

The Role of Sheikh as an Effective Communicator on the Spiritual Development Process of Tarekat Practitioners

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ABSTRACT

The worldwide phenomenon of globalization has given rise to an individualistic and materialistic way of life. Material gains become a benchmark for measuring human pleasure and success. Consequently, social tolerance, *ukhuwah Islamiyyah*, and human values are gradually declining. Therefore, considering the humanitarian issues of the globalization era, balanced spiritual and material development is required to fill the vacuum in the human soul through divine ideals. In this light, finding a sheikh to mentor and help one get closer to God is advised, and this calls for the discipline of tarekat tasawuf in life as well as spiritual development. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of Tarekat Tasawuf Sheikh as a successful communicator on the spiritual growth of tarekat practitioners. Using a descriptive qualitative methodology, this study explores the idea of Islamic communicators and explains academics' perspectives on sheikh tarekat tasawuf. Consequently, it has been determined that sheikh tarekat plays five functions in helping the tarekat practitioners of Negeri Sembilan improve spiritually and serves as an efficient communicator in this process.

Keywords: Tarekat Tasawuf, Negeri Sembilan, sheikh, communicator, mentor, spiritual

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has altered people's lives in the modern era. Materialistic and individualistic lifestyles turn into benchmarks for measuring happiness and success in life. As a result, social tolerance, Islamic *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and human values are all diminishing (Muzakkir, 2011). Therefore, spiritual development based on the concept of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (Soul's Purification) should be given attention to addressing this issue. According to Faizatul & Faudzinaim (2016), the process of *tazkiyah al-nafs* is the removal of bad and repulsive aspects from the spirit because of bad conduct. This procedure entails cleaning the soul of *mazmumah* (*takhalli*) (bad manner) and then attempting to adorn it with *mahmudah* (*tahalli*) (good manner). Inadvertently, this procedure may result in honorable conduct that is consistent with the admirable principles that Allah SWT has assigned to humanity.

Tazkiyah al-nafs, however, necessitates human perseverance and tenacity. This allows one to be consistent in the purifying process, which requires high discipline and spiritual development support to obtain success and consistency in the process of *tazkiyah al-nafs*; some believe that mastering tarekat tasawuf is beneficial. Moreover, Sufism requires a sheikh to mentor those seeking a deeper relationship with Allah Ta'ala. People who follow the sheikh of Sufism tariqa will, inadvertently, lead simple lives, dislike exaggerating, boasting or *takabbur*, become modest or *wara'*, show patience through hardship, and be appreciative of others' help and blessings. Sufism will, therefore, always be obedient to Allah's commands and those of His Messenger and try to abstain from His prohibitions (Muzakkir, 2011).

The discourse on Sufism in Malaysia has been widely discussed by various parties and figures from different schools. Discussions typically revolve around the history, flow, practice, and prominent figures within the order in Malaysia. The Sufism order is an important da'wah group among Muslims in Malaysia, including in Negeri Sembilan, where it is one of the vessels for the spread of Islamic teachings (Mohammad Fahmi & Ishak Suliaman, 2017). According to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1963), there are nine orders that play an important role in the Malay Archipelago, namely the Qadiriyyah, Naqsybandiyyah, Rifaiyyah, Syadziliyyah, Chistiyyah, Syattariyyah, Ahmadiyyah, Tijaniyyah, and Alawiyyah orders. Hamdan Hassan (1990) has listed fifteen order organizations in Malaysia, namely the Naqshbandiyyah, Ahmadiyyah, Qadiriyyah, Qadiriyyah Naqsybandiyyah, Syatiriyyah, Alawiyyah, Shammaniyyah, Aiderusiyyah, Mufradiyyah, Suhrawardiyyah, Rifa'iyah, Darqawiyah, Khalwatiyyah, Shadhiliyyah, and Sanusiyyah orders. Preachers (caliphs) who received permission from the sheikhs of each order to spread their message were the first to introduce Sufism into Malaysia.

Sufism has a special position among the people of Negeri Sembilan. The evidence for this is that preachers from Negeri Sembilan's own lineage have brought a significant influx of Sufism preachers to Negeri Sembilan, making it one of the states in Malaysia where this phenomenon has occurred. Regarding the initial date of entry of the Sufism order into Negeri Sembilan, it cannot be ascertained exactly because there is no official document about it. Based on the opinion of past researchers who studied the history of the Sufism order in Negeri Sembilan, it is likely that the date of entry of the Ahmadiyyah al-Dandarawiyyah order to Negeri Sembilan is around 1900. This is based on the argument that in that year, the main founder of this order in Negeri Sembilan received the Degree of Ahmadiyya al-Dandarawiyyah from the founder of the order himself, Sheikh Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Dandarawi (Hamdan Hassan, 1990). According to Sulaiman Ibrahim (1996), the Ahmadiyyah al-Dandarawiyyah order entered Negeri Sembilan in 1902. In 1900, Sheikh Haji Ahmad al-Baqir introduced the Naqsyabandiyyah order to Negeri Sembilan by establishing a suluk surau in Batu area 7, Pantai, Jalan Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan (Abdul Manam Mohamad et al., 2013).

Thus, this article discusses the role of sheikhs as effective communicators in the process of community spiritual development in Negeri Sembilan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted qualitatively to collect information, data and reference materials from the right sources. Qualitative research focuses on efforts to obtain non-numerical information (Cresswell, 2013) that can provide in-depth information about the background of a matter. Qualitative research uses a natural approach to understand the true state of a phenomenon in a specific context without manipulating any real situation. This study uses the bibliographic method, which is by analyzing literature data obtained from previous studies. Research has been done on books, theses, dissertations, journals and related scientific studies used to collect data. The data obtained is then analyzed inductively to describe, analyze and draw conclusions from the data in the process of finding the validity of facts, data and information that is specific to the public. Inductive research begins with detailed observations in general situations and then moves towards formulating more specific insights and theories. Inductive research involves an in-depth process of the research situation and examining relevant explanations to form a conclusion when the study is completed. In this study, Document analysis was conducted to discuss the concept of Islamic communicator, the role of sheikhs in tarekat tasawuf as well as to elaborate the background of tarekat tasawuf in Negeri Sembilan. Meanwhile, the descriptive approach is used in content analysis to explain and prove the role of the sheikh as a successful Islamic communicator in the process of spiritual development of tarekat tasawuf practitioners in Negeri Sembilan.

THE CONCEPT OF AN ISLAMIC COMMUNICATOR

Islamic communicators are Muslim individuals, either male or female, who oversee successfully communicating the Islamic message to the public by disseminating information through a variety of targeted delivery channels (Salahudin, 2021). In this essence, an Islamic communicator not only conveys the message of Islamic teachings but also strives to give understanding, build positive relationships, and answer the audience's questions thoroughly and prudently based on the Quran and al-Sunnah (Ghazali, 2007). Salahudin (2021) opined that each Muslim individual has an important role as an Islamic communicator in the process of delivering religious messages to others. Furthermore, in the context of dakwah, Islamic communicators are known as preachers who

carry out dakwah efforts through the medium of communication. The process of communication that takes place between the preacher and the recipient of the dakwah will be successful if the preacher is able to influence others, regardless of their backgrounds, through his fikrah and dakwah (Roslan, 2004).

From an Islamic standpoint, preachers or Islamic communicators hold a prominent place in communication. This is because Islam places a strong emphasis on the qualities of effective communicators, such as the importance of truth, humility, kindness, justice, honesty, sincerity, and sincere intentions. It also highlights the need to verify the accuracy of the message given, the source of the communication, and the communicator's accuracy (Yahya, 2007). In addition, Islam consistently promotes communication skills as a quality information source that lessens the likelihood of false statements being made during negotiations (West, 1994). First, a communicator's credibility lies in his integrity, which entails honesty and transparency in discharging trust and responsibility (PRPM, 2023). Islamic communicators need to act with integrity while presenting information. In this regard, the communicator's moral and ethical traits are crucial to represent honesty, truth, and consistency in the communication process. Moreover, an ethical communicator should uphold ideals in all facets of his communication (Dzakayah & Sri Ayu, 2021). A communicator with integrity will exhibit the value of honesty, sincerity, and consistency when delivering information.

Indirectly, when it comes to communication, this condition helps preserve confidence between the two sides by ensuring the alignment between the statement made, claims, and deeds performed. The next factor that determines a communicator's credibility is justice, which entails standing by the right side and upholding justice (PRPM, 2023). Islamic communicators should convey information without any element of bias to any party or for their benefit. This is because a fair communicator will deliver an accurate and factual message (Taufik, Salahudin & Rauf, 2018). Therefore, the adoption of the value of justice in the communication process of an Islamic communicator is emphasized to create a fair and beneficial communication environment between individuals as well as to create a harmonious relationship in society.

The next element of a communicator's credibility is accountability, which means being responsible for a person or a decision or action and being willing to provide the necessary explanation or reasonableness. Islamic communicators need to recognize that the value of accountability in the communication process is essential to prevent any mistakes from happening. The application of accountability in communication by an Islamic communicator helps to create a responsible atmosphere and sets a positive example for others. This is because a communicator's understanding of the Islamic faith includes the importance of accountability. Additionally, Allah SWT will watch over every communication, and they will be held accountable before him. Hence, a communicator should exercise caution and verify the accuracy of the facts that will be shared with the public (Hanifah, 2020). Finally, a credible Islamic communicator should be truthful. Islam places great emphasis on its ummah telling the truth in every conversation including in conveying information, claims, or news. This is because unverified information can cause anxiety and panic in a community. Thus, the sheikh tarekat tasawuf has an important role as an effective communicator in delivering dakwah communication today.

SYEIKH TAREKAT TASAWUF, AS A COMMUNICATOR OF THE SPIRITUAL MESSAGE

One of the core ideas of the Sufi religion is the idea that the sheikha sheikh's guidance is essential in all domains of one's faith, sharia and ethics, physical and mental. In the Sufi discipline, perfect repentance and practice at the level of Shari'a, Order, Truth, and Makrifat will undoubtedly not come to be fruitful and attainable without the leadership of a sheikh. The sheikh, according to this discipline, is a tariqa teacher who, under the expert tutelage of his master, has a true understanding of Sufi discipline. With his wisdom, a sheikh must also truly and genuinely perform charitable deeds. In addition, the sheikh must possess other qualities, including unwavering adherence to the Quran and the Prophet SAW's sunnah, abstaining from heresy, and having the ability to transform his students into ideal Sufis through physical and mental training (Jahid, 2018). As mentioned by al-Qasyani (1981), the sheikh should be an individual who has attained the pinnacle of proficiency in the disciplines of knowledge, such as Shari'a, tarekat, and fact, and who is highly skilled in understanding the complexities of his passions and ailments and their remedies. Furthermore, a sheikh can respond to a tarekat practitioner who is following him on tauhid, fiqh, or matters pertaining to soul purifying (Moh Isom, 2015).

Thus, a sheikh's role in guiding his followers is the most important pillar of tasawuf (Abdul Hayei, 2004). According to As'ad (2012), tasawuf scholars have highlighted the importance of seeking guidance from a teacher or sheikh to lead them towards the spiritual path. Tasawuf knowledge and contemporary psychology are two areas of study that address strategies for human development. These two pieces of information aim to improve the human being not only in terms of physical attributes but also in terms of spiritual or emotional, spirit, soul, and spiritual qualities. The process of acquiring qualities of the human being that are hard for the unaided sight to perceive, grasp, and witness is known as spiritual development. This achievement in the spiritual growth of humans will produce honorable individuals as part of an ideal society (Mostafa, 2003).

Tarekat tasawuf is a discipline that guides people to strengthen their spirituality which includes various aspects in the formation of a believer's personality with the aim of bringing people who believe in Allah SWT closer. Through the discipline of tarekat tasawuf, it serves a variety of specific methods and practices in enhancing the spirituality of the individual. It involves not only theoretical but also practical nature that needs to be implemented for those who are ready to take the tasawuf road. However, it should be noted in the selection of tarekat tasawuf, tarekat tasawuf which is not based on sharia is rejected, and only the tarekat tasawuf that is aligned with the sharia as determined by Allah SWT is accepted (Haidhar, 2018).

Therefore, a sheikh tarekat is required to guide his students in the practice of self-purification (tazkiyah) and soul cleansing (tasfiyah) through the application of devotion, the practice of zikrullah, muraqabah and suluk or khalwat. All these matters are directed towards a positive and intact internal or spiritual aspect through the leadership of a sheikh. If a specialist can treat a physical illness through a medical doctor, then a spiritual illness should be cured by a tarekat sheikh. In this light, Sheikh Tarekat plays the role of a spiritual doctor who is responsible for treating the spirituality and personality of his disciples to obtain spiritual steadfastness (Saleha, Hasrul & Hishamudin, 2020). According to Yusuf (2004), an individual needs guidance in their spiritual path. Hence, the Apostles are sent to guide humans to the right path. In this regard, humans' cognition and intellect might be limited, and in the practice of tarekat tasawuf, a sheikh is required to guide those findings ways to be to Allah SWT. This is because the path to be closer to Allah SWT is very difficult, as the devil has various ways to deceive humans. Those trying to be near Allah SWT without the leadership of a sheikh could fall into the trap of the devil.

THE ROLE OF SHEIKH TAREKAT AS AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TAREKAT IN NEGERI SEMBILAN

According to Taufik & Salahudin (2021) and Hardiyansyah (2015), communicators are parties that act as senders and message presenters in the communication process. In other words, a source is the source of information. It plays an important role in the communication process as the source will determine the understanding, confidence, trust and acceptance of the audience towards the information presented. As an Islamic communicator, Sheikh Tarekat plays a role in conveying the message of spiritual development towards the tarekat practitioners and the local community. Among the roles of sheikhs identified that can be attributed to the four credibility of Islamic communicators, namely integrity, justice, accountability, and truthfulness.

a) Establishment of the Negeri Sembilan Registered Tarekat Coalition

Given Malaysia's diversity and the variety of tarekat institutions, the establishment of the Sufi Supreme Council is imperative. The government established a top organization to serve as an umbrella for the numerous tarekat present in the nation following the arrival of a new tarekat in Malaysia and accusations made by a group claiming to be a Sufi sheikh. The Ala Turuq Sufiyah Council, for instance, oversees the travels of 70 tarekat tasawuf with more than 70 sheikhs, totaling over 15 million tarekat practitioners. This council is in Egypt. Jami'iyah Ahlith Thariqah al-Mu'tabarah (JATMAN) oversees 45 tarekats in Indonesia, much like it does in other countries (Faizal, 2015). This was implemented in Negeri Sembilan through the formation of the Negeri Sembilan Registered Tariqat Coalition (G-Tariq) under the guidance of Dr. Muhammad Firdaus Abdul Manaf. To restore tarekat tasawuf as an Islamic scientific organization that balances amaliah, scientific and moral, and to mainstream tarekat in the community, G-Tariq was established.

G-Tariq is a resource for the community seeking information about tarekat tasawuf and works in conjunction

with the Negeri Sembilan government's Mufti Department. G-Tariq also helps to bring the registered tarekat tasawuf group in Negeri Sembilan together, educate the community about tarekat tasawuf, respond to questions, and defend tarekat tasawuf against allegations made by outsiders (G-TARIQ, 2021). In addition, the establishment of the Negeri Sembilan Registered Tarekat Coalition also shows that the sheikh tarekat in Negeri Sembilan has integrity, which is to ensure that the tarekat to be practiced in Negeri Sembilan is registered with the state religious authorities. Apart from that, showing the integrity of the sheikh tarekat in ensuring that the tarekat tasawuf which is spread is on the track of the Sunnah wal Jamaah.

b) Socialising the Sufism Order

The role of the sheikh tarekat as a communicator is in line with the Prophet Muhammad PBUH's command to convey the message from the Prophet PBUH even though it is 'one verse'. Symbolic to 'one verse' shows how important it is for religious truth to be conveyed effectively based on the principles of communication outlined by the Quran and al-Sunnah (Norain, 2012). Discussions and questions on tasawuf are related to matters involving internal matters, namely spiritual or spiritual aspects. Tasawuf frees a person from mazmumah behaviours, cultivates a mahmudah nature and brings a person closer to Allah SWT. When it is mentioned in relation to tasawuf, it also does not run away from the debate on tarekat because, in the discipline of tasawuf, tarekat is the pillar of tasawuf. This is where the starting point shows the great role of a sheikh as a communicator to assist and guide the tarekat practitioners under his leadership to ensure that the level of spiritual construction and formation meets the expected purpose (Wan Saleha, 2020).

Therefore, the discipline of tarekat tasawuf based on al-Quran and al-Sunnah should be disseminated and expanded further until it seeps into the hearts of the community. This is because the institution of tarekat tasawuf is the only ideal and complete spiritual masrasah in Islam (Jahid, 2017). Through the organizing of the zikir tarekat tasawuf ceremony at the tasawuf tarekat practice centre, it serves as a platform for the community to improve through regular spiritual training. The sheikhs of tarekat tasawuf can play a big role in the process of disseminating the knowledge of zikir tarekat tasawuf to the community by providing knowledge of the practice of zikir tarekat tasawuf. When the community is already integrated with the zikir tarekat tasawuf, the community originally as the recipient will also act as a promotional agent or message presenter to others to get to know more closely what tarekat tasawuf is and will further expand the role of tarekat tasawuf. Indirectly, the communication process continues to take place.

c) Sheikh of the Order as a "Doctor of the Soul"

Within the medical field, interpersonal communication has a critical role in shaping an individual's behaviour and health (Ismail & Omar, 2018). The conversation that occurs between a patient and a doctor is a very closely related element of this interpersonal connection. Patients' health can be improved, and the effectiveness of medical consultations can be assessed by providing them with positive health messages and information (Haron & Ibrahim, 2013). The institution of tarekat tasawuf can be named the "Hospital of Soul" as a centre for the treatment of individual spiritual problems. Syeikh, who leads the tarekat institution, serves as a doctor to treat the spirituality of his tarekat practitioners through regular zikir tarekat tasawuf ceremonies (Firdaus, 2018). This is in line with the principles of tarekat itself, which leads its practitioners to cleanliness (tazkiyah) and its spiritual purity (tasfiyah), which is the nature of piety, zikrullah and muraqabah as well as the practice of suluk or khalwat.

All these matters are directed towards positive internal or spiritual aspects through the leadership of the sheikh. If the physical illness can be treated by a medical doctor, then the spiritual disease of the specialist who is able to treat it is the sheikh tarekat itself. Thus, the position of a sheikh tarekat is responsible for caring for the spiritual and personality of the tarekat practitioners to obtain spiritual steadfastness (Wan Saleha, 2020). As a "Doctor of Souls", a sheikh needs to have accountability and is responsible for the healing process of his pupil's soul. Each sheikh tarekat is also responsible for the decisions, actions and explanations for each treatment given to his students clearly and in detail based on the evidence from the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH.

d) The Protector Against Misconduct in the Sufism Order

Islamic communicators are proselytising who are responsible for inviting goodness and preventing evil. This is

summarised in the words of Allah SWT: “*And there should be among you a group who call for good and enjoin evil and prevent evil, and that is what they are successful.*” (Surah Ali-‘Imran, 3: 104). To combat the exploitation of tarekat tasawuf, sheikh tarekat plays a role in preventing stray tarekat from spreading and damaging the name of tarekat and tasawuf itself. The Prophet PBUH said: “*It is not evil that is done to a people, then they are able to prevent it but will not prevent it, but God will inflict torment on them*” (Riwayat Abu Daud).

The spread and development of tarekat tasawuf in Malaysia in general and Negeri Sembilan in particular has had a rough path. The tarekat tasawuf institution was banned by religious authorities in 1987, and the Mufti Department of the Negeri Sembilan Government (JMKNS) was the only government body helping to maintain its foothold in Malaysia (Danial, 2016) in addressing the issue of banning the zikir tarekat ceremony in Malaysia in 1987 (Abdul Rahman, 1997).

In this regard, Syeikh Murtada, as Syeikh TAIRD and the Mufti of the Negeri Sembilan Government at that time, proposed to establish the Negeri Sembilan Tasawuf Tarekat Enactment (ETTNS) 2005 to uphold the tarekat tasawuf in Negeri Sembilan. The enactment includes everything related to tarekat tasawuf is included in the purpose of this is to guarantee that the state’s tarekat tasawuf follows the Islamic Shari’a and is following regulations. The Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department, YAB Dato’ Dr Abdullah Md Zin, suggested that this enactment be implemented in Negeri Sembilan initially. Subsequently, this enactment was tabled in 2004 and enacted at the end of 2004, along with the Negeri Sembilan Islamic Religious Administration Enactment 2003. A sub-committee was established to assist the Fatwa Committee in all matters related to tarekat tasawuf. JMKNS’ determination to empower and strengthen tarekat tasawuf was evident when with the existence of the Tasawuf Tarekat Division (BTT) under JMKNS in 2007, responsible for implementing ETTNS in organising tasawuf tarekat in Negeri Sembilan more systematically.

BTT also acts as an organisation responsible for overseeing and monitoring all tarekat tasawuf activities in Negeri Sembilan to ensure their practices are in accordance with the provisions of ETTNS. The establishment of these two important organisations demonstrates the serious efforts of the Negeri Sembilan government in preserving the purity of the tarekat tasawuf discipline based on the Quran and al-Sunnah (Syaiful, 2016). Therefore, in a sheikh tarekat, a communicator should be fair in conveying an accurate and factual message regarding the teachings of tarekat tasawuf to others. Every action they intend to do should also be clarified from the Quran and sunnah so that the tarekat practitioners can be consistent in practising the tarekat tasawuf.

e) Leader of the Zikr Ceremony

Nik Rashid (1993) defined leadership as the application of goals, communication, and influence. The endeavour of leadership involves directing interpersonal influence through communication to accomplish objectives. God’s pleasure is the ultimate purpose of communication in the Islamic context. Leadership communication refers to examples and role models that should be shown by a leader not only about communication styles, methods and strategies but also on the aspects of morals and acts of worship. According to the Islamic leadership method, a leader, despite having good communication skills, cannot be considered a good leader if he lacks empathy, morality and righteousness (Akhtar & Azmi, 2017).

Therefore, the sheikh of the order, as a communicator, must be the leader and facilitator of the zirk ceremony. Based on the above discussion, Negeri Sembilan should serve as an example as the only state in Malaysia that upholds the honour and integrity of the Sufism order. One way it does this is by using integrated management to monitor the Sufism order’s progress across the state. Furthermore, “Darul Tarekat” refers to the Sufism order’s weekly zikr ceremonies, which are organised and held in the centre of the order’s practice throughout Negeri Sembilan on a recurring basis. The sheikh of the tarekat plays an important role as a spiritual message communicator in fulfilling the aspiration of turning Negeri Sembilan into “Darul Tarekat”.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the sheikh has an important role in an individual’s spiritual development. Thus, it is highly recommended to find a sheikh to guide a person to bring himself closer to God in this challenging era of globalization. In this light, the Sufism institution in Negeri Sembilan has opened space for spiritual development within the

community, specifically in Negeri Sembilan and Malaysia. The Negeri Sembilan community's spiritual growth has been impacted by the Sufism order's zikr ceremony, recurrently held in the Sufism order's practice centre and led by the sheikh of the order, who is well-versed in Sufism. The Zikr ceremony offers an extra platform for those seeking an exemplary spiritual life focused only on being closer to Allah SWT. Zikr, which is said to draw one closer to Allah, can result in positive behavioural changes in a servant who fears Allah SWT.

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