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## Wasathiyah and Its Implementation among Tasawwuf Scholars in Aceh

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### Abstract

Wasathiyah is one of the main elements that can build stability and harmony both locally and internationally. Therefore, it is not surprising that Islam which is a religion of peace supports the value of wasathiyah. This has been proven by the practice of the Messenger of Allah and his Companions. Positive practices have been perpetuated by the tasawwuf scholars from the past until today. This study aims to explore the thoughts and practices of wasathiyah among the tasawwuf scholars in Aceh. This study is qualitative with an exploratory design. Data collection is through content analysis of primary and secondary sources. The data obtained were analyzed using inductive and comparative methods. The findings of this study highlight the significant contribution made by the tasawwuf scholars in promoting the understanding and practice of wasathiyah among the people of Aceh.

**Keywords:** Wasathiyah, Harmony, Tolerance, Tasawwuf, ACEH.

### Introduction

Islam is a religion that emphasizes the blessing for all nature. However, the blessing itself is impossible to achieve if the universal teachings of Islam are misunderstood. The topic of Wasathiyah (moderation) is crucial to be discussed and disseminated to the religious community, especially Muslims particularly in Indonesia. Shihab said, when viewed from a geological, historical and cultural perspective, Indonesia is a very complex country with a diversity of races, ethnicities, languages and even religions (Usman 2015; Azman, Shuraimi, & Yunus, 2018).

Muslims as a people who are always in the middle position, appear as the chosen people who become "martyrs" in the sense of being witnesses or witnessed and imitated, also appearing as role models and benchmarks of truth. Islam rejected extreme groups because it symbolizes shortsightedness and rigidity in dealing with problems. Muslims are ideologically adhering to a system of balance, not as people who are draining in materialism and ignoring spiritual life holistically, nor as people who only dissolve in spiritual life alone and ignore physical life. The middle position calls on Muslims to appear to have social interactions, dialogue and be open with all parties who have different religious, cultural and civilizational backgrounds.

Since the beginning of its presence, Islam has positioned itself in the midline, when the Jews positioned the Prophet Jesus as a child of adultery (demeaning) and killed many prophets, while in other side Christians glorified the Prophet Jesus to the stage of becoming God (exalting). However, Islam still believes that the Prophet Jesus is only limited to the messenger of Almighty Allah (middle attitude). As described by Allah in surah al-Fatihah: 6-7: "Guide us to the straight path - The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor, not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray."

Muslims need to be the people who take an approach between two extreme values, which are those who are outrageous in their religion, and those who go astray who have always ignored and overlooked Allah's commands (Endut, n.d.).

Wasathiyah comes from the word (وسط) which literally means: middle position or intermediate. While by linguists and Qur'anic commentators, they defined it as just, chosen, best, especially, the noblest and highest. As mentioned by Almighty Allah: "And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you. And We did not make the qiblah which you used to face except that We might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels. And indeed, it is difficult except for those whom Allah has guided. And never would Allah have caused you to lose your faith. Indeed Allah is, to the people, Kind and Merciful" (al-Qur'an, Surah al-Baqarah: 143).

Conceptually, Wasathiyah has many purposes, including moderate, middle position, balance, just and not excessive. Other words used in Arabic, i'tidal, means that they are not excessive or strict and not as well liberated. According to Ahmad Omar Hashem, he defines Wasathiyah with whatever is in the middle so that nothing is excessive or extreme. According to al-Qaradawi, Wasathiyah is something that requires the appropriate right which is giving the right by taking the middle way so as not to exceed the limits of Islamic law (Endut n.d.).

If we examine the life of the Prophet Muhammad, we can find his simplicity in several aspects of life, for example, the Hadith narrated by al-Tabarani from Uthman bin Maz'un, he said: "O Messenger of Allah, allow me to castration (ikhtisa') so that sexual desires will be diminished. Then the Prophet (PBUH) said to him "O Uthman, indeed Allah has exchanged the life of a monk

(priest) to the simple religion of Hanif". The Prophet (PBUH) also opposed excessive attitudes in carrying out worship, such as committing tyranny to self-rights, family rights and community rights. The Prophet (PBUH) also believes that justice is to give to everyone who has the right to their rights, neither more nor less (Zin, 2013; Mehedy, Sajib, Karim, 2018).

According to Azra (2017) in the development of Islam, various groups or sects emerged. Among them, some are exclusive (close-minded) in understanding Islam. This group is too strict in holding the shari'a that they understand Islam textually and rigidly. Frequently, the understanding they have clashed with other schools and even too extreme in going against other religions. Hence, there is no space for dialogue left. Furthermore, there is also an inclusive stream (open-minded). This group is represented by Sufism who are able to offer Islam as Wasathiyah (middle). However, he restricted it to only Sufism which was spearheaded by Imam al-Ghazali which has remained loyal to Islamic law.

The opinion expressed by Azra above is very much in line with the view expressed by the royal mufti of Brunei Darussalam, Haji Awang Abdul Aziz bin Juned. He said, "ummata wasatha" is a people who stand in the middle to be witnesses. Witness that he means is the same as a witness in court; a witness must be the best, virtuous and honest. If we want to admit it, adherents of Islam who really emphasize the nature of the virtuous, honest, noble character and so on, then the teachings of tasawwuf are the reflection of the "ummata wasatha".

In the view of the Majelis Ulama Indonesi (MUI), Islam as Wasathiyah sees the teachings of Islam as rahmatan lil alamin, a blessing for the entire universe. Wasathiyah in Islam is the "Islamic Central" for the realization of the best people (khairu ummah). Almighty Allah made the Muslims moderate (wasath) in all religious matters, such as in terms of prophethood, shari'a and others. IX MUI National Conference believes that the Islam as Wasathiyah must be practiced in a religious manner by all Indonesian Muslims and the world so that it becomes a Shuhada 'ala al-Nas (Witness for the truth of Islam) to realize a religious life that is progressive and tolerant; forming a peaceful and respectful community life; realize national life which is inclusive, united and civilized; and creating a democratic and a nomocratic state of life (Fitri, 2017).

### **Literature Review**

Nur. et. al (2015) in his journal entitled "Konsep Wasathiyah Dalam al-Qur'an: Studi Komparatif antara Tafsir al-Tahrir Wa al-Tanwir dan Aisar al-Tafsir", tries to explain regarding the necessity for Muslims to give birth and practice Wasathiyah life (moderate). He tried to put out the meaning of Wasathiyah contained in two books of interpretation of the Qur'an, which he then compared between the two. However, his study did not mention at all about Wasathiyah in the perspective of Sufism as the topic will be discussed in this paper. Nevertheless, his study also helped researchers to get additional references to this study.

Furthermore, in a journal entitled "Pendekatan Wasathiyah: Definisi, Konsep dan Pelaksanaan" by Zin (2013), gives a good explanation about Wasathiyah. He issued a proposition about

Wasathiyah from al-Qur'an, al-Sunnah, the lives of the Companions and the Tabi'in, traditional scholars and contemporary scholars. In his study, he also strongly advocated the importance of religious life by practicing the value of Wasathiyah. Apart from the two works above, there are still some studies on Wasathiyah. However, according to the opinion of the researcher, there is no study that specifically discusses the thought of the Islamic scholar of Tasawwuf in Aceh. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the topic.

### **Research Methodology**

Basically, this research is of a qualitative study. Usually, qualitative studies are used when the study relies on content analysis and document analysis. This method is believed to have attempted to explain the thoughts of the Wasathiyah (moderate/middle) of the Islamic scholars of Tasawwuf in Aceh in more depth.

### **Discussion**

From the perspective of Islamic history and preaching, the existence and role of the Islamic Tasawwuf scholars, either in Africa, India or Southeast Asia, especially post-one century after the death of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), the Islamic Tasawwuf scholars have become selfless carriers. With various streams of tasawwuf, they embraced this field as an effective way of preserving and practicing the teachings of the Messenger of Allah, especially in the areas of purification and preservation of the soul, adorning the morals with honesty, sincerity and humility as exemplified by the Messenger of Allah (Muchsini, 2013).

Similarly, with the advent of Islam to Aceh and later developing in the archipelago, the religious world was colored with a pattern of Sufistic thoughts. One thing that is not disputed is that the history of Islam coming to this region is moving along with the development of Sufism. In short, tasawwuf is a factor in the acceptance of Islam in the archipelago (Fakhriati, 2014). This statement can also be found in the writings of Naquib al-Attas (Ghafur, 2011).

Among the most acceptable reasons for the archipelago's acceptance into Islam is the ability of Islamic represent to use attractive approaches especially by emphasizing Islam or synergy with local beliefs. Such adjustments do not make a drastic change in local religious beliefs or practices but through adaptations of the Tasawwuf approach. Early Islamic disseminators were traveling teachers with strong Sufi characters. They also had an attractive and charismatic attitude (Ghaffar, 2015).

The attractive method used by Aceh Islamic Tasawwuf scholars in spreading Islam in the early days was the result of their rational or balanced thinking in assessing a condition. Muslim historian, Azra (1995) also agreed with the reason. He said the success of the Sufis in Islamic literature was more due to the introduction of Islam using attractive approaches, which emphasized the suitability of Islam in the old tradition or continuity, rather than the drastic change in local religious beliefs and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism, animism and dynamism.



The adherents of the Aceh Islamic Tasawwuf scholars were not confined to the process of Islamic preaching in the early days. However, in all aspects of life, they also give priority to moderate and not extreme thinking. In criticizing governments, for example, approaches used other than orally, are also through writing. Islamic Tasawwuf scholars in Aceh have produced many books that have criticized the government, including the book of Taj al-Salatin by Bukhari al-Jauhari. According to Prof. Abdul Hadi, Bukhari al-Jauhari was a scholar of Sufism because in his work, he embraced sufistic moral values. He wrote this book to be presented to Sultan 'Ala al-din Ri'ayat Shah Sayyid al-Mukammil (1590-1604M) as a scholar's contribution in advising the sultan to exercise good governance by following the principles of the Qur'an and al-Sunnah. According to Djajadiningrat, at the time the book was written, Aceh was plagued by political turmoil and a leadership crisis. Fadzil agrees with this theory because he also says that there is also a poem written by Hamzah al-Fansury, expressing dissatisfaction with the political behavior of the Aceh leaders and government, the greedy and oppressive aristocrats (Nordin, 2014). Somehow, a leader is more impressed with a simple, polite and modest critique.

The accepting attitude of a sultan over criticism of tasawwuf scholars, can also be found in the criticism of Shaikh Nur al-Din al-Raniry, he is "Shaikh al-Islam Sultanate" (mufti). Among his duties was to advise Sultan Iskandar Tsani who had just taken the throne on a variety of issues, both religious and political. In his book entitled Bustan al-Salatin, he explained how to advise the sultan who played a role as ruler and caliph of Almighty Allah on earth. By quoting verses from the Qur'an, he explained to the Sultan his responsibilities and obligations to the people. Protecting the weak and bringing good to ordinary people will make the Sultan protected and blessed by God. Perhaps on his advice, Sultan Iskandar Tsani abolished punishment that was not in accordance with Islamic teachings for convicted persons, such as the penalty of "permeating oil" and "licking iron" (Majid, 2015).

Then, in building the diplomatic relationship, the Sultanate of Aceh Dar al-Salam would also need a knowledgeable, broad-minded, moderate and flexible (Wasathiyah) as well as capable to become a diplomat. Looking at these criteria, it is not wrong if the Sultan Iskandar Muda appointed his teacher as well as the Royal Mufti Shaikh Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani as a diplomat to meet with the British royal diplomat, Sir James Lancaster who came to Aceh (Gazali, 2016). Wasathiyah thinking is indeed very necessary in establishing a diplomatic relationship. This is due to the fact that the second party who wants to collaborate is not necessarily committed to one belief (aqeedah) the same as us. Moderate thinking as well does not harm the Sultanate of Aceh itself. There is no doubt that Shaikh Shams al-Din who is a Sufi is certainly very expert in possessing the character.

The thought of Wasathiyah (moderate) is not something new in Islam. Besides being mentioned in al-Qur'an and al-Sunnah, it has also been applied by the companion of the prophet Muhammad Saw. As narrated by Ali bin Abi Talib by Ibn Abi Syaibah, he said: "The ummah is as good as the middle class, people who are slow may follow it and those who are fast can maintain it". What is

meant by Sayyidina Ali is that he hates excessive behavior and also behavior that is taking things way too easy (Zin, 2013).

Moving on to the time of Shaikh 'Abd al-Rauf al-Singkily, an interesting thing happened was a heated debate over the planned inauguration of Empress Taj al-Lam 'Alam Safiyat al-Din Shah as supreme ruler of the Kingdom of Aceh. Men of the descendants of the Sultan of Aceh tried to usurp the throne with the support of the scholars who said that women should not be kings because they were seen to be in conflict with Islamic law. They believe that women should not be the Imam of the prayer that there are men as ma'mum. Therefore, women are not justified to be Wali al-Amr. After reading and understanding conflicting ideas and the political situation in Aceh, finally Shaikh 'Abd al-Rauf al-Singkily was able to control and defuse the upheaval that occurred by means of deliberation with both parties. The scholars and also the pioneer of the Syattariyah Order in the archipelago argued that Taj al-'Alam Safiyat al-Din Shah may be appointed as Sultanah, replacing her deceased husband Iskandar Tsani. However the inauguration should be limited to the conditions; marriage, thalaq, fasakh and other cases related to religious law must be held by the scholar who holds the Qadi al-Malik al-'Adil. His thoughts showed that with his broad knowledge he could relieve the polemic that occurred in the community by taking the middle way.

In fact, it was not only in that case. Shaikh Abd al-Rauf al-Singkily returned to expressing his thoughts when there were differences of opinion between Shaikh Nur al-Din al-Raniry and followers of Shaikh Hamzah al-Fansury regarding the Wihdat al-Wujud doctrine. By holding the principles and perspective of Wasathiyah, Shaikh 'Abd al-Rauf al-Singkily tried to mediate between the two opposing poles. He did not agree with the actions of Shaikh Nur al-Din al-Raniry who blasphemous the followers of Shaikh Hamzah al-Fansury. According to him, if the accusation is not true then the accusation will return to the accuser. Then, towards followers of Shaikh Hamzah al-Fansury, he wrote a commentary on his book entitled Bayan al-Tajalli; "however engrossed a servant worships Almighty Allah and feels united with the light of God, so that he mentions himself Ana al-Haq (referring to himself as the light of God), but Allah and the creatures still have different meanings" (Muhammad, 2019).

Then, in the early 20th century AD, there was a civil war between the scholars and Ulee balang (commanders) in Cumbok, Pidie, Aceh. Basically, not all scholars agree with the Cumbok War. One of the tasawwuf scholars who developed the Congregation of Hadadiyah in Aceh, which is Shaikh Hasan Krueng Kalee, disagreed with the war. He took the attitude to meet Teuku Daud Cumbok, a figure from the Ulee balang, to make peace. But the meeting was considered a failure because Teuku Daud Cumbok refused the peace invitation on the grounds that he would not budge after the reputation of the commander was defiled with accusations that had not been proven as alleged by the scholars who gathered in the organization of the Persatuan Ulama Seluruh Aceh (PUSA), even though Shaikh Hasan Krueng Kalee is a figure who is not included in the organization because he prefers to be in the Tarbiyah Islamiyah Association (PERTI).

However, when opposing the Dutch colonialists, he agreed and shared his views with the PUSA scholars. His attitude can be seen from the announcement of scholars throughout Aceh, which were pledged by four great scholars of Aceh from Mazhab Syafi'ie. Among them are Tgk. Haji. M. Hasan Krueng Kalee from the PERTI association, Tgk. Muhammad Daud Beureueh from the PUSA association, Tgk. Hajj. Dja'far Siddiq Lamjabat and Tgk. Ahmad Hasballah Indrapuri. The notice was a fatwa of jihad against the Dutch invaders. The gentle attitudes towards fellow Muslims, but firm with the invaders was an example to the people of Aceh at that time so that the civil war did not spread throughout Aceh (Zulkarnain, 2015).

The thought that was Wasathiyah (moderate) was also followed by his students, which is Shaikh Muhammad Wali al-Khalidy. When there was a conflict between the DI/TII parties and the Indonesian government at the beginning of independence, Waly disagreed with the methods adopted by the DI/TII which using force to fight the Indonesian government. Of course, he has enough reasons not to fight against fellow Muslims.

### **Conclusion**

The thought of Wasathiyah as a way of thinking must be applied by Muslims around the globe. Choosing a middle position is not an easy matter, due to the fact that it also requires intelligence, maturity and extensive knowledge. Especially in current modern times, various problems have suddenly arisen. Thus, Muslims are required to be able to respond to these problems.

Examining at the history of Aceh which is so complex with polemics and differences in views in the community, it is undoubtedly necessary to learn the approaches taken by the historical participants mentioned in the discussion (tasawwuf scholars) in completing and taking a middle position on a condition. In this case, it shows us how tasawwuf scholars have been able to answer various polemics and their duties as patrons of the people. Hence, it is not necessary for us to follow the role models from streams of understanding that probably will not be able to answer the problems of the people.

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