God's Being manifested
Sixth	<i>'Alam al-Ajsām</i>	The World of Bodies	Created and particular – God's Being manifested
Seventh	<i>'Alam al-Insān</i>	The World of Man	Created and particular – God's Being manifested

Table 6.2: Al-Sumatrānī's Seven Stages of Being

Source: Riddell, *Transmission*, 113

Johns views that al-Sumatrānī's Seven Stages simplifies the complex theosophy of Ibn 'Arabī as expounded by the earlier Acehnese mystic and his master al-Fansūrī, which shows 'affiliation to an Iraqi-Persian transmission of Ibn 'Arabī, tradition mediated by al-Jīlī (d. 827/1424)'.³⁴ Without going into detail of al-Sumatrānī's *wujūdiyyah* at this point as it will be further discussed later when

³⁴ Johns, 'Shams al-Dīn al-Samatrānī, in *EI2*.

talking about al-Falimbānī's *wujūdiyyah*, suffice it to mention here that this seven-grade ontological structure of emanation is quite identical to that of al-Falimbānī.

6.3 *Wujūdiyyah* teachings of Al-Falimbānī

6.3.1 Its Origin

Just as the term '*waḥdat al-wujūd*' was not coined by Ibn 'Arabī,³⁵ likewise the term 'Seven Stages of Being' also did not originate from al-Falimbānī himself. He took the idea from the *Tuḥfat al-Mursalāh ilā Rūḥ al-Nabī*³⁶ of a Gujerati by the name of Shaykh al-Burhanpūrī (d. 1029/1619).³⁷ Very little is known about al-Burhanpūrī apart from the fact that he wrote the *Tuḥfat* with its commentary which he called it *al-Ḥaqīqat al-Muwāfīkah li al-Shari'ah* (Mystical reality brought into harmony with the Law).³⁸ 'Abd al-Ghānī al-Nablūsī (d.1143/1730), a *hadīth* scholar who had written over two hundred works also came up with a commentary of al-Burhanpūrī's *Tuḥfat*.³⁹ Shaghīr claims that there are two more commentary works, the first one is by Ibrahim bin Hasan al-Kurani (d. 1011/1690) bearing the title '*Tahiyat al-Mas'alat al-Sharḥ al-Tuḥfat al-Mursalāh*' and the second one is by Jalāl al-Dīn bin Kamal al-Dīn al-'Ashī entitled *Mazhar al-Ajla*

³⁵ The doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* according to Chittick did not originate from Ibn 'Arabī (d.637/1240) as what many people wrongly accused him of. The term can never be found in any of his works. The term was first introduced by Sadr al-Dīn al-Qunāwī (d. 673/1274) and then became infamous after the attack launched by the putative authorities of the 'Reformers', Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328); *EI2*, s.v. "*waḥdat al-shuhūd*".

³⁶ 'Abd al-Rahmān Mahmūd in his article, '*Martabat Tujuh Menurut Syekh Daud al-Fatani: Satu Analisis*' mentions the name of al-Burhanpūrī work is *Risālat al-Tuḥfat al-Mursalāh fī 'ilm Haqīqat al-Shari'at al-Muhammadiyah*, instead.

³⁷ His full name is Muhammad ibn Fadlillāh al-Buhanpūrī, a Gujerat who, according to Brockelmann, died in 1029/1620 (Brockelmann, GAL, Supp.II, 617). Al-Burhanpuri's influence in the Archipelago was spread through his book *al-Tuḥfat al-Mursalāh ila Rūḥ al-Nabī*. The work has been translated by A.H. Johns into English as *The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet*.

³⁸ Brockelmann: *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*. (Leiden: 1898-1942) Supp.II, 617; cf. Johns, *Gift*, 5.

³⁹ It is not known whether *Tuḥfat* has been translated into Malay or not prior to its translation as found in al-Falimbānī's *Siyar*. However, this commentary of al-Nablūsī was translated into Malay by a certain Sheikh Muhammad Tayyib ibn Mas'ūd al-Banjārī al-Khālīdī al-Naqshabandī under the title *Fath al-hadi fī tarjamat Sharḥ ibn al-Nablūsī al-Naqshabandī* (Shaghīr, *Tuḥfat al-mursalāh*). Biography of al-Nablūsī can be found in *Tārīkh 'Ajā'ib al-Athar fī al-tarājīm wa al-akhbār of al-Jabartī*, 1:232, and also Baghdādī's *Hadiyyat al-'ārifīn*, 1:590-594.

ilā Martabat al-A‘lā.⁴⁰ The best of all, according to al-Falimbānī, however, is the commentary by al-Nablusī.

Unlike *Hidāyat*, which is meant for the beginners, the *Tuhfat* according to al-Falimbānī is for the advanced students in Sufism, at the level of *muntahī*.⁴¹ *Tuhfat* has been so popular in the Malay world that many commentary works were written on it either as a separate epistle, or incorporated in various works of the Malay scholars as done by al-Falimbānī in *Siyar*, chapter three, al-Banjārī in his *al-Durr al-Nafīs* and Dawūd al-Fatānī’s *Manhal al-sāfi*. Shaghir further claims that he is in possession of manuscripts written by Yusūf al-Maqassārī, who has also elaborated the doctrine found in the *Tuhfat*.⁴² He (Shaghir) also provides at the back of his *Hidāyat*, volume two, facsimiles of two manuscripts. The first is al-Burhanpūrī’s *Tuhfat* with parallel Malay meanings allegedly given by al-Falimbānī,⁴³ and another text called *Risalah Tasawwuf* a work written by al-Falimbānī.⁴⁴

Interestingly, on a related note, Johns had discovered an anonymous collection of seventeenth century tracts in a single volume forming No. 11648 of the Marsden Collection in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies. In general, the tracts contain the teachings similar to those of al-Sumatrānī, and are of *wujūdiyyah* or pantheistic type. It was believed that the author was one al-Sumatrānī’s disciples.⁴⁵ The framework of the tracts resembles

⁴⁰ Shaghir, *Hidāyat*, 2:viii-ix; *Marifah*, 2:60.

⁴¹ Shaghir, *Hidāyat*, 2:ix.

⁴² Shaghir, *Hidāyat*, 2: ix.

⁴³ I have not found anywhere written the corresponding parallel meanings as allegedly done by al-Falimbānī. Shaghir, however, believes it is so.

⁴⁴ The facsimile reads from back cover to front of *Hidāyat*. For al-Burhanpūrī’s *Tuhfat* and al-Falimbānī’s *Risalah Tasawwuf*, see Shaghir, *Hidayat*, 2: 258-234, and 2:271-259 respectively.

⁴⁵ Johns, *Malay Sufism*, 33; Drewes, *BKI*, 115 (1959), no.3, 281 (Review).

that of *Tuhfat* of al-Burhanpūrī where it contains the commentary on the doctrine of Seven Stages. According to Johns, they ‘were written expressly for the people of Aceh in a crystallised form’.⁴⁶ This is again a proof that al-Burhanpūrī’s influence with his *wujudiyyah* teaching was great among the people and in this case the Acehnese.

Voorhoeve, in his preface to the Arabic text of *Tuhfat*, states that al-Burhanpūrī ‘had a close relation with Indonesian countries and was a friend of Sibghat Allah ibn Rūh Allah al-Barūchī (of Broach) who was living at Mecca’.⁴⁷ They both studied with a teacher belonged to the Shattariyah order, Wajih al-Dīn al-‘Alawī, Al-‘Alawī, was a student of Muhammad ibn Khatīr al-Dīn of Gwalior, known as al-Ghawth al-Hindī whose major work *al-Jawāhir al-khamsah* contains six stages of being.⁴⁸ He is also traced back to Ahmad al-Qushāshī, whose student, Abd al-Rā’uf al-Sinkīlī who spread this Shattariyyah *tarīqa* in the Indonesian region.⁴⁹ The significance of al-Qushāshī, al-‘Alawī and the Shattariyyah especially in the spread of Seven Stages will be seen in the preceding sections.

The *Tuhfat* was written in a very succinct and concise manner in the form of a collection of aphorisms. It is as a summary or compendium of Sufi doctrine. The basis of its teaching, according to Johns, who translated it into English, is to formulate the understanding on the ‘Unity of God’ correctly and ‘to restrain from extremists of certain groups of mystics in India’. Johns says:

His [Burhanpūrī’s] work thus represents an attempt on the part of

⁴⁶ Johns, *Malay Sufism*, 33.

⁴⁷ Johns, *Gift*, 126.

⁴⁸ Johns, *Gift*, 126.

⁴⁹ See Voorhoeve’s Preface of the Arabic text of the *Tuhfat* in Johns, *Gift*, 126.

the *orthodox* (italics is mine) Sūfī tradition to restrain the extremist tendencies of certain groups of mystics in India, and elsewhere, and ensure the grasp and practice of the essential elements of Islam. As such, it is a documentation of the tension between the *orthodox* and heterodox wings of Sufism current throughout the length and breadth of the Muslim world...⁵⁰

It is not clear from the above, however, which groups of ‘extremist mystics in India’ and ‘heterodox wings of Sufism’ that Johns was referring to. Nonetheless, it is not surprising to note that there are always group of mystics or dervishes from time to time who contravene the Shari‘ah teachings and deviate from the mainstream orthodox Sunni Islam. Karamustafa, for example, discovers the following:

In addition to eschewing ritual obligations, the dervishes further contravened the Sharia, in spirit if not always in letter, by adopting patently scandalous and antisocial practices. Foremost, among these, on account of its conspicuous nature, was the cultivation of a bizarre general appearance. The coiffure, apparel, and paraphernalia of the dervishes were all shockingly strange.⁵¹

Another statement of Johns that al-Burhanpūrī’s *Tuhfat* represents an ‘orthodox Ṣūfī’ is also very much debatable now as to whether it is truly ‘orthodox’ or not, as some critics have pointed out. It is quite surprising to note that the basis of this so-called ‘orthodox Ṣūfī’ teaching, as Johns writes, is that ‘God is Being, and that this Being proceeds to visible world through six stages of emanation, but is involved in no change thereby’.⁵²

While Johns has his own interpretation of the orthodoxy of the teachings of *Tuhfat*, nonetheless, the *Tuhfat* has now become one of the texts considered propagating deviant teachings. Since the teachings of *Tuhfat* also appear in al-

⁵⁰ Johns, *Gift*, 5-6.

⁵¹ Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends*, 18.

⁵² Johns, *Gift*, 6.

Falimbānī's *Siyar*, then *Siyar* too is deemed deviating.⁵³ Prior to this, the same fate has also befallen the work of Shaykh Muhammad Nafīs al-Banjārī, *Al-Durr al-Nafīs*.

The original Burhanpūrī's *Tuhfat* was actually translated into Javanese language around 1090/1680 and thereafter several local scholars from Sumatra itself and nearby province of Aceh might have used it and translated it.⁵⁴ This might include al-Fansūrī's disciple Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrani (d. 1039/1630)⁵⁵ who quoted it in his works such as *Jawhar al-Haqā'iq*⁵⁶ and *Sha'ir Ikan Tongkol*,⁵⁷ and later by 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkilī (d. c.1104/1690)⁵⁸ who also quoted the same idea in his books like *Daqā'iq al-huruf*. Another local scholar, Muhammad Nafīs al-Banjārī (d.1191/1820) further elaborates the ideas in his work *al-Durr al-Nafīs* and finally, Muhammad Salleh 'Abd Allah al-Mengkabu in his work *Kashf al-Asrār*. Al-Fansūrī himself, however, perhaps had not encountered the work yet. The *Tuhfat* most probably had not yet emerged during his life time who might have died around 1016/1607.⁵⁹

The *Tuhfat* is without doubt one of the most important works in the history of development of Ṣūfī thought in the seventeenth century Archipelago, with its

⁵³ Riddell, *Transmission*, 258; see also JAKIM e-fatwa, http://www.e-fatwa.gov.my/fatwa-kebangsaan-page-front?keys=siyarus&tid_2=208

⁵⁴ The book was said to have been found in 1668 by a Javanese saint named, 'Abd al-Muhyī of Ceribon, Sumatra. It was also translated into English from Javanese (and Arabic) by A.H. Johns in 1960, who was then a Professor of Indonesian Languages and Literatures, University of London. The book bears the title *The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet* published by The Australian National University of Canberra, 1965. Reference to this translated *Tuhfat* of Johns is made throughout this work. Al-Attas believes the work was translated and used in Aceh sometime during the second phase of Islamization process, i.e. fifteenth until eighteenth centuries, see Al-Attas, *Mysticism*, 200.

⁵⁵ Also sometimes referred to as 'Shams al-Dīn of Pasai' as found in Nieuwenhuijze. See A.H. Johns' article on 'Shams al-Dīn al-Samatrānī' in *EI2* or further details.

⁵⁶ This work was edited by C.A.O van Nieuwenhuijze for his dissertation, *Shamsu'l-Dīn van Pasai*, Leiden 1948.

⁵⁷ See for example a manuscript held by the University of Leiden Library, coded as MAL 3320.

⁵⁸ For further details, see 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkilī' in *EI2*.

⁵⁹ Azra, *Origins*, 71.

popularity is still found in the Ṣūfī circles up to the present day.⁶⁰ Apart from the commentary written by al-Burhanpūrī himself, there is also a commentary by Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d.1110/1689) composed on the orders of al-Kūrānī's master at Medina, Ahmad al-Qushāshī (d.1071/1661).⁶¹ It is no exaggeration to say that all subsequent writings of Sufism in the Archipelago drew much reference to *Tuhfat* where it serves as the source of framework of the Seven Stages.⁶² This includes the works of al-Sumatrānī's *Jawhar* and al-Banjārī's *al-Durr al-naḥīs*, all contains the system of Seven Stages as found in *Tuhfat*.⁶³ Other works are like *Jawhar al-Tasawwuf* by Muhammad Ismā'īl al-Midrāsī, al-Fatānī's *al-Manhal*, *Bentuk alam mengkagumkan* (in Malay) by 'Abd Allāh Muhammad (Nākula) and *Risala asrār al-dīn* of Muhammad Tayyib al-Banjārī.⁶⁴

However, it is not certain where al-Burhanpūrī himself had actually taken the doctrine. There is also a possibility that he might have taken the teachings from the Sumatran mystics, al-Sumatrānī, and not vice versa as often thought.⁶⁵ According to Johns, in al-Sumatrānī's *Jawhar*, there contains several passages also found in the *Tuhfat* 'quoted almost verbatim and without acknowledgment'. Despite the general assumption that *Tuhfat* is prior to *Jawhar*, yet al-Sumatrānī's work is 'far more developed and better than that of al-Burhanpūrī'. For that reasons Johns feels that 'it is not impossible that the scheme of the Seven

⁶⁰ Johns, *Gift*, 8.

⁶¹ Drewes, *BKI*, 115, pt. 3, 283.

⁶² Johns, *Gift*, 8-9.

⁶³ Johns, *Gift*, 9. In fact, according to Voorhoeve, there are many Mss extant of this work and commentaries of it, see P.Voorhoeve: *Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and other collections in the Netherlands*. Bibliotheca Universitatis Lugduni Batavorum 1957, 380-382.

⁶⁴ For the details of the works, see Fatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 149-150.

⁶⁵ Johns, *Gift*, 9, n.8.

Grades of Being is an Indonesian invention’,⁶⁶ however, he strongly believes that the system is of Indian origin.⁶⁷

While Johns is still searching for evidences to establish the hypothesis that the doctrine might have been the invention from within Indonesia, Voorhoeve, on the hand, unlike Johns (and also Drewes), is convinced that al-Burhanpūrī was indeed ‘the first to compile the doctrine in the form it appears in his work’.⁶⁸ He rejects another possibility that it might have come from Wajīh al-Dīn al-‘Alawī just because al-‘Alawī wrote classification of six stages in his *al-Jawāhir al-khamsa*, two stages short from al-Burhanpūrī’s seven stages, yet identical in all the first six stages as *Tuhfat*. But if one does not count the stage of *Ahadiyyah* or *lā ta‘ayyun*, as sometimes happen, then al-Burhanpūrī’s doctrine is in fact six stages as well, and perhaps in this case it would be similar to that of al-‘Alawī. In any case, one needs to investigate first how the six stages of al-‘Alawī looks like, and it is beyond the scope of this research to venture into it.

6.3.2 Its Teachings

Al-Falimbānī views that there are several degrees of *tawhīd* and consequently one’s reliance to God (*tawakkul*) corresponds to his level of *tawhīd*.⁶⁹ The basis of *tawhīd* obviously lies on the verse “*lā ilaha illa Allāhu wahdahu lā sharīka lahu, lahu mulku wa lahu al-hamd*” where it constitutes three main points: firstly, *lā ilaha illallāhu wahdahu lā sharīka lahu* means there is no deity but He Alone and He has no partner whatsoever; secondly, *lahu mulku* means all dominions belong to Him and thirdly, *wa lahu al-hamd* means all praises belong to Him. But the

⁶⁶ Johns, *Gift*, 9, n.8.

⁶⁷ Johns, *Malay Sufism*, 33.

⁶⁸ Johns, *Gift*, 127; cf. Drewes, *BKI*, 283 (Review).

⁶⁹ *Siyar* 4:104.

concept of *tawhīd* for al-Falimbānī is not as simple as that. It is like a vast ocean which has no limit, where different people have different degrees of *tawhīd* depending on their faith (*īmān*).

Following al-Ghazālī's degrees of *tawhīd*, al-Falimbānī says that there are four distinct levels of *tawhīd* with the first lowest level is that of mere outward utterance of the formula '*lā ilaha illallāh*' while the person's heart denies it. This is actually the *tawhīd* of a hypocrite. The second level is the utterance with the tongue and affirmation of the heart. This is the level of *tawhīd* of majority of ordinary Muslims and as propagated by the theologians (*mutakallimīn*). The third stage is the stage when one sees the 'Unity of God' by ways of unveiling (*kaḥsf*) of the spiritual heart (*baṣīrah*) due to the overflowing (*fayd*) of the light of truth into one's heart, especially for those travelling in the path of spiritual path (*ṭarīqah*). This is the station of 'those brought closed' or 'the intimates' (*muqarrabīn*). At this stage, they see existence of many things originate from the one and the same source of action of God through His Divine Attribute of The Subduer (*al-Qaḥḥār*). This is called by al-Falimbānī the level of *tawhīd* of divine actions (*tawhīd al-af' al*) which consists of *tawhīd* of Divine Names (*tawhīd al-asmā'*) and *tawhīd* of Divine Attributes (*tawhīd al-sifāt*). The other name for this stage, according to al-Falimbānī, is *tawhīd* of the elite (*tawhīd al-khawās*) because this is the *tawhīd* of the Sufis. What al-Falimbānī actually means by *tawhīd al-af' al* is as follows:

[...] *tawhīd al-af' al* and *tawhīd al-asmā'* unveil for you that there is no action took place in this universe except that it was the action of God alone. And further, no doer of actions except He alone. He is the One who created for all existence (*mawjūd*) their provision

(*rizq*), barrier, life and death, rich and poor, and other attributes.⁷⁰

Finally, the fourth and the highest level of *tawhīd* is where one sees nothing existing (*mawjūd*) in this universe except His Unique Essence (*dhāt*) alone of the Necessary Existence (*wājib al-wujūd*). This is the level of the truthful (*siddiqīn*) the verifier (*muḥaqqiqīn*) and is known in Sufism as the stage of annihilation (*fanā'*) of oneself. It is where one forgets one's own self while being completely drowned in the Unity of the The Truth (*mustagriqān bi al-wāhid al-haq*).⁷¹ Citing the words of al-Bistāmī, al-Falimbānī says that it is the level that “makes me forget of myself” (*ansānī dhikr nafsī*).⁷² This is the utmost level of *tawhīd*, ‘*tawhīd* of elect of the elect’ (*tawhīd khawās al-khawās*).⁷³ Al-Falimbānī further asserts that this is the real meaning of ‘*lā ilaha illallāh*’ which actually signifies ‘*lā mawjūda illa Allāh*’ (No Existence except God alone) as stipulated in the Prophetic tradition: ‘there was God when nothing with Him’ (*kāna Allah wa lā shay'a ma'ahu*).⁷⁴

Al-Falimbānī goes on saying that *ma'rifah* is the level of which the Ṣūfīs that have attained the status of the Verifiers (*muḥaqqiqīn*) and the gnostics (‘*ariffīn*’) term as ‘Knowledge of Reality’ (‘*ilm ḥaqiqah*’) or ‘Gnosis’ (‘*ilm ma'rifah*’) or ‘Unity of Being’ (*wahdat al-wujūd*).⁷⁵ This is for the first time the term *wahdat al-wujūd* mentioned in *Siyar*.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ *Siyar*, 4:102-103.

⁷¹ *Siyar*, 4:103; *Ihyā'*, 4:198.

⁷² *Siyar*, 4:103.

⁷³ *Siyar*, 4:103.

⁷⁴ *Siyar*, 4:103.

⁷⁵ *Siyar*, 4:103.

⁷⁶ Al-Falimbānī also mentions the term *wahdat al-wujūd* and its teachings in his other work, *Risalah Tasawwuf*, see *Risalah Tasawwuf*, 269.

This point is where al-Falimbānī's teachings begins to create controversy, and the starting point where he departs from the teaching of al-Ghazālī and adopted the teachings of al-Falimbānī. It is nowhere to be found in any of al-Ghazālī's writings that he ever mentions the infamous Ṣūfī term, '*waḥdat al-wujūd*'. This is understandable since the term emerged later after al-Ghazālī.

For this reason alone, it is sufficient to conclude that al-Falimbānī did not replicate al-Ghazālī fully, but rather had also incorporated views from other scholars, as in the case those of Ibn 'Arabī, al-Jīlī, al-Burhanpūrī, al-Nābulī and others. While al-Ghazālī stops short of elaborating further of what he actually means by the highest level of *tawḥīd*, the level at which he briefly describes as 'God being the source of all actions',⁷⁷ al-Falimbānī, on the contrary, goes one step further by elaborating on the degrees of existence from the Ṣūfī experiential knowledge. Al-Ghazālī, perhaps in order to avoid from getting the general laymen misled – to whom his book *Iḥyā'* is actually meant for— says that 'this affairs (i.e. *tawḥīd* at highest level) pertains to the secret mysteries of the spiritual world and it is not allowed to write these secrets'.⁷⁸

Ironically, however, while explaining the meaning of the fourth degree of *tawḥīd*, al-Ghazālī has subtly laid almost similar ontological concept but in a very mild way by avoiding using any Sufi technical term.⁷⁹ If one closely scrutinise al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'*, one could sense the underlying flavour of *waḥdat al-wujūd* of some sort does exist in his elaboration of the final degree of *tawḥīd*. While sensing this, the scholars such as Afifi and Nakamura generally prefer to view al-Ghazālī's *tawḥīd* more of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (unity of witnessing) rather

⁷⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, 4:103.

⁷⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, 4:103.

⁷⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, 4:140-157.

than the controversial *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being).⁸⁰ Al-Attas however disagrees with the contention that there is such a doctrine of *waḥdat al-shuhūd*. For him *waḥdat al-shuhūd* is one of the many aspects or facets of *waḥdat al-wujūd* itself.⁸¹

In Burhanpūri's teachings of Seven Stages, we see that God as the Real Being manifests his Divine Unity to the visible world through seven stages of being. The first stage is that of the hiddenness of God Himself, the stage only known to Him alone, which al-Burhanpūrī terms it as *aḥadiyah* (Divine Unity).⁸² While the other six stages are *waḥdah* (Divine Solitude), and *wāḥidiyyah* (Divine Unicity), '*ālam al-arwāḥ* (the World of Spirits), '*ālam al-mithāl* (the World of Ideas), '*ālam al-ajsām* (the World of Bodies), '*ālam al-insān al-kāmil* (the World of Perfect Man).

Al-Falimbānī follows al-Burhanpūrī, in which he elaborates the doctrine further using terminologies and names slightly different from those used by al-Burhanpūrī. At times, al-Falimbānī introduces a few more new terms referring to the same stage depending on the perspective one looks at it, not originally found in *Tuhfat*. Though al-Falimbānī's intention was perhaps to make the explanations clearer, but more often than not they might lead people to further confusion.

It is obvious that the ontological and cosmological discussions involved in this section of al-Falimbānī's *Siyar* seem little to do with his conviction on the

⁸⁰ Affifi, 15 as quoted by Nakamura, 'Imām Ghazālī's Cosmology', 46.

⁸¹ Al-Attas, *A Commentary*, 458.

⁸² Johns, *Gift*, 6-7.

‘origin of the creation of the universe’. It is rather his explanations of various degrees of *tawhīd* and *tawakkul* and not on creed or doctrinal belief.

Before we proceed, it is better to have a look at the various terms used by al-Falimbānī for each stage.

6.3.3 Seven Stages

These stages in the first place do not exist in spatio-temporal sense but rather spiritual-cosmological sense during the spiritual journey where only a gnostic experiences these different stages of being during his spiritual journey (*safar*), which was previously discussed in Chapter Five. The Seven Stages can briefly be surmised as follows:

Aḥadiyah li-aḥadiyah: This is the first stage which is inconceivable and beyond all attributes or normally called in Sufism as ‘*al-lā ta‘yyun*’ (Non-Determination). Al-Falimbānī introduces two more terms when talking about this stage ‘*al-itlāq*’ (Absoluteness), and *al-dhāt al-baḥth* (the Pure Essence).⁸³ The second stage is

Al-wāḥidah (Oneness): It is also known as *al-ta‘yyun al-awwal* (First Determination), or *al-Ḥaqīqat al-Muhammadiyah* (Muhammadan Reality).⁸⁴

Al-wāḥidiyyah, is the third stage and also known as *al-ta‘yyun al-thānī* (Second Determination) or *al-haqīqat al-insāniyyah* or *a‘yan al-thābitah* (Fixed Prototype).⁸⁵

⁸³ *Siyar*, 4:103.

⁸⁴ *Siyar*, 4:104.

⁸⁵ *Siyar*, 4:104.

‘*Alam al-arwah* (World of the Spirits) is the fourth stage. Also known as *Nur Muhammad* and *a‘yan al-khārijah* (Exterior Prototpye).⁸⁶

‘*Alam al-mithāl* (World of Ideas) is the fifth stage.⁸⁷

‘*Alam al-ajsām* (World of Bodies) is the sixth stage and also known as ‘*ālam al-mulk*, ‘*ālam al-shahadah*.⁸⁸

Al-jāmi‘ah, is the seventh stage and known ‘*alam al-insān*, ‘*al-tajalli al-akhir*.⁸⁹ Al-Falimbānī further explains each stage by begin with the idea that the existence of every created being (*hādith*) of this universe can be classified into three broad ontological categories:⁹⁰ first is the existence at the stage of *ta‘ayyun awwal* (First Determination) or the level of *wahdah*. The existence at this stage is in the knowledge of God in its generality (*al-ijmāl*) where separations or distinctions between individual existents not yet manifested. Its existence is mere existence in potentiality (*wujūd taqdīrī*). It only exists in God’s knowledge but has not yet manifested outside His knowledge. The outside is still void and non-existence (‘*adam*). It also known as *wujūd shu‘uni*⁹¹ as in the saying of God below:

Whosoever is in the heavens and on earth begs of Him (its needs from Him). Every day He has a matter to bring forth (such as giving honour to some, disgrace to some, life to some, death to some, etc.)!”

(Surah al-Rahman 55:29)

⁸⁶ *Siyar*, 4:104.

⁸⁷ *Siyar*, 4:104.

⁸⁸ *Siyar*, 4:104.

⁸⁹ *Siyar*, 4:104.

⁹⁰ *Siyar*, 4:104

⁹¹ Al-Falimbānī also uses other term, that is *wujūd al-sulūhī*, *Siyar*, 4:105. This term does not exist in original *Tuhfat* of Burhanpurī.

of Him seeks (its need) every creature In the heavens and on earth: every Day In (new) splendour doth He (shine)!⁹²

The second category is potential existence at the level of *ta'ayyun thānī* (Second Determination). This level is also known as *a'yān al-thābitah* (Fixed Prototypes) at the station of *wāḥidiyyah* where the decrees of every existent are in the knowledge of God, where separations or distinctions between one to the other manifest but have not yet existed exteriorly (*khārij*). This is in line with the words of al-Burhanpūrī that 'they do not even smell a breath of exterior existence'.⁹³

The third category is where the exterior existents are manifested (*wujūd tanjīzī*) at the physical world.⁹⁴ It is also known as *a'yān al-khārijah* (Exterior Prototypes). This is where creations were created and manifested in order that God is known.⁹⁵ At this exterior level, four worlds were created namely worlds of spirits, ideas, bodies and man which we will further explain them in detail below.

Those are basically three levels of existence of a created being. Al-Falimbānī then further explains on his conception of *ma'rifah* of God where God as the Necessary Being and Existence can be directly known by the gnostic who has attained gnosis. The first stage as we have mentioned before is that of *aḥadiyah li aḥadiyah*.⁹⁶ The stage is also known as station of *al-lā ta'ayyun*

⁹² Al-Qur'an 55:29 "Whosoever is in the heavens and on earth begs of Him (its needs from Him). Every day He has a matter to bring forth (such as giving honour to some, disgrace to some, life to some, death to some, etc.)!"

⁹³ Johns, *Gift*, 143-144; *Siyar* 4:105.

⁹⁴ *Siyar* 4:105.

⁹⁵ Al-Falimbānī cites another disputed Prophetic tradition: "I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known, therefore I created creation so that they came to know Me", *Siyar* 4:105.

⁹⁶ In *Tuhfat*, al-Burhanpūrī uses '*al-aḥadiyah*' only and not '*aḥadiyah li-aḥadiyah*'.

(Non-Determination)⁹⁷ or *al-iṭlāq* (Absoluteness) or *dhāt al-baḥth* (the Pure Essence). It is a stage as if the existence of God Essence alone where God sees nothing but His Essence without His Attributes, Unity and His Actions.⁹⁸ This is the stage ‘where no other stage above it exists, but all other stages are below it’.⁹⁹ Ontologically, this can be said as the stage where only God’s Pure Essence exists, not even His Divine Attributes, nor His Divine Names or His Actions. At this highest spiritual stage, a gnostic – through Divine Grace – visions God at His Pure Essence through his spiritual eyes (*baṣīrah*). This is also called Stage of Distinct (*martabat al-zuḥūr*), since only God’s Pure Essence alone is distinct, and nothing else. This stage is completely invisible (*ghayb al-mutlāq*) from all human sensory perception, physical, rational and imaginal faculties.

Here, knowledge of God is not derived from all the various faculties of human beings mentioned above, but rather through continuous remembrance (*dhikr*) of God and Extinction (*fanā*)¹⁰⁰ of oneself from everything else except God alone. The gnostic is annihilated until gradually he reaches the station of ‘remaining with God’ (*baqā’ billāh*). In other words, upon ‘seeing’ this Divine Essence, the person loses his self-consciousness, first from this physical world then from his own self and finally immersed in the ‘unity of God’. At this level of *ma‘rifah*, one is recommended to continuously make remembrance of God (*dhikr Allāh*) in order to prevent from any disruption.¹⁰¹ As said, at this level only God Essence

⁹⁷ Other term used is ‘Indeterminacy’; see Al-Attas, *Fansūrī*, 69.

⁹⁸ *Siyar*, 4:104.

⁹⁹ *Siyar*, 4:104.

¹⁰⁰ Also ‘annihilation, cessation, passing away’. It is a technical term in Sufism used to indicate stage in the mystical experience where a gnostic is ‘absorbed’ into God losing consciousness of the self the physical world, Ian R. Netton, *A Popular Dictionary of Islam*, 79.

¹⁰¹ *Siyar*, 4:104.

alone exists. This, according to al-Falimbānī, is based on a Prophetic tradition: ‘God was, and there was nothing besides Him’.¹⁰²

Only at the lower level the discussion on the existence of being starts. The first three top levels namely *aḥadiyyah*, *wāḥidah* and *wāḥidiyyah*, the existence still in the *a‘yān al-thābitah* or what Izutsu terms as in the ‘mind of God’. In other words, the first of the seven stages is that of ‘Non-Determination’ as mentioned by al-Burhanpūrī, while the remaining six are universal states of manifestation.

The second stage is what he terms *al-wāḥidah*.¹⁰³ It is also known as *al-ta‘ayyun al-awwal* (the First Determination) or *Ḥaqīqat al-Muḥammadiyyah* (Reality of Muhammad). It is as if God’s knowledge of His Essence and His Attributes and All Existents in composite without any distinction between one another.¹⁰⁴ At this level, it signifies God’s knowledge of His Essence, Attributes and all Existents ‘under the aspect of their generality without being differentiated from one another’.¹⁰⁵

The third stage is *al-wāḥidiyyah*. It is like God’s Knowledge of His Divine Essence and Attributes and all creations in their separated and distinct forms between one and the others. Since starting from this level is where all creations begin, this stage is also known as *ḥaqīqat insāniyyah*. It is *al-ta‘ayyun al-thānī* (the Second Determination) which ‘signifies God’s knowledge of His Essence, Attributes and all Existents under the aspect of their particularity as being

¹⁰² The saying goes: “*kāna Allahu wa lā shay‘a ma‘ahu*”, *Siyar* 4:103.

¹⁰³ This name is not found in *Tuhfat* but what is used is *al-wahdah*, see Johns, *Gift*, 130.

¹⁰⁴ *Siyar*, 4:104.

¹⁰⁵ Johns, *Gift*, 140.

differentiated one from another'.¹⁰⁶ All the above three stages just mentioned are eternal (*qadīm*) and eternity (*azalīy*) and no existent whatsoever at this stage save God's Essence and Attributes. While all existents at that stage is in the God's Knowledge, not yet existed outside it.¹⁰⁷ Al-Burhanpūrī says that these three grades mentioned are not only uncreated (*qadīm*), but also the priority (*al-taqdīm*) and posteriority (*al-tā'khīr*). This all is logical ('*aqlī*) and not temporal (*zamānī*).¹⁰⁸

The fourth stage is '*ālam al-arwāh*. This is the stage of the 'world of spirits'. Also known as stage of the *Nūr Muḥammad* (Light of Muhammad). It is a very subtle state has no form yet and no distinction among each other. It signifies simple things (*al-kawniyah al-mujarradah*) and independent where things exist in the form of ideas without any differentiation from one another.¹⁰⁹

The fifth stage is '*ālam al-mithāl*. It is the 'world of ideas' which signifies subtle things which are not liable to partition or division nor rending (*fusūq*) nor mending.¹¹⁰ The sixth stage is '*ālam al-ajsām*. The sixth stage is that of the 'world of bodies'. It signifies composite things from the dense elements such as fire, wind, earth and water. They are now liable to partition and division and from them stones, vegetation, animals, man and jinns were created.¹¹¹

The seventh stage is *al-jāmi'ah* (Composite). It is a stage which combines all the previous stages. This stage is also known as *martabat al-insān* which is

¹⁰⁶ Johns, *Gift*, 140.

¹⁰⁷ *Siyar*, 4:104.

¹⁰⁸ Johns, *Gift*, 130-131.

¹⁰⁹ Johns, *Gift*, 131, 141.

¹¹⁰ *Siyar*, 4:10; Johns, *Gift*, 141.

¹¹¹ *Siyar*, 4:104. The mentioning of these four elements are no where to be found in *Tuhfat*.

the final manifestation (*tajallī al-ākhir*) of God.¹¹² This stage combines all these material and spiritual, and *wāhidīyyah* and *wahdah* as well as manifestations of the previous sixth stages.¹¹³ This is the grade of God's final manifestation (*tajallī al-ākhir*), as it were, which is also called 'grade of Man' (*martabat al-insān*). In Man, finally is 'manifested all the preceding grades in an unveiled manner in the form of 'Perfect Man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*) with the full perfection is in our Prophet Muhammad.¹¹⁴

As we have said earlier, this concept of 'Perfect Man' is clearly the reminiscence on the influence of al-Jīlī, one of the greatest exponents of the work of Ibn 'Arabi. Jīlī was responsible through his book, *al-insān al-kāmil* for systematizing Ibn Arabi's teachings on the structure of reality and human perfection.¹¹⁵ The inclusion of the idea of a 'Perfect Man' in al-Falimbānī's teachings shows that he was not mainly influenced by al-Ghazālī alone, but also other Ṣūfī scholars, including those from the school of Ibn 'Arabī, such as al-Jīlī.

Al-Falimbānī as we have mentioned in Chapter Four: On Knowledge and Spiritual Education, clearly adopts that a *sālik* ought to continuously purify his self to attain the status of a Perfect Man as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad whom he regards as someone who has attained the most perfect *ma'rifah*. Perfect Man is the level of the Prophets, messengers and saints.¹¹⁶

As far as is known, al-Ghazālī has not discussed the concept of Perfect Man in any of his works in the manner mentioned by al-Falimbānī. Al-Jīlī, on the

¹¹² *Siyar*, 4:104.

¹¹³ Johns, *Gift*, 141.

¹¹⁴ Johns, *Gift*, 141.

¹¹⁵ The full title of Jīlī's work is *al-insān al-kāmil fī ma'rifat al-awākhir wa al-awā'il* (The Perfect Man through the gnosis of endings and beginnings).

¹¹⁶ *Siyar*, 3:106.

other hand as said earlier was responsible for introducing the term *al-insān al-kāmil* which was unheard of before him. Thereafter, subsequent *wujūdiyyah* scholars seem to adopt al-Jīlī’s doctrine of Perfect Man and incorporated it in their teachings as had been done by al-Burhanpūrī, and al-Falimbānī. Al-Falimbānī’s Seven Stages can be summarized as below:

Grade	Name	Content	Characteristics
1	<i>Aḥadiyyah li Aḥadiyyah</i>	The Essence of God	Uncreated and eternal
2	<i>al-wāhidah</i>	The Attributes of God (the Reality that is Muhammad)	Uncreated and eternal - multiplicity in unity
3	<i>al-wāhidiyyah</i>	The Names of God (the Reality of Man)	Uncreated and eternal – unity in multiplicity
4	<i>‘ālam al-arwāh</i>	The World of Spirits	Created and particular – God’s Being manifested
5	<i>‘ālam al-mithāl</i>	The World of Ideas	Created and particular – God’s Being manifested
6	<i>‘ālam al-ajsām</i>	The World of Bodies	Created and particular – God’s Being manifested
7	<i>‘ālam al-insān</i>	The World of Man	Created and particular – God’s Being manifested

Table 4.3: Al-Falimbānī’s Seven Stages of Being

Source: Al-Falimbānī’s *Siyar*, 4:104

6.4 Contemporary Debates Surrounding Al-Falimbani's Teachings

6.4.1 Introduction

This section is devoted to discussing the contemporary issues surrounding the teachings of al-Falimbānī. As we have mentioned earlier, modern scholars are generally divided into two groups when discussing Sufism in the Archipelago, particularly with regard to the debates on *wahdat al-wujūd* (or Seven Stages in the context of al-Falimbānī). The first group believes that the doctrine is a clear-cut pantheism without doubt and therefore any Muslim who holds such a belief is condemned as heretic (*zindīq*) or infidels (*kufir*). While another group believes that the *wujūdiyyah* adherents should be given the benefit of the doubt as to whether the doctrine is truly deviating from the Islamic Shari‘ah, or the scholars have actually misunderstood it.

This section will try to present some of the main accusations levelled at the Malay *wujūdiyyah* adherents, particularly in the teachings of al-Falimbānī's Seven Stages. The accusations are quite similar to those previously launched against Ibn ‘Arabī or al-Falimbānī's predecessors. We will confine our discussion here to the works of several contemporary Malay scholars only. At the end of this section, we will try to deduce some conclusions based on the findings of the two dissenting views.

The first group that against the so-called ‘*wujūdiyyah*’ scholars believe that the latter have gone astray by believing in such a doctrine which their critics accuse them of being pantheism. The second group, however, believes this is a mere misunderstanding on what the propopents of ‘*wujūdiyyah*’ actually meant. Hence,

they refrain from associating Seven Stages or *waḥdat al-wujūd* with pantheism - a heterodox doctrine from the viewpoint of the Orthodox Sunni Islam.

In the context of the response from the contemporary Malay scholars to *wujūdiyyah* doctrine, the scenario is exactly the same as what had been demonstrated by classical scholars in determining their position on Ibn ‘Arabi’s doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. They are divided into three groups: a group of them considered him a ‘friend’ of God (*walī*), while another group considered him a heretic, while the third group expressed their lack of conviction for him.¹¹⁷

The contemporary Malay scholars like Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, Muhammad Uthman el-Muhammady,¹¹⁸ Dr ‘Abdul Rahman Mahmood¹¹⁹ and Dr Aziz Dahlan¹²⁰ are strongly in support of the *wujūdiyyah* teachings and the adherents of the doctrine. They do not see any blasphemy or heresy in the teachings of the most heterodox Ṣūfīs such as al-Fansūrī, Sumatrānī and others. They believe that the critics have misunderstood these Ṣūfīs works. These contemporary scholars agree with certain classical scholars who view positively towards Ibn ‘Arabī and his school.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ G.F. Haddad, *Shaykh Muḥyi al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī*, 6. According to Haddād, in the first group consists of scholars like Ibn ‘Ata Allah al-Iskandarī and ‘Afīf al-Dīn al-Yafī‘ī, the third, among others, is al-Dhahabī. Azra too mentions a few list of scholars who defend Ibn ‘Arabī, such as, Muḥy al-Dīn al-Nawāwī (d. 676/1278), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 910/1505), Zakariyyā al-Ansārī, and the staunchest defender of Ibn ‘Arabī of all was, al-Sha‘rānī (d. 973/1566); cf. Azra, *Networks*, 138. Surprisingly, al-Sha‘rānī in spite of his strict orthodox, surprisingly defends Ibn ‘Arabī, see Trimmingham, *The Sufi*, 223.

¹¹⁸ See his “Martabat Tujuh”, a paper presented at *Seminar Tasawwuf* organised by Islami Department of Negeri Sembilan, on 14th August 2004 at Allison Kelana Resort Seremban, Negeri Sembilan Darul Khusus, <http://blogtraditionalislam.wordpress.com/tag/martabat-tujuh/> accessed on 20th August 2012.

¹¹⁹ His article entitled ‘Martabat Tujuh: Menurut Syeikh Daud al- Fatani: Satu Analisis’ as published in *Budaya dan Pemikiran Islam Mesir-Malaysia*, eds. Ahmad Sunawari Long & Zul’azmi Yaakob, 16-29, see his *Martabat*, 26.

¹²⁰ An Indonesian scholar whose dissertation is on Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatranī.

¹²¹ Al-Sha‘rānī, believe that the critics have misunderstood Ibn ‘Arabī’s works, see Trimmingham, *Sufi*, 223.

Another group of scholars, like Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi,¹²² Prof. Abdul Fatah Haron Ibrahim,¹²³ and Dr. Abdul Rahman Haji ‘Abdullah,¹²⁴ are strongly against the teachings. They believe *wujūdiyyah* is heretical and of foreign influence from the Neo-Platonism and alien to the teachings of Islam.

The last group of scholars are like Azra who, in spite of acknowledging the criticism, yet still giving the *wujūdiyyah* the ‘benefits of the doubt’. Azra says:

Despite criticism of the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, it is in fact the fundamental and central doctrine of all kinds of Sufism. Criticism of this doctrine by such scholars as Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Subki (d. 745/1344) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 780/1378) is essentially based on the fact that it can be easily misunderstood. It may lead to the belief that there is continuity, or a total unity, between the creation and God. In other words, it could bring one to a pantheistic belief which is anathema to legal scholars (*ahl al-sharī‘ah*).¹²⁵

6.4.2 Arguments against Seven Stages

According to Peter Riddell, who based his findings on several documents issued by the Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM)¹²⁶ in the Prime Minister’s Department, the doctrine of the ‘Seven Stages’ is identified by the

¹²² Al-Minangkabawī (d.1334/1916) was a renowned Minangkabau Indonesian Islamic teacher who was appointed by the Mayor (*Sharīf*) of Mecca as one of the Grand Imāms (leaders in prayers) at the mosque of Masjid al Harām, Mecca, representing the Shāfi‘ī *madhhab* adherents. He married the daughter of a rich Kurdish merchant in Mecca and settled there for the rest of his life. He was a prolific writer and wrote some forty-nine books. He is known for his anti-*tarīqa* ideas. His student, Ahmad Dahlan (d.1923), was inspired by his teachings and influenced by Egyptian reformist Muhammad ‘Abduh eventually found a reformist group called ‘Muhammadiyah’, that labelled many practices of the people *shirk* or idolatry. For the details of him, see Ajahku Hamka, *Riwajat Hidup Dr. H. Abd. Karim Amrullah dan Perjuangan Kaum Agama di Sumatera*, 230-2; Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia, 1900-1942*, 31-3; Abu Bakar Hamzah, ‘Shaik Tahir Jalalu’d-din, in *Medium*, 1:1 (September, 1988), 88-9; Mohammad Redzuan Othman, ‘The Role’, 148. His *al-Shumush al-lāmi‘a* (The shining Sun in Refuting the Innovation of the Seveners) printed in Mecca by Matba‘a al-Mirriya in 1357AH.

¹²³ Professor of Theology at UKM.

¹²⁴ A lecturer at the Department of Theology, National University of Malaysia (UKM).

¹²⁵ Azra, *Networks*, 138.

¹²⁶ One of the documents identifies two primary sources of deviationist teachings in Malaysia: spiritual (*batiniyyah*) teachings and theosophical (*wujūdiyyah*) teachings, for details see Riddell, *Transmission*, 258.

JAKIM as one of the doctrines deemed deviant and heretical, yet it was popular among the Malays. JAKIM's accusation of its heterodoxy could be traced back to the 1990s.¹²⁷ Other groups, individuals or doctrines included in these so-called 'deviant' groups are, as expected, the teachings of sixteenth century Malay mystics al-Fansūrī and his disciple, al-Sumatrānī. While 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkīlī, who according to Azra falls among the moderate Ṣūfī, surprisingly also included in the list of JAKIM's groups and individuals accused of heretic or propagating theosophical teachings.¹²⁸

Another Malay scholar known for his *wujūdiyyah* trend as well but less controversial than al-Fansūrī, Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, 'escaped' the heretical charge of JAKIM, while it is a fact that al-Rānīrī is an advocate of Ibn 'Arabī whom he considers as belonging to *wujūdiyyah muwahhīd*. Likewise, the inclusion of al-Singkīlī among the heterodox group together with al-Fansūrī and al-Sumatrānī's group is also quite perplexing since al-Singkīlī is known for not displaying any controversial teachings, which might be construed as pantheism.

According to Shaghir, work of another scholar Shaykh Muhammad Nafīs al-Banjārī (d.1226/1812) who wrote *al-Durr al-Nafīs* was also prohibited by the Mufti of Johore, Sayyid Alwī Tahir al-Haddād and Sultan of Pahang, Sultan 'Abd Allāh al-Muzaffar Shah for public teaching. According to him, the decision made because they afraid it might mislead the general people.¹²⁹ Even in those

¹²⁷ Riddell, *Transmission*, 259.

¹²⁸ Riddell, *Transmission*, 259.

¹²⁹ Shaghir, *Silsilah*, 8:46. An extensive study of this work is made by Wan Muhammad bin Wan Ali for his masters degree in 1973 submitted to National University of Malaysia entitled *Suntingan dan Anotasi Sebuah Kitab Tasawwuf Melayu Kurun Ketiga Belas Hijrah/Kedelapan Belas Masihi: Ad-Durru al-Nafīs*. For details of al-Banjārī, see also Martin van Bruinessen, Nafīs al-Banjārī, URL: http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Nafis_Banjari.htm; Hawash Abdullah, *Perkembangan Ilmu Tasawwuf dan Tokoh-Tokohnya di Nusantara*, 107-122; Azra,

days, it was not allowed to be taught not because it was deviating from the Orthodox Sunni, but rather it contains the teachings which might be later misconstrued and secondly, because there was no qualified teachers to teach the subject which is regarded as an advanced stage of Sufism.

The only reason mentioned by JAKIM for imposing its ban is that these works teach *wujūdiyyah* idea which contains or resembles the Greek Neo-Platonism doctrine of pantheism.¹³⁰ This very same accusation that had previously been levelled at Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 637/1240) some eight hundred years ago, and in the sixteenth century at al-Fansūrī and then al-Sumatrānī in the Malay world, then eventually at al-Falimbānī as its next victim. The ban on teachings of those works by JAKIM above however, is believed to be only as a precautionary measure in order to avoid the public to be in the state of confusion because the teachings are too philosophical and not meant for the general public. Even in the syllabus of a spiritual traveller as we have mentioned before, those works are meant to be studied at the last and stage of their journey and not for the beginners.

Historically, the earliest criticism of the doctrine of Seven Stages came from one the most important of the Minangkabawī reformists, known as ‘Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawī’ (d.c.1855/60-1916). Al-Minangkabawī was known for his anti-Sufi attitude and often branded as ‘radical’ reformist. He also condemned various practices and doctrines of the Naqshbandiyyah Ṣūfī order and wrote three tracts against them.¹³¹ The attacks were immediately answered by his own disciple Khatib Ali and Minangkabau Naqshbandi Sheikh Muhammad Sa‘ad

Networks, 117-122. The work was Romanised from its original Jāwī script by Kiyai Haji Haderamie with the title, “*Ilmu Ketuhanan Permata Yang Indah*” (Shaghir, *Silsilah*, 8:20-21).

¹³⁰ ‘Abd al-Fatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 143.

¹³¹ Bruinessen, ‘*The Origins*’, 173.

b. Tanta of Mungka.¹³² Al-Minangkabawī wrote *al-Shumush al-lā'imah fī Radd Bid'at Ahl al-Sab'ah*, criticising the doctrine of Seven Stages. Perhaps, he was the only scholar who came up with a treatise denouncing the teachings. Other than that, there was no record of any other written criticism specifically condemning the Seven Stages since it first came to light.¹³³ Al-Minangkabawī was said to have launched the attack in response to a claim by a certain quarter of Jāwī people in the beginning of the twentieth century that 'whoever does not know Seven Stages, he is feared to die as an infidel'.¹³⁴ Consequently, al-Minangkabawī gave his response as follow:

Generally, it is heretic (*al-shirk*) and is not from the words of the learned but rather from the ignorant who perceives it [Seven Stages] from words of the people of *wahdat al-wujūd*.¹³⁵

As for contemporary critics, we only have thus far Prof. Fatah Haron who has written quite a work denouncing the teachings of the Seven Stages. He is the only Malay scholar who has presented his arguments academically criticising the doctrine. Another critic is Dr Abdul Rahman Haji 'Abdullah through his work entitled *Falsafah Alam Semesta Dalam Sejarah Tauhid Melayu*. Of all these three works we have mentioned above, the works by Fatah Haron is worthy of analysis and studied in the context of the debates surrounding this issue.

Before going directly to the criticisms on al-Falimbānī's Seven Stages, as we have mentioned earlier, even al-Falimbānī's predecessors had already faced similar accusations. Though the attacks were not directed at the Seven Stages – a

¹³² Bruinessen, *The Origins*, 174.

¹³³ 'Abdulfatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 149.

¹³⁴ 'Abdulfatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 147-147. It is not clear however, who had said such a statement and from where Abdalfatah got this impression. He has not given any reference to it.

¹³⁵ 'Abd al-Fatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 148. Its Malay reads: "*segalanya menyalahi Syari'at Nabi dan menjadikan bersatu Tuhan dengan hamba, dan tiada ia daripada kalam Imam Ghazali, ghalibnya kufur dengan Allah Ta'ala dan tiada pula daripada perkataan orang alim tetapi ia daripada perkataan orang jahil yang melihat ia akan perkataan ahli wahdat al-wujud*".

doctrine which became infamous only after al-Falimbānī's age – nonetheless, they were targeted at the *wujūdiyyah* in general. There was no record if there had been any accusation against al-Falimbānī's teachings while he was still alive. What we have found are the charges made after his death, the earliest being in the twentieth century reflected in Ahmad Khatib's treatise.

The writings that argue for and against Shakyh al-Akbār Ibn 'Arabī's *wujūdiyyah* are numerous and it is beyond the scope of this research to deal with them each and everyone.¹³⁶ Suffice it for us to limit the discussion to the *wujūdiyyah* polemics in the Malay world alone by concentrating on the arguments used by al-Falimbānī himself or his supporters. Apart from his works, the works of other Malay scholars who had shared the same 'school of thought' as that of al-Falimbānī will be quoted, as like those of his younger contemporaries, Dawūd al-Fatānī and al-Banjāri. The arguments put forth by the anonymous tracts discovered by Johns on *Risalah Tasawuf* are also very helpful in further shed light on this doctrine. Other than those, works of contemporary scholars and 'sympathisers' of Seven Stages or *wujūdiyyah* who have further explained the teachings are also referred to.

It is inevitable that these works of Malay scholars need to be consulted apart from those of al-Falimbānī since al-Falimbānī himself only touches this doctrine briefly during his life time, without much explanation or providing answers to his later critics.¹³⁷ Seven Stages, *wahdat al-wujūd*, pantheism and

¹³⁶ One of the earliest works, perhaps, is by A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din- Ibnul 'Arabī*, published in 1939 by Cambridge University Press. See also Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*.

¹³⁷ Azra has presented quite a lengthy defence of Seven Stages based on a work attributed to al-Falimbānī, '*al-Tuhfat al-rāghibīn*', see Azra, *Networks*, 128-139. Nonetheless, in the light of a

monism may look alike. Some scholars believe they are more or less referring to the same doctrine with different names, while others believe that they are not the same with the *wahdat al-wujūd*, where the latter at least affirms on the existence of God as a Real Being and His Eternity.

Since al-Falimbānī's Seven Stages follows quite closely Ibn al-‘Arabi's *wahdat al-wujūd*, we shall find that the same criticisms as used against the pantheism were also directed at al-Falimbānī's Seven Stages. While the criticisms of scholars such as by Prof. Fatah Haron and Dr Abdul Rahman on The doctrine of Seven Stages can be summarised into the following main points:

- a) **Foreign Influence:** Seven Stages was influenced by various philosophical teachings and religious beliefs such as Greek Neoplatonism, Christianity, Upanishad of Hinduism or the Brahmins, the Incarnationists, Bahaism, Qadianism, Shi'ite, and others.¹³⁸
- b) **God's immanence:** That the Seven Stages leads to or resembles *wahdat al-wujūd*, allegedly a Greek pantheistic doctrine which views God's Essence is completely immanent in the world; that God permeates everything that is created (*al-hulūl wa al-ittihād*).¹³⁹
- c) **Creation of the Universe:** That the Seven Stages originates from the Greek Neo-Platonism doctrine of emanation (*nazariyat al-fayd*) that views the creation of the Universe through the emanation of God, not because of God's

recent article by Noorhaidi Hasan, 'The *Tuhfat al-rāghibīn: The work of Abdul Samad al-Palimbani or of Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari?*' which conclusively proves that the work was written by al-Banjārī instead, all arguments put forth by Azra based on *al-Tuhfat*, hence are not those of al-Falimbānī.

¹³⁸ Abdul Fatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 91-94; Al-Attas, *Mysticism*, 31.

¹³⁹ 'Abdu l Fatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 144-5; Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-fatawā*, 2:294-8; Mustafā Sabrī, *Mawqif al-bashar taht sultan al-qadar*, 3:85-89; 'Abdul Rahman, *Martabat*, 20; Al-Attas, *Fansūrī*, 31; Oxford Companion to Philosophy, s.v. 'Plotinus'.

Divine Act of creation from non-existence to existence as mentioned in the Qur'ān.¹⁴⁰

- d) **Eternity of the Universe:** Because of the (b) above, the Seven Stages propagates the eternity of the Universe (*qidām al-'alam*), a doctrine held by the philosophers which is clearly against the teachings of Sunni Islam where the Universe is regarded as 'new' (*huduth*) or created and only God exists from eternity.¹⁴¹
- e) **Metaphorical Existence:** That the Seven Stages ideas regarding God, the World, Man and the relationship between them, especially on the Reality of their existence where the Seven Stages affirms that only God's Existence is the only True Real Existence (*wujūd haqīqī*) while other existence is only in the metaphorical (*wujūd majāzī*), just as the existence of a shadow.¹⁴²

6.4.3 Arguments For The Seven Stages

6.4.3.1 Knowledge of 'Unveiling'

The supporters of Seven Stages are the adherents of Malay *wujūdiyyah* too since these doctrines are of the same origin. They start their arguments by emphasising that this doctrine of the Seven Stages actually concerns with the spiritual experience at the level of gnosis, or what al-Falimbānī called *ma'rifah sufiyyah*,¹⁴³ or in the words of al-Ghazālī '*ilm al-mukāshafah*' (Knowledge of 'Unveiling'). '*ilm al-mukāshafah*' according to them does not constitute belief or creed ('*aqīdah*)

¹⁴⁰ 'Abdul Fatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 133-141, 158-163.

¹⁴¹ Al-Minangkabawī, 18; 'Abdul Rahman, *Martabat*, 21; Al-Attas, , *Fansūrī*, 31.

¹⁴² *Siyar*, 265-266

¹⁴³ *Siyar*, 265-266; Abdul Rahmān, *Martabat*, 18.

because it is not doctrinal but rather experiential. It differs from one person to the other.

As to the creed of the Ṣūfīs, these Ṣūfīs have explicitly mentioned in their books dealing with creed. It is erroneous to judge their creed by examining what they have uttered or written about their spiritual journey, especially when there were in the state of ecstasy.¹⁴⁴ As in the case of al-Falimbānī, his creed is what he has categorically mentioned in *Siyar* volume one, which is purely taken from al-Ghazālī's *Kitāb Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*.¹⁴⁵ In other words, he is an Ash'arite.

The critics also accuse the doctrine of the Seven Stages falls under the philosophical Sufism (*tasawwuf falsafī*) or theosophical Sufism.¹⁴⁶ It is therefore, according to the critics, not compatible with the Orthodox Sunni Islam.¹⁴⁷ They lump together *wujūdiyyah* adherents with all known deviant sects and cult groups and label them together as heretics. Abdul Fatah, for example, has grouped *wahdat al-wujūd* together with the Shi'ite, Dahriyah, Baha'ism, Qadianism and others.¹⁴⁸

El-Muhammady argues that epistemologically, it is wrong to say Seven Stages is a philosophical Sufism since this doctrine does not come out of one's mental or intellectual 'philosophising'. This doctrine was a result of spiritual unveiling (*mukāshafah*).¹⁴⁹ Even as we have demonstrated earlier al-Ghazālī, in his classification of knowledge divides knowledge into several systems of

¹⁴⁴ El-Muhammady, interview, 27 February 2010.

¹⁴⁵ *Siyar*, 1: 21-34. The translation is given as the Appendix of this work. El-Muhammady further says that as in the case of Ibn 'Arabi, the creed is as found in his *Futūhāt al-Makkiyyah*, not in what he has written in his *Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikām*.

¹⁴⁶ El-Muhammady, *Martabat Tujuh*.

¹⁴⁷ Abdul Fatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 143.

¹⁴⁸ 'Abdul Fatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 143.

¹⁴⁹ El-Muhammady, 'Martabat Tujuh' (Online).

classification. One of them is between presential (*hudūrī*) knowledge and attained (*husūlī*) knowledge.¹⁵⁰ ‘Attained or acquired knowledge is sensual, indirect, rational, logical, discursive or inferential’ but the ‘presential knowledge is the knowledge of unveiling of the divine mysteries’.¹⁵¹ The former pertains to the physical world, but the latter deals with the spiritual world and the intelligibles, and the attainment of spiritual truths. Ibn ‘Arabī too speaks of the same epistemological division in his *Futūḥāt*.¹⁵² Ibn ‘Arabī argues there are three categories of the source of knowledge namely: ‘*aql*, *ḥāl* and *ḥaqā’iq*’.¹⁵³ Mystical doctrine generally falls under the knowledge obtained after one had undergone the highest form of spiritual annihilation (*fanā’*) where the realities (*ḥaqā’iq*) of things were revealed through spiritual unveiling or *mukāshafah*, in al-Ghazālī’s terminology.

In the context of Seven Stages, it is a kind of knowledge that falls under the presential knowledge and not acquired knowledge. In Ibn ‘Arabī’s schema, it is the knowledge of realities (*ḥaqā’iq*). El-Muhammady in his response, adopts al-Ghazālī’s terms to differentiate the two kinds of knowledge: *mukāshafah* vis-a-vis *mu’amalah*, claiming that Seven Stages should be treated as knowledge of *mukāshafah* not the latter. It is the knowledge of realities.¹⁵⁴

Having classed the doctrine into this kind of knowledge, the defenders of the *wujūdiyyah* hope to restrain the critics from trying to ‘interfere’ with the affairs of the Ṣūfīs until they themselves have undergone the experience of the spiritual

¹⁵⁰ *Ihyā’*, vol.III, Bk.I:1376.; *Risālat al-laduniyyah*, 360-368.

¹⁵¹ Osman Bakar, *Classification*, 204. Presential knowledge is also known in several other names such as ‘*ilm ladunī* (knowledge from on high) or ‘*ilm al-mukāshafah* (knowledge of unveiling) (Osman Bakar, *Classification*, 204).

¹⁵² El-Muhammady, *Martabat Tujuh*, (Online).

¹⁵³ El-Muhammady, *Martabat Tujuh* (Online).

¹⁵⁴ ‘Abdul Fatah, for example, argues that Islam is a religion of based on fixed methodology and evidence from the primary sources. There is no exclusivity of knowledge for any group of people such as *tasawwuf* only for the Sufis and understood by them alone; or knowledge could only be understood by means of ‘tasting’ (*dhawq*) (Abdul Fatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 42-49).

unveiling. The defenders believe that this presential knowledge is unique amongst the Ṣūfīs, though may not widely be acknowledged by scholars of exoteric knowledge, particularly the critics.¹⁵⁵

Therefore, the levels of existence or the so-called ‘theory of the creation’ or the ‘origin of the Universe’ that a Ṣūfī experience or spiritually ‘unveiled’ during his spiritual traveller should not be construed as his conviction or creed, but rather, as an imaginative reflection on the degrees of existence along their spiritual journey towards highest level of gnosis of God. The spiritual experience generally may differ from one person to another. Because of that, one may find difference in the number of degrees of existence between one spiritual master and the other. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, for example lists the degrees of existence up to forty levels;¹⁵⁶ al-Fansūrī only five degrees;¹⁵⁷ while al-Sumatrānī,¹⁵⁸ al-Burhanpūrī, Dāwūd al-Fatānī,¹⁵⁹ Muhammad Nafīs al-Banjārī¹⁶⁰ all like al-Falimbānī came up with seven degrees.¹⁶¹

The defenders of Seven Stages argue that this is acceptable within the teachings of Orthodox Sunni Islam. Scholars such as al-Taftāzānī, al-Rāzī, al-Haytamī, al-Tahānawī, acknowledge that there are two approaches in grasping

¹⁵⁵ Abdul Rahmān, *Martabat*, 18.

¹⁵⁶ Al-Jīlī, *Maratīb al-Wujūd wa Ḥaqīqat kull Mawjūd*, 12; Abdul Rahmān, *Martabat*, 18.

¹⁵⁷ Al-Fansūrī’s five archetypes or epiphanies which emanates from *a’yān al-thābita* (Fixed Prototypes) are *al-ta’ayyun al-awwal* (First Determination), *al-ta’ayyun al-thānī* (Second Determination), *al-ta’ayyun al-thālith* (Third Determination), *al-ta’ayyun al-rābi* (Fourth Determination), *al-ta’ayyun al-khāmis* (Fifth Determination) where each epiphany has its own aspects.

¹⁵⁸ See ‘Abd ‘Azīz Dahlan, *Penilaian Teologis Atas Faham Wahdat al-Wujūd Dalam Tasawuf Syamsuddin Sumatranī*.

¹⁵⁹ See Dāwūd al-Fatānī, *al-Manhal al-Sāfī*.

¹⁶⁰ Al-Banjārī, *al-Durr al-naḥīs*, 22-23.

¹⁶¹ Further, the reduction of the number of emanation stages into seven according to Zoetmulder ‘may have been due to cosmological influence, for the seven spheres, the seven oceans’ and so on (Johns, *Malay Sufism*, 33).

the meaning of *tawhīd*.¹⁶² One is through the usual way of believing in the Unity of God based on rational proofs as well as textual evidences found in the Qur’ān, for example *Sūrat al-Ikhlās* and other verses. While another method, is as adopted by the Sufīs, is by means of ‘witnessing’ (*shuhūd*) of God at the station of *ma’rifah* of the spiritual traveller.¹⁶³ The Ṣūfīs all affirm that at the station of *ma’rifah* where one has reached the Extinction (*fanā’*) and the end of one’s spiritual journey, the unimaginable intense spiritual experience or ‘tasting’ (*dhawq*) that one undergoes is incomparable with the imaginable or physical world. Due to that, not only the Ṣūfī scholars, but even the Orthodox Sunni scholars among the theologians give a bit of flexibility or ‘benefits Dāwūd al-Fatānī,¹⁶⁴ Muhammad Nafīs al-Banjārī¹⁶⁵ all like al-Falimbānī came up with seven degrees.¹⁶⁶ The defenders of Seven Stages argue that this is acceptable within the teachings of Orthodox Sunni Islam. Scholars such as al-Taftāzānī, al-Rāzī, al-Haytamī, al-Tahānawī, acknowledges that there are two approaches in grasping the meaning of *tawhīd*.¹⁶⁷

The Ṣūfīs all affirm that at the station of *ma’rifah* where one has reached the end of one’s spiritual journey and at the state of Extinction (*fanā’*), the unimaginable intense spiritual experience or ‘tasting’ (*dhawq*) that one undergoes is incomparable with the imaginable or physical world. Due to that, not only the Sufī

¹⁶² Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharh al-Maqāsid*, 59-60; Muhammad Salih al-Zarqān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa arā’uh al-kalāmiyya wa al-falsafīyyah*, 276; al-Sha’rānī, *al-Yawāqit wa al-jawāhir*, 64-65; al-Haytamī, *al-Fatawā al-Hadithiyyah*, 332-333; Muhammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qasimī, *Dalā’il al-tawhīd*, 80-81 as quoted ‘Abd al-Rahmān, *Martabat*, 24.

¹⁶³ Al-Tahanāwī, *Kashshāf*, 4:310-311; ‘Abdul Rahmān, *Martabat*, 22-23; Abdul Fatah accepts tasawwuf of al-Ghazālī which he terms as having the experience of ‘*wahdat al-shuhūd*’ and in line with the teachings of Islam, but he rejects *wahdat al-wujūd* (‘Abdul Fatah, *Ahli*, 69) El-Muhammady on the other hand asserts that the two terms are in reality are similar and not much different. See also Abdul Rahmān, *Martabat*, 16-17.

¹⁶⁴ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharh al-Maqāsid*, 59-60; ‘Abd al-Rahman, *Martabat*, 22.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Abd al-Rahman, *Martabat*, 22-23.

¹⁶⁶ See for example Al-‘Izz ibn ‘Abd al-Salam, *Mughnī al-Muhtāj*, in the Chapter on Apostasy, ‘Kitāb al-ridda’.

¹⁶⁷ Ibn Hajar, *al-Tuhfat*, (Online).

scholars, but even the Orthodox Sunni scholars among the theologians give a bit of flexibility or ‘benefits of the doubt’ to what have been expressed by the Sūfīs at that station. Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1389) for example says:

A spiritual traveller when reaching the end of his travel to God, will immerse in the ocean of Unity (*tawḥīd*) and gnosis (*ma‘rifah*) until he feels his essence unites with the Essence of God, his attributes with those Attributes of God, and everything else is disappeared except God. He does not see any other existence apart from God the Most Exalted and this is called Extinction (*fanā*) in the Unity (*tawḥīd*), as goes the Prophetic saying: “Verily when my servant perpetually gets closer to me until I love him, when I love him, he hears with My Hearing, and sees with My Sight”. At that stage, perhaps came out expressions that could be construed as union and incarnation (*al-hulūl wa al-ittihād*) due to intense state (*hāl*) ineffable to express it with words...and we acknowledge that the way of Extinction (*tarīq al-fanā*) is through vision and not rational evidence.¹⁶⁸

This statement taken from the famous Sunnī theologian, al-Taftāzānī, serves as one of the many proofs for the *wujūdiyyah* that it had never been the intention of the *wujūdiyyah* Sūfīs, in general, and the adherents of the Seven Stages in particular to regard that God is completely immanent in the World as do the philosophers. On the contrary, it is their best way to express the Unity of God (*tawḥīd*), not by means of reason or intellect, but rather based on *ma‘rifat al-dhawqiyyah* or unveiling (*kashf*) as they experienced it.¹⁶⁹

Secondly, according to the *wujūdiyyah*, the words uttered by the Sūfīs during their spiritual journey and at the stage of ‘intoxication’ or annihilation (*fanā*) which is termed as ‘*shatahāt*’ should not be interpreted ‘literally’ nor

¹⁶⁸ This clearly does not follow Ibn ‘Arabī whose position on the creation of the universe is not only controversial but also quite paradoxical, between its eternity (*qidām*) and newness (*hudūth*). Affifi, for example, views Ibn ‘Arabī as holding the belief that the Universe is eternal, infinite and everlasting based on his principle of ‘ever new process of creation’ (*al-khalq al-jadīd*). Others, such as Samer Akkach interprets that Ibn ‘Arabī still believes the creation of the Universe based on the Islamic dogma of *creatio ex nihilo*, yet maintaining the eternal presence of the Universe in the Divine Knowledge as ‘Immutable Essences’, see Affifi, *Mystical*, 29; Samer Akkach, *Ibn ‘Arabī’s Ontology*, 113). As far as al-Burhanpūri’s position in this area, it is not quite clear.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Abdul Rahmān, *Martabat*, 24-25.

interpreted by the people not belonging to their group, i.e. the Ṣūfīs.¹⁷⁰ This is in accordance with the teachings of the Asha‘arite and Shafi‘ite scholars and jurists, such as Sultan al-‘Ulama’ al-‘Izz ibn ‘Abd al-Salam (d. 660/1261), Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī (d. 852/1448), where the sayings of the Ṣūfīs should be understood in the metaphorical (*majāz*) sense and never to mean in literal sense (*harfīyyah*).¹⁷¹

This is inevitable since the spiritual experience of the Ṣūfīs, as said, is beyond description of words. Lacking of better words, they resorted to express this experience in common day language, which more often than not leads to serious confusion among the general masses, including exoteric scholars.¹⁷² What the Sufis said then should be given some flexibility. On specific accusations against Seven Stages such as that, the doctrine resembles or has the elements of *wahdat al-wujūd* of Ibn ‘Arabī and therefore ‘pantheist’,¹⁷³ there are two approaches adopted by the defenders of Seven Stages: one is disassociating it from the ‘original’ *wahdat al-wujūd* of Ibn ‘Arabī as done by ‘Abdul Rahmān Mahmood.

He claims that the Seven Stages is a ‘modified’ *wujūdiyyah* of Malay version and many ideas which were controversial or problematic in the original *wahdat al-wujūd* of Ibn ‘Arabī or al-Burhanpūrī have been eliminated or at least clarified by the later Malay scholars.¹⁷⁴ They were people like Dāwūd al-Fatānī who clarified the teachings of al-Falimbānī and al-Burhanpūrī; while al-Sumatrānī had done the same for the teachings of al-Fansūrī. One of the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 641.

¹⁷³ Simon Blackburn, ‘pantheism’ in *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 276. The main proponent of this doctrine in the West is a Dutch Jewish rationalist, Baruch or Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) who believed that ‘God is immanent in the world, and individual things are themselves modes or modifications of God’: the only one reality is ‘God or nature’, in Latin *deus sive natura*, *ibid*, 360

¹⁷⁴ Abdul Rahman, *Martabat*, 25.

controversial issues in Ibn ‘Arabī and Burhanpūrī’s *wujūdiyyah* is on the creation of the universe. The works of these scholars could be interpreted that the creation of the universe is through the emanation of the Absolute Being and not a creation *ex-nihilo* as strongly upheld by the Ash‘arites. However, the Malay scholars like al-Fatānī in their commentary or super-commentary works of al-Burhanpūrī’s *Tuhfat* emphasise that the existence of universe is ‘new’ (*ḥādith*) preceded from non-existence (‘*adam*’).¹⁷⁵

The Universe started to exist when God brought it into existence. While the existence of God, on the contrary unlike that of the universe, is from Eternity. Al-Fatānī in his works *al-Manhal* mentions that the existence of the universe came about through God’s Divine Creative Word ‘*kun*’ (Be!).¹⁷⁶ The emphasis on the Divine Creative Word ‘*kun fa-yakun*’ as an approach through which the universe was created, perhaps was an attempt by the Malay *wujūdiyyah* to respond to the polemics surrounding the issue on the ‘creation of the universe’ which was left vague and unattended by al-Burhanpūrī and al-Falimbānī. It is also believed that the Malay scholars might have adopted the explanation from a commentary made by ‘Abd al-Ghānī al-Nabulsī (d. 1143/1730) on *Tuhfat* entitled *Nukhbat al-Mas’alah Sharh Risālat al-Tuhfat al-Mursalāh fī ‘Ilm Ḥaqīqat al-Shari‘at al-Muhammadiyah*. This is evident when a translated Malay version of al-Nabulsī’s commentary was found written by Shaykh Tayyib as mentioned earlier.

¹⁷⁵ *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 641; *The Chambers Dictionary*, s.v. ‘pantheism’; Dagobert D. Runes, ed., *The Dictionary of Philosophy*, s.v. ‘pantheism’. J.O Urmson & Jonathan Rée, eds., *The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy & Philosophers*, 227.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Attas, *Fansūri*, 34.

Al-Nabulsī therein mentions that the creation of the World of Spirits (*‘ālam al-arwāh*) was through God’s command via His *‘kun’* (Be!).¹⁷⁷

6.4.3.2 Pantheism

Another approach by the Malay *wujūdiyyah*, while maintaining its *wujūdiyyah* tendency, is to highlight the differences between the doctrines of Seven Stages and the pantheism. By doing so, they hope to disassociate Seven Stages from pantheism which the latter is of Greek origin and generally deemed heterodox from the perspective of Orthodox Sunni Islam. Briefly, the term ‘pantheism’ is first used by John Toland in 1705.¹⁷⁸ Though Toland was first coined the term, the idea has been in existence since the time of Greek. For Hinduism, pantheism means ‘God is all’ and ‘All is God’ where God is perceived as immanent within all things, including the individual. God is viewed as in everything, or that God and the universe are one’.¹⁷⁹ It is a view that everything is an all-encompassing immanent abstract of God; or that the universe, or nature and God are equivalent. It denies the radical distinction between God and natures and holds that everything there constitutes unity and that this unity is divine. God and the material world is one and the same thing and that God is present in everything. It is a doctrine that everything is divine, that God and Nature are identical. In other words, it sees nature and the physical universe are constituents of the essence of God; they are part of what God is. The reality, for this doctrine, comprises a single being of which things are modes, moments, members, appearance or projections. A pantheist if ‘viewed from the theist standpoint appears as one who reduces God

¹⁷⁷ Afīfī, *The Mystical*, 54; Al-Attas, *Mysticism*, 34.

¹⁷⁸ Afīfī, *The Mystical*, 54; Roni Landau, *The Philosophy of Ibn ‘Arabī*, 27-34.

¹⁷⁹ Martin Lings, *A Sūfī Saint*, 125-126; R.A. Nicholson, *The Idea*, 21, 22, 27, 31, 52, 73; T. Burckhardt, *An Introduction*, 22-25; Al-Attas, *Fansūrī*, 35, note 14.

to Nature, while from the Sceptics, he appears one who takes religious view of Nature'.¹⁸⁰

Al-Attas further divides pantheism into two types. One is the belief that the Essence of God is completely immanent in the world where God and Nature are but One. In other words, 'God exhausts Himself in the World, so that transcendence is denied Him'.¹⁸¹ The second type of pantheism according to him, is 'starting from the assumption that God is an absolute, infinite and eternal being, who is the source and ultimate ground of all that is, was, and will be, gradually assumes a form of acosmism according to which the Phenomenal World is but a passing shadow of the Reality which lies behind It'.¹⁸² This second form considers emanation (*fayd*) as an aspect of God Himself, the One God and there is nothing in existence except God alone.¹⁸³ All these are various definitions given trying to convey various meanings and facets on the central teachings of 'pantheism'.

As for *wahdat al-wujūd*, it is admittedly one of the most controversial doctrines in Sufism. It is controversial because it has often been associated with this doctrine of pantheism, whereas, pantheism is contradicting the teachings of Orthodox Sunni Islam as said before. The association of the term 'pantheism' to describe the *wahdat al-wujūd* doctrine, for some scholars such as Martin Lings, Nicholson, Titus Burckhardt and Al-Attas, is not only misleading but also erroneous.¹⁸⁴ Martin Lings claims that the prevailing 'misconception of *wahdat al-wujūd*' actually stems from the inability to understand Sufism itself since Sufism in

¹⁸⁰ Martin Lings, *A Sūfī Saint*, 125 note 3.

¹⁸¹ The terminologies referring to the Plotinus triad apparently according to al-Attas belong to Proclus (al-Attas, *Fansūrī*, 73). For further details on Greek Philosophy, see among others, Zeller's *Outlines of the history of Greek philosophy* and Inge's *The Philosophy of Plotinus*.

¹⁸² Al-Attas, *Mysticism*, 73; cf. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 1:122-99, especially 194-199.

¹⁸³ Al-Attas, *Mysticism*, 73; Afifi, *The Mystical*, 61.

¹⁸⁴ Al-Attas, *Mysticism*, 34-35.

reality has no clear system.¹⁸⁵ *Waḥdat al-wujūd* in other words has no specific pattern or system that can be easily formulated and understood. It is, as said before a kind of ‘spiritual experience’ or knowledge of the ‘unveiling’, which may differ between two persons. In specific reference to the Malay *wujūdiyyah*, Al-Attas said, it is also incorrect to compare the Ṣūfī terminologies used by al-Fansūrī, *ta‘ayyun*, *tanazzul* and *taraqqī* with those of Greek Plotinus triad namely: ‘*monē*, *prōodos*, and *epistrophē*’ found in pantheism, for they are not the same.¹⁸⁶ Al-Attas explains this:

In the system of emanations propounded by Plotinus and the Neo-Platonists, the emanations emanate in progressive deterioration. They become worse and worse, so to speak, as they emanate away from the Source. Further God, the Source, remains transcendent, as it were, and not present in the emanations that go down in a descending orders; the higher creating the lower, and the lower reflecting the being and perfection of the higher.¹⁸⁷

In Sufī *wujūdiyyah*, the ‘emanations’ are quite different from the Neoplatonism, as Afifi and al-Attas juxtapose the two:

[the Sufī interpretation of the emanations is that] the ‘emanations’ do not progressively deteriorate as they ‘emanate’ away from the Source, for God Himself ‘descends’ with ‘them’ in a series of descents; and he does so in such a manner that we can ascribe to Him neither transcendence nor immanence with respect to His ‘emanations’. In fact, there are no emanations ... but only manifestations (*tajalliyāt*). The ‘descent’ of the Absolute is nothing but various ways which He manifests Himself to us *in the course of our knowledge of him*, not in terms of emanations.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Pantheism is the belief that God is both immanent in creation and transcendent to it. God creates, contains and sustains the universe, but mysteriously exists outside of it as well. Subjectively, it can be explained as the feeling that nature, the universe, has a divine or awe-inspiring aspect. This is a form of monotheism.” While Pantheism is a similar word which means that god actually is the universe, that, in other words, ‘the universe is literally Divine’, see Nicholson, *Studies*, 27.

¹⁸⁶ Al-Attas, *Mysticism*, 67.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Attas, *Mysticism*, 67.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Attas, *Mysticism*, 67.

The *wujūdiyyah* Sufīs claims that they do not believe ‘Unity’ in the pantheistic sense where God and Nature becomes one. For the Sufīs, God is both transcendence (*tanzīh*) and immanence (*tashbīh*), because *wahdat al-wujūd* not in the sense that God is an ‘aggregation of existents’ for there is no such thing as ‘aggregation of existents’ as God is *the* only Existent’ in real sense.¹⁸⁹ If we were to call this Ṣūfī system of *wahdat al-wujūd* in the mode of western way of thinking, then it would be more appropriate, according to Nicholson, to label it as ‘pantheism’ rather than ‘pantheism’.¹⁹⁰

6.4.3.3 Real Existence (*Wujūd Haqīqī*)

The critics further argue that al-Falimbānī and other Malay *wujūdiyyah* denies the existence of other beings apart from God alone. This contradicts, say them, the teachings of Islam where there is a distinction between Creator and the created, or dualistic nature of existence (*ithnainiyat al-wujūd*). As mentioned before, the response from the *wujūdiyyah* adherents is that the doctrine still upholds the dualistic separation between Creator and creature and the idea that ‘God merges with the world’ or ‘the World is Divine’ never their intended meanings. The *wujūdiyyah* Ṣūfīs do not believe God and Nature as identical as pantheists do or monists do. Al-Fansūrī for example, affirms that ‘if God and Universe were identical, then it could be said of God that He is ‘situated’ in a spatio-temporal with respect to the Universe – which is absurd’.¹⁹¹ The ‘relationship’ between God and the Universe employed by the Ṣūfīs is in the sense of metaphorical

¹⁸⁹ Al-Falimbānī, *Siyar* 3: 103; *Risalah*, 266; Al-Maqassārī also shares the same view see Azra, ‘Opposition’, 681.

¹⁹⁰ Without going into details of the debate surrounding the origin of this modern word ‘Neo-Platonism’, the usage of this term in this thesis follows the approach adopted by most modern the scholars, in their effort to differentiate between the ‘original Platonism’.

¹⁹¹ *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, s.v. ‘Neoplatonism’, 612-613.

(*majāz*) or symbolical expression (*‘ibārat*)¹⁹² and not linear. Since for them God alone is the only Reality¹⁹³ and Existence of God alone is Real, while existence of others are mere reflection of His shadow.¹⁹⁴

6.4.3.4 Eternity of the Universe

With regard to the accusation that the Seven Stages advocates the emanation theory of Neo-Platonism on the creation of the Universe, and consequently holds the view the Universe is Eternal (*qadīm*) just as God is. The response of the defenders of the Seven Stages, first and foremost, is that the two theories are conceptually different. Plotinus (d. 270 CE) who was the founder of this later form of Platonic philosophy, Neo-Platonism,¹⁹⁵ views among other things that all things in nature comes into existence due to the projection or emanation of one same source which is ‘the Ultimate Being, the One, as supernatural, incorporeal, self-caused’ to several stages of fixed orders of Being.¹⁹⁶ This emanation from the Ultimate Being flows ‘not an intentional, creative act; it is rather a timeless, involuntary, permanent effulgence or emanation’.¹⁹⁷ This concept, for the defenders of the Seven Stages, clearly negates the voluntarily act of God in creating the Universe, and secondly, it perceives the existence of the Universe and God as both equally eternal. This is certainly incompatible with the teachings of the Sunni Islam and has never been found in the teachings of Seven Stages, as alleged.¹⁹⁸ While the Seven Stages, at a first glance may appear as if it

¹⁹² *The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy & Philosophers*, s.v. ‘Neoplatonism’, 219.

¹⁹³ Abdul Rahmān, *Martabat*, 24.

¹⁹⁴ Al-Fatānī, *al-Manhāl*, 16; Abdul Rahmān, *Martabat*, 24.

¹⁹⁵ Abdul Fatah believes that the formulation of the doctrine is in order for the Sūfīs to achieve gnosis and perfect man, (Abdul Fatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 184-185).

¹⁹⁶ Edgar, *Commentary*, 27.

¹⁹⁷ Nicholson, *The Mystics*, 71.

¹⁹⁸ Johns, *Gift*, 7.

looks like similar to the Neo-Platonism idea because of its usage of the notions of emanation, effulgence and the stages of being, nonetheless, there are fundamental differences between the two. The differences were not spelt out distinctly by al-Burhanpūrī, while al-Falimbānī only touched them very briefly. Al-Sumatrānī, and a younger contemporary of al-Falimbānī, Dāwūd al-Fatānī, and Nafīs al-Banjārī were responsible for elaborating more on this doctrine and dispelling all the misconceptions. In the Seven Stages, the doctrine firmly acknowledges the Divine Creative Act of God where God creates the Universe from the Fixed Prototypes (*a'yān al-thābitah*) through the Divine Creative Word 'kun' (Be!) out of his of Divine Will (*qudrah*). Al-Fatānī, beautifully explains this:

...when it was intended for an existence [of a thing], it would be said to the Fixed Prototypes (*a'yān al-thābitah*) by means of 'kun' (Be!). Consequently, a Prototype, like that of the Fixed Prototypes came into existence by the Divine Will (*qudrah*) of God and is known as the Exterior Prototypes (*a'yān al-khārijah*). It is therefore 'new' (*hādith*) since it came into existence by the Divine Will which is Eternal (*qadīm*).¹⁹⁹

This explanation, though not directly from al-Falimbānī himself, but from his younger contemporary, al-Fatānī, answers the accusation of the critics that the Seven Stages allegedly propagates the creation of the Universe from the emanation of God without any voluntarily act of God himself. It also refutes the accusation that the doctrine of Seven Stages promotes the Universe as eternal as God is.

¹⁹⁹ Al-Fatānī, *al-Manhal*, 16; 'Abdul Rahman, *Martabat*, 24

6.4.3.5 Usage of Seven Stages Theory

The critics also criticise why there is a need of this theory. What is the purpose of creating this Seven Stages theory? Abdulfatah believes that the formulation of the Seven Stages is in order for the Sufis to achieve *maʿrifah* (gnosis) and Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*).²⁰⁰

The Sufis who follow the Ashaʿarite creed believe that the illumination (*al-ilhām*) is one of the sources of knowledge (*al-ʿilm*) admissible in the Sunni Islam as mentioned by Sunni theologian such as al-Taftāzānī, where gnosis (*maʿrifah*) falls under this rubric of illumination knowledge.²⁰¹ Without denying that *maʿrifah* as one of the aims of the spiritual travellers in the *tariqah*, nonetheless, the formulation of Seven Stages doctrine has nothing to do with attaining *maʿrifah*. One may still attain it – by the Divine Grace – even without believing in it. On contrary, the stages were unveiled to them during their process of attaining gnosis, not as an intellectual or doctrinal belief upheld prior to achieving the *maʿrifah*. Nicholson writes on *maʿrifah*:

The *maʿrifah* of the Sufis is the ‘gnosis’ of Hellenistic theosophy, i.e. direct knowledge of God based on revelation or apocalyptic vision. It is not the result of any mental process, but depends entirely on the will and favour of God, who bestows it as a gift from Himself upon those whom He has created with the capacity for receiving it. It is a light of divine grace that flashes into the heart and overwhelms every human faculty in its dazzling beams. “He who knows God is dumb.”²⁰²

The purpose of the formulation of the Seven Stages theory as John distinctly mentions it as the beginning of his translated work of *Tuḥfat* is to correct the

²⁰⁰ ‘Abdul Fatah, *Ahli Sunnah*, 184-185.

²⁰¹ Edgar, *Commentary*, 27.

²⁰² Nicholas, *The Mystics*, 71.

rampant deviant groups in India. The corollaries of al-Burhanpūrī's teachings therefore centre around three main points:²⁰³

- a. God is the source of all being and existence;
- b. Nothing other than God exists in its own right;
- c. Individual things differentiated one from another (*mufassal*) may not be equated with God, although before creation they were one within Him.

It is quite incorrect to accuse that the creation of Seven Stages is to facilitate the attainment of *ma'rifah* as there are other Ṣūfī schools who do not subscribe to the doctrine of *wujūdiyyah*, but yet having the same aim of achieving the *ma'rifah*. The doctrine is in fact neither philosophical nor doctrinal in its strict sense. It is rather a spiritual unveiling (*mukāshafah*), as we have alluded earlier. It is a gift to those who have successfully reached the end of their spiritual travel and was given the privilege to have direct knowledge of God not given to anyone else. It has never been a philosophical formulation as a result of deep contemplation as some people have always mistakenly thought of, nor a doctrine of belief that each and every single Muslim needs to believe in, failing which one would fall into heresy or blasphemy. This is evident when all the Ṣūfī masters who discuss *wahdat al-wujūd* such as Ibn 'Arabī, al-Jīlī, Jāmī, or Malay scholars such as al-Fansūrī, Shams al-Dīn and al-Falimbānī never did they discuss the issue in the context of creed or belief. It always falls in the discussion of spiritual unveiling (*mukāshafah*) at the highest level of gnosis (*ma'rifah*) when one is reaching the end of the spiritual journey (*muntahī*).

²⁰³ Johns, *Gift*, 7.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the doctrine, its origin and teachings, as well as the debates surrounding it by presenting arguments put forth by both sides: the critics and the defenders. It is pitiful that al-Falimbānī himself had not explained the doctrine at length, but rather only replicated what al-Burhanpūrī had written in *Tuhfat*. Perhaps, al-Falimbānī's original intention then was only to reproduce al-Burhanpūrī's *Tuhfat* into Malay without taking into consideration some of the ideas therein were vague and might be misconstrued later. Al-Falimbānī's image was not much tarnished as a proponent of *wujūdiyyah* when his younger contemporary Dāwūd al-Fatānī had done a great job by tasking himself with the responsibility of clarifying most of the vague ideas found in the doctrine of Seven Stages through his own treatise, *al-Manhal al-Sāfi fī Bayān Ramz Ahl al-Sūfi*. Coupled with the answers and responses given by his predecessor al-Sumatrānī, *al-Manhal* of al-Fatānī has no doubt helped to answer many controversial points found in the doctrine of Seven Stages of al-Falimbānī.

The teachings of al-Falimbānī, especially on the controversial doctrine of Seven Stages have been clearly explained. This doctrine is surely not taken from al-Ghazālī, but rather from al-Burhanpūrī. This is perhaps the area where al-Falimbānī departed from the teachings of al-Ghazālī. Al-Falimbānī incorporated the teachings that has an element of *wujūdiyyah* for which al-Ghazālī had never discussed in any of his work in such a manner.

In spite of the fact that al-Falimbānī did not devote much on the discussion of this topic of his entire work, yet this doctrine is too crucial in determining the brand of which al-Falimbānī's Sufism belongs to. It is clear now that the theories

of existence had been discussed by the Malay scholars since the time of al-Fansūrī, or perhaps much earlier, in the early sixteenth century and continued for several centuries later. Al-Falimbānī was not the only Malay scholar who came up with such a doctrine.

Although al-Falimbānī was unable to defend his teachings during his lifetime since the criticisms were never surfaced then, nonetheless, his younger contemporary, Dāwūd al-Fatānī who was together with him while there were students in the Arabia had pre-empted that the teachings might be misconstrued later. Al-Fatānī provided a commentary of the work and clarified sections which were left vague by the original authors al-Burhanpūrī and al-Falimbānī through his treatise, *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*. The doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the Malay world, just as in other parts of the world seems to have received mix response. A group strongly supports it and another goes strongly against it. We have provided above, arguments from both sides in light of modern contemporary debate surrounding the issue in the Malay world.