

CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study has explored the intellectual and religious milieu since the early sixteenth century of the Archipelago. It has shown that Islam in the Archipelago since its advent has a very strong connection with Sufism so much so that there are modern scholars who believe that the *Şūfīs* were in reality the true bringers of Islam to the region. Though this assertion is not uncontested, nonetheless, it is an undeniable fact the *Şūfīs* had indeed played a major role in the Islamization process of the Archipelago.

We have also presented various theories on the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago but we believe the theory put forth by al-Attas is more convincing which says that the bringers of Islam to this region are the *Şūfīs* and particularly they are the Arabs of the *sayyids* and *shaykhs* of Hadramawt origin. Having that as a backdrop of the intellectual climate, made us easier to understand why there existed conflicts between various groups of Sufism during the time of al-Falimbānī.

We have also presented here a detailed biography of al-Falimbānī. We have successfully pointed out that the date of al-Falimbānī's birth was grossly inaccurately estimated by many scholars starting from Quzwain leading to the wrong estimation of his death. He was most probably born in 1124/1711 and died in 1243/1828.

With regard to al-Falimbānī's conception of knowledge and spiritual education, we have observed that he follows the line of al-Ghazālī's school of thought. In purification of soul, however, al-Falimbānī adopts another *Şūfī* master

approach al-Halabī with his Seven Degrees of Soul. This theory is nowhere to be found in al-Ghazālī's works. The adoption of this theory is most probably to fit al-Burhanpurī's idea of Seven Stages of Being which al-Falimbānī adopts it as well to explain when it comes to spiritual cosmology during the spiritual journey. Al-Falimbānī also combines with the idea of a Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) at the end of one's spiritual journey, an idea that is said to be originally from al-Jamī but expanded by al-Jīlī.

Al-Falimbānī then goes on to explain on the spiritual psychology and cosmology. This is where the doctrine of Seven Stages of Being comes into picture. It is part of al-Falimbānī's explanation of the concept of *tawḥīd* and *tawakkul*. We have demonstrated that the Seven Stages of Being that al-Falimbānī has taken from al-Burhanpurī was quite similar to the concept of Stages of Being of his predecessors al-Fansurī and al-Sumatrānī. We have analysed this concept in details and its relation to the theories of his predecessors.

This work has also touched the crucial part of al-Falimbānī's teachings and the most controversial issue which is the Seven Stages of Being. Probably for the first time, the contemporary debates of scholars on this issue were presented, and analyzed in the light of classical scholars arguments with regard to Ṣūfī doctrine and practices. This is where al-Falimbānī's *Siyar* caused controversy and sparked some criticism especially in these modern days. The criticism revolved around the issue of 'Seven

Stages of Being'¹ where it was accused of being pantheistic. Due to the inclusion of some elements of *wujūdiyyah* teaching in *Siyar*, al-Falimbānī's position on Sufism became vague. Initially, it looks as if he was purely a Ghazalian or following the '*tasawwuf Sunni*' rather than '*tasawwuf falsafi*', but when he incorporated the teachings of al-Burhanpūrī's Seven Stages, his position now seems to be a mixture of the both. As a result, in the Malay Archipelago, al-Falimbānī is infamously associated with this Seven Stages.

As we have said the version of Sufism that had reached the Archipelago in its early phase of Islamization was that of the *wujūdiyyah* Sufism as manifested in the teachings of al-Fanṣūrī and al-Sumatrānī. This was later strongly opposed by the more orthodox Ṣūfī, al-Rānīrī. The conflict was too intense to the extent that the executions of the *wujūdiyyah* adherents took place on the order of the Sultan. The climax of the conflict shows incontrovertibly how enormous and disastrous the conflict was. This incident happened in the seventeenth century.

The later phase of Islam in the Archipelago observed more moderate scholars such as al-Sinkīlī and al-Maqassārī who tried to bring back the practice and implementation of Shari'ah in one's daily life as a means for spiritual purification and closeness to God, as opposed to the *wujūdiyyah* teachings that sought solely the purification on the creed from *shirk* in the form acknowledging only God is the Real Existent. This is for them the highest degree of *tawḥīd*. As to the practice of

¹ Also translated as 'Seven Stages or Seven Grades of Existence'. '*Martabat*' is Arabised Malay word from *martabāt* means stage, while '*tujuh*' means seven. The term '*Martabat Tujuh*' itself is never to be found in any of al-Falimbānī's works as a doctrine understood today, neither was it coined by him. He, however, did explain the Ṣūfī cosmology and ontology in the format of seven grades of being, and hence the name of the doctrine emerged.

Shari‘ah, they were accused of not giving much emphasis.

This was the beginning of a reform in Sufism in the Archipelago which is called by some scholars as ‘neo-Sufism’. The reform process that had already started became more far-reaching and intensified with the emergence of al-Falimbānī in the eighteenth century, with his two works based on *Iḥyā’* and *Bidāyat* of al-Ghazālī. It was al-Falimbānī who was responsible for systematically introducing al-Ghazālī’s teachings in the Malay world. Sufism in the Archipelago since then shifted to be more Shari‘ah-centred and Ghazalian until this present day. Al-Falimbānī emphasises that while purification of creed is paramount in Ṣūfī doctrine and belief, while at the same time practice of Shari‘ah should also go concurrently hand in hand. True conviction alone is not sufficient to get close to God.

By the eighteenth century, the Muslim scholars of the Malay Archipelago had ‘returned’ to the Ghazalian mysticism, as opposed to that of Ibn Arabian, which most of them were in the previous centuries. While the teachings of al-Ghazālī had already been made known briefly to the Malay world a few centuries prior to al-Falimbānī, but only al-Falimbānī who was responsible for further promoting the teachings of al-Ghazālī in the most comprehensive manner possible as enshrined in the latter’s work of *Iḥyā’*.

The transmission of knowledge from the Arabian Peninsula to the shores of Malay-Indonesian Archipelago, and the intellectual networking that al-Falimbānī had established in his lifetime were also clearly discernible. On several issues ranging from the variants of his name, his death and others about him were brought to the

centre of discussion for further analysis. One of the findings was that his date of birth as mostly quoted by the contemporary scholars surprisingly seemed to be far off the correct estimation. We propose his birth date to be either 1711 or 1712, but not 1704 as it stands now. On knowledge, as we have seen, al-Falimbānī clearly adopts al-Ghazālī's scheme of presentation that divides knowledge basically into three major broad disciplines: creed (*'aqidah*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Sufism (*tasawwuf*) as it appears in the *Siyar*; and likewise with *fard 'ayn* and *fard kifāyah*. Having placed al-Ghazālī as the framework of his thoughts, al-Falimbānī then strengthens al-Ghazālī's original ideas with the teachings of other Sufī masters. Education for al-Falimbānī is ultimately not just a mere process of imparting knowledge from the instructors to the students' mind but rather is an integrated process involving spiritual and physical aspects of man. It is not just the intellect, but also involving the spiritual psychology, the metaphysical aspects, ontology and spiritual virtues that will eventually shape one's character inwardly and outwardly. It is an all-embracing educational process more than theoretical doctrinal teachings but also coupled with practical implementation of the doctrine at the highest spiritual experience.

In the Ṣūfī term, its aim is to be in the Divine Presence, *knowing* God, or *ma'rifah*. This is the integrated or *tawhidic* approach of Islami spiritual education expounded by al-Falimbānī. Interestingly, al-Falimbānī at one point mentions that the objective of seeking knowledge is for one to 'fear God' since only the scholars who

fear God. At various other occasions, however, he repeatedly mentions that the aim is to attain *maʿrifah*. In synthesizing the two aims, perhaps we could say that since piety (*taqwā*) is also ‘fear of God’, then for al-Falimbānī someone who has attained *maʿrifah* or known as a gnostics also the pious person (*muttaqī*) which is another term for the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*).

On the doctrine of Seven Stages of Being, this study has presented arguments from both sides: in favour of and against the doctrine. The debate surrounding this Seven Stages is more of recent or contemporary phenomenon believed to be a consequence of the reform movement around the globe, attacking certain Ṣūfī practices and belief in general, and *waḥdat al-wujūd* in particular. As have been demonstrated, the *wujūdiyyah* tendency in the Malay world however, is not something new, for it had been there since the earliest time of Islam’s arrival in the Archipelago.

As for *wujūdiyyah* teachings of al-Falimbānī, it is not clear however whether he has adopted directly any of the teachings of al-Fansūrī, but he surely had adopted certain main ideas from Hamzah’s disciple, al-Sumatrānī as we have seen. It is clear however that al-Falimbānī had successfully synthesized the two approaches from two main figures in Islamic mysticism, the approach of al-Ghazālī and that of Ibn ‘Arabī.

Recommendations for Further Research

Finally, it is without doubt that there are still a lot could have been done in analysing the teachings of al-Falimbānī, not only confined to his two main works *Siyar* and *Hidāyat*, but also other works as well. But the time and other constraints do not permit that. There are other works of al-Falimbānī in the manuscript forms that have not been translated, transliterated or commented upon. Some of those are said to be available in the Mosque Agung Palembang. This study aspires to spark such an interest in this great scholar.

Secondly, with this study, it is hoped that Sufism will be placed in a better position in the society be it in our school syllabus, tertiary, or university curricula as well as for the mosques, *surau* or *madrasahs*, as method of social and nation building where *akhlāq* that is promoted by the teachings of Sufism undoubtedly could serve as a protective shield from all the social ills and diseases besetting our country today.