

# Al-Palimbani, The National Islamic Thinker in The 18<sup>th</sup> Century and His Divinity Concept

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## Abstract

Discourse about God becomes a study is not only in the philosophical and *Kalam* dimension but also by thinkers attempt to approach their understanding with *Tasawuf* dimension. Al-Palimbani is an Islamic thinker in the 18<sup>th</sup> century who gives specific reasoning about divinity. The approach given became specific in philosophical study of divinity. The basic concept of his thinking is stated in his monumental work, *sayr al-Salikin*. This study attempted to reveal the discourse

**Keywords:** divinity, seven dignities, *tasawuf*

## 1. Introduction

Discussing about renowned scholars in national archipelago in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, definitely Abd Samad al-Palimbani must be positioned in the strategic one because al-Palimbani had international reputation primarily about the authority of his knowledge. The dissemination of his knowledge was not only limited from his work bequeathed to the successors, but also the tradition of the dissemination of those religious studies were also forwarded by his students (Fang, 1993).

The existence of al-Palimbani as a highly reliable with a fighting spirit to leave the archipelago in order to deepen his knowledge had given new inspiration and motivation among observers of religious studies in the archipelago. The study on al-Palimbani in order to enrich the treasure of knowledge felt very appropriate and important. Therefore, this study attempted to construct the concept of al-Palimbani's thinking concerning God embodied in his work entitled *syar al-Salikin*. This work is used as the primary data, while the secondary data is all information that can be found to support this discussion. The systematics of discussion begins with introduction, the biography of al-Palimbani, the works of al-Palimbani, the vision of al-Palimbani about God, and ended with some concluding notes

### 1.1 The Biography of al-Palimbani

#### 1.1.1 The origin of al-Palimbani

There are different opinions and visions on the origin of al-Palimbani as one of the influential scholar in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the archipelago. Muhammad Hasan (1968), for example, as proposed by Chatib Quzwain (1985), argued that al-Palimbani is one of the sons of Sheikh al-Jalil bin Sheikh abd. Al-Wahid bin Sheikh Ahmad-a-Madhani, an Arab who came from Yemen after 1700 (1112 H) was given a credence as mufti in Kedah kingdom, with his wife Radin Ranti in Palembang. He had been married to Wan Zainab a daughter of Dato 'Sri Maha Raja Dewa, Kedah. From this marriage, he was blessed with two sons; Wan Abd Qadiq and Wan Abdullah. Both of them are younger than al-Palimbani. Since both of his brothers were born after Abd. DJALIL returned after three years of his leaving to Palembang where He married Radin Ranti who gave a birth to Abd. Shamad.

Chatib Quzwain further argued, in the beginning Abd. Djalil was as a religious teacher in Palembang. In an odyssey of Tengku Muhammad Jiwa (the Kedah crown prince, the brother of Wan Zainab) to India, Abd. Djalil was brought by him to Kedah. Tengku Muhammad Jiwa was crowned as the Sultan of Kedah succeeded his father who passed away in his odyssey, at that time Abd. Djalil was assigned as the mufti of the kingdom and married to Wan Zainab. Meanwhile, according to Hamka, as stated by Mal An Abdullah (1981), al-Palimbani was named abd. al-Samad bin Abdul Wahab al-Yamani al-Palimbani, originally was from Yemen who came to Palembang, learnt Malay and taught religious studies. With his religious knowledge, he became known as a great scholar and famous with students who came from all over the country. Furthermore, al-Palimbani went to Mecca to deepen the treasure of his knowledge.

The validity of the origin of al-Palimbani revealed by Hamka should be doubted, this information is very contradictive with the statements explained by Quzwain. The doubt on this Hamka's explanation is very reasonable; moreover, it can be strengthened by the findings of the investigation conducted by Azyumardi Azra. According to Azra (1995), in a Malay source al-Palimbani's full name is Abd al-Shamad bin Abd Allah al-Jawi al-Palimbani. Whereas in Arab sources (Azra, 1995), it is mentioned by Sayyid Abd al-Shamad bin Adb Rahman al-Jawi. Although there are differences of the name in these sources, Azra felt confident that Abd as-Shamad al-Palimbani is Abd al-Shamad bin Abd al-Rahman al-Jawi, this is confirmed by Arab sources, of which almost entirely is a career overview of Abd Shamad al-Palimbani found in other sources.

When referring to the descriptions above, that Sayyid's blood who is from Yemen and Malay's blood

of royal bloodline of Palembang were inside Abd al-Shamad al-Palimbani. Although there are the differences of the name in her paternal descent side, as mentioned by Quzwain, Hamka, and Azra, but there is similar principle that the father is originally from Arab-Yemen

#### 1.1.2 The life and the intellectual establishment of al-Palimbani

Regarding al-Palimbani's date of birth and year of death, which are not so obvious, but in an estimate, al-Palimbani allegedly was born in 1116/1704 M (Azra, 1995). This consideration is based on the year of his father's coronation Abd. Djalil as a mufti in Kedah kingdom and not long after Tengku Muhammad Jiwa was appointed as Sultan of Kedah in 1112/17000 (Syamsul, 1996), in his visit to Palembang he married Ranti, after three or four years being in Palembang he returned to Kedah with his son because his duty as mufti awaited him. There are different opinions about the death of al-Palimbani, it was presumed that he died in 1203/1789, namely the year when he accomplished his last and the most famous, *Sayr al-Salikin* (Hassan, 1993) it is the version of Azyumardi Azra. Meanwhile, *Tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah* mentioned that al-Palimbani was killed in a battle in Thailand in 1244/1828. This statement was rejected by Azra as a result that there is no evidence from other sources providing information that al-Palimbani returned to the archipelago. Moreover, in the year of the battle al-Palimbani should be 123 years old, too old to go to war (Azra, 1995).

Concerning several opinions above, it can be proposed that al-Palimbani was born in 116/1704 in Palembang, and death of the year is 1203/1789, when referring to that he never returned to the archipelago after being in Arabia. However, if referring to the death in the battle means in the archipelago because there is an opinion that he had returned to the archipelago to visit his brother, the mufti of Kedah kingdom named Wan Abd. al-Qadir, this also must be understood that it did not happen in the year as mentioned above, because it is not reasonable that he could join the war as old as he was at that time.

As the son of a mufti of Kedah kingdom, al-Palimbani attended religious education from his father. In addition, al-Palimbani once studied in Pattani, Thailand in Islamic traditional institutions, it is not clear how long he was educated there, because there is information to deepen religious studies especially supported by the ability of intelligence possessed by al-Palimbani. His father initiated to send him to learn in Arabia. Moreover, there is also no record, when al-Palimbani left the archipelago for Saudi (Azra, 1995).

The basic of religious knowledge acquired al-Palimbani from his father and during her study in Pattani, with the knowledge he had, al-Palimbani continued studying religion in depth in Arabia.

In the city of Mecca, al-Palimbani learned to some renowned scholar of that time, Sheikh Ata Allah, Ahmad bin Abd al-Mu'im al-Damanhri. The lecture notation acquired by al-Palimbani from his teacher emerged the inspiration and proven by the appearance of a work entitled *Zuhrat al-Murid fi Bayan al-Tawhid*. Al-Palimbani also studied to Sheikh Mohamed bin Sulaiman al-Kudri, and Muhammad al-Samman not less than two years al-Palimbani deepened the science of tasawuf (Azra, 1995).

Al-Palimbani had a chance to learn to Sheikh Ibrahim al-Zamzami al-Rais, a scholar who mastered various religious knowledge and had an expertise in the field of *ilm al-falak*. Shaikh Muhammad Khalil bin Ali bin Muhammad bin Murad al-Husayni, the Nahsayabandi follower known as a historian and mufti of Hanafi mazhab in Damascus, which was in his visit to Haramayn used by al-palimbani to learn from him. Muhammad al-Jauhari al-Mishri, the son of a prominent Egyptian *muhadits*, is renowned as a scholar of hadith (Azra, 1995).

Seeing the history of learning studied by al-Palimbani from renowned scholar when it was as one indication of al-Palimbani's intellectual formation in mastering religious studies is very thorough. He had learned and mastered the various disciplines, such as hadith, fiqh, Islamic law, kalam, tafseer and Tasawuf.

Nevertheless, among the studies learned by al-Palimbani they have profound tendency towards the mystical world. These symptoms are due to the slap of his teacher Sheikh al-Sammari. Reinforced by the statement that, while studying with al-Sammir, al-Palimbani's intellectual abilities were tested by the trust given by his teacher to replace him to teach some of his students whose origin was from Arabia. This is an indication of extraordinary achievement. (Azra, 1995)

Although al-Palimbani was away in Mecca, his religious ideas spread across the archipelago through the works left (Taufik, 1987). Al-Palimbani, though lived longer in Mecca, but had a good relationship with the scholars in the archipelago and had written several letters to the authorities in the archipelago, such as a letter to the Sultan of Mataram (Hamengkubuwono I), and Susuhan Prabu Jaka (the son of Amangkurat IV). In the letter, al-Palimbani praised the struggle of Sultans in the fight against the infidels and explained at length the position of the martyrs on the side of God by quoting some verses of al-Quran.

It can be used as one of the indicators that describe, that al-Palimbani played an important role in preserving the morale of the Muslims in the archipelago in facing the power of European colonialism, which colonized the region.

Al-Palimbani spent his life by studying and writing. It is proven by a few pieces of his works becomes the reference and reading of the Muslims.

## 2. Several works of al-Palimbani

The scientific tendency of al-Palimbani is in the world of tasawuf and tauheed. It is proven through some of his works and the text can still be obtained, such as there are eight (8) of al-Palimbani's works, seven (7) have acquired the manuscripts, four (4) books in Arabic-Malay, three (3) books in Arabic, one more book again mentioned by al-Palimbani in the book of *Sary al-Salikin* with *Zadul Muttaqin fi Tauhidi Rabbil Alamin* (Abd Al Shamad, tt).

Al-Palimbani's works in Arabic are as follows:

- 1) *Nasiqat al- Muslimin wa Tadhkirat al-Mu'minin fi Fad-it al-Jihad fi Sabil Allah wa Karamat al-Mujahidin fi Sabil Allah*, this book contains a boost to jihad on the way of Allah. Al-Palimbani warned the Muslims to fight against the infidels. According to Mal An Abdullah. This book has inspired and referenced by TGK. Chik Ditiro in writing *hikayah perang Sabil* (the hikayah of Sabil war).
- 2) *al-Urwat al Wuthqa wa Silsilat Uli al-Ittiqa*, this Arabic book contains several al-Palimbani's recommendation to the Muslims about the exact procedure to do supplication pronounced continuously at a certain time. According to el-Muhammady, the book is inside the book of *Hidaya al-Salikin* edition of Sulaiman Mar'I (Singapore, tt).
- 3) *Rati Abd. Al-Samad al-Palimbani*, this small book in Arabic called *ratib*, a sort of collection of dzikr and prayer held after Isya prayer, contained in the book the quotation of Al-Qur'an verses, which must be read. The call in the name of Allah followed with shalawah ended with several prayers was not mentioned in the book. However, allegedly it was written along with the book of *hiday al-Salikin* by considering that *ratib* is a practice that must be carried out by a *salik* who becomes the central important discussion in the book *Hidayat al-Salikin* (Chatib, 1985).
- 4) *Tuhfat al-Raghibin fi Bayan Haqiqat Imam al-Mu'minin wa'Ma Yufsiduhu fi Riddat al-Murtaddin*, the book was written in Malay in 1188/1774 to meet the demand of the Sultan of Palembang. The book is written into three chapters and one khatimah. In the first chapter, there is a description of the different opinions between *ahl al-Sunnah* and the Muk'tazilah about faith, Islam, and the distinction of opinions, about faith and Islam are explained in detail. In the second chapter of al-palimbani, it discusses satan, Jin, and some differences between them. In the third chapter, it reveals about ridda (apostate) based on the existing fiqh book. In the concluding part, al-Palimbani answered what the sin is, the amount of sin, and how about repentance.
- 5) *Zuhrat al-Murid fi Byan Kalimat al-Tauhid*, this book is in Malay written in Mecca in 1178/1764 contained mantiq (logic) and Usul al-Din (theology). The writing of this book is a collection of al-palimbani's lectures notation alongside his teacher Ahmad Abd. Al-Mon'im al-Damanhuri; an Egyptian scholar who later became a great teacher at al-Azhar University, Egypt.
- 6) *Hidayat al-Salikin fi Suluk Maslak al-Muttaqin*, this book was written in 1192/1778, is one of al-Palimbani's masterpieces as an adaptive work of al-Ghazali's work, *Bidayatul al-Hidayat*, the book has been printed in various cities on different continents, such as, Mecca (1287/1870) Egypt (1341/1922), Bombay (1311-1895), Singapore (tt) and Surabaya (1352/1933). This is as an indication that the writings of al-Palimbani have been famous and widely read. This book consists of Muqaddimah, which discuss about useful knowledge and the virtue for those who seek knowledge, completed by seven chapters of discussion with different contents. The first chapter describes about *aqidah ahl al-Sunnah wa al-jama'ah*. The second chapter states about being obedient and outward worship. The third chapter states that the effort to avoid outward vice, such as swearing, jadal (quarrel), also described about halal and haram. The fourth chapter reviews the effort to avoid inner vice, such as a lot of eating, words, being angry, jealous, curmudgeonly, and so on. The fifth chapter states that all inner obedience such as repentance, resignation, patience, gratitude, and so on. The sixth chapter states that remembrance, courtesy and the procedures. Chapter seven states suhbah and *mu'asyarah*, which are loving each other, the discussion about the courtesy of pious people and the courtesy of people who make friends.
- 7) *Sary al-Salikin ila 'Ibadat Rabb al-Alamin*, this book is al-Palimbani's masterpiece as a further explanation of the teachings stated in *hidayat al-Salikin*. This work is a translation of *lubab Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, a summary version of *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, written by al-Ghazali's brother, Ahmad bin Muhammad (Azra, 1995). The idea of writing the translation was born in Mecca in 1139/1799 and successfully was completed in Tha'if on 20 Ramadan 1203/1788.

That book consists of one *Muqaddimah*, four parts and is closed with *kahtimah*. In *Muqaddimah*, it is described the advantages of knowledge, and those who seek knowledge. In the first part, al-Palimbani describes the science of *Ushuluddin akidah ahl al-Sunnah*, every obedient deeds, and outward worship. The second part states customs, namely the laws of courtesy that apply to etiquette of eating, drinking, marriage, and attempting to bring life in the world as well as knowing halal and haram. The third part revealed what destroys charity, any outward and inner vices. The last section states *munajat*, namely self-release instead of destroy any good deeds. In the *khatimah* part, it suggests the books, which are useful to those who care tasawuf.

### 3. Concept about Divinity

#### 3.1 Several Divinities of Pre al-Palimbani

Humans have a sense of awareness and potential of mind to think about their own form and what lies outside them, mainly the universe that becomes a manifestation of God. Accumulation of the base of awareness and potential of mind owned by human, which in turn raised the nature of faith in him towards about something thought (Syamsul, 1987)

Humans continue to be aware and think about the existence of God, in the development of thinking about God. In the development of the concept about divinity, mankind not only acknowledges God through the postulates and the proof of mind even the proof through revelation through Gabriel to God's messengers, but also humans seek to acknowledge God directly through inner experience. This introduction of God is known as *ma'rifah*, although the consequence of *ma'rifah* has led to various human's position and it becomes a controversial debate in the world of tasawuf. For instance, there is a human tendency that is *ma'rifah* (acknowledges God directly) will lose its manifestation, which merges into a familiar manifestation (*ittihad*) or vice versa. God is inside a man (*hulul*), so that human utterances come out which describe, at least it does not appear the understanding, that he is God.

Until the eighteenth century where al-Palimbani lived, the depiction of human understanding of God had been varied in nature. There are at least three concepts of Divinity at that time; *first*, the human recognition that there is no God but Allah, the divine teachings stated in Ushuluddin science; *second*, human vision that the only manifestation is Allah, the mortal teachings in the science of tauheed, *third*, human vision that the essence of the universe is the appearance of born from God, the teaching of *wihdat al-wujud* in the world of tasawuf (Chatib, 1985).

That divinity teaching in the theory of science developed by each sectarian has equally the true value. Al-Palimbani as a figure of scholar who has a deep religious knowledge tends to judge that the three teachings of the divinity referred to be contradictive to each other. Al-Palimbani provides a vision of divinity admirably through his masterpiece *Sary al-Salikin*. The next will be presented briefly basic thinking of al-Palimbani about God contained in that work.

#### 3.2 The vision of al-Palimbani about Divinity

The overview of al-Palimbani's thinking about God is inseparable from the concept of divinity developed at his time. In this regard, al-Palimbani was more adaptive to al-Ghazali's vision about God. It is proved by reviewing al-Palimbani about God tends to be based on interpretations towards al-Ghazali's works who later create the masterpieces of al-Palimbani.

Al-Palimbani's vision about God appeared, when he explained aqeedah *ahl al-Sunnah* as written by al-Ghazali. According to al-Palimbani, we must believe, Allah is a substance that *wajib al-wujud*. His existence does not depend on others and his manifestation becomes a cause for manifestation other than Him. Such a view is in line with the vision of divinity by most scholars, such as al-Ghazali, Hasan al-Banna.

God as *wajib al-wujud* is the previous great beginning of his manifestation if it is compared with all this temporal manifestation without preceded by its absence. He is also a great end, which is everlasting after the destruction of the temporal manifestation. In His "begin"ning there is not *nihayat*. He has been manifested since azali.

Furthermore, al-Palimbani argued, that Allah is almighty (*whidun La Sharikalah*), qadim (*qadimun La Awwala lahu*) immortal (*la Nihabata lau*), and several other traits. Al-Palimbani seems to agree with the concept that God has some traits of *tanzih* that God cannot be equated with God other than Him, because God is neither a substance (jauhar) nor accident (Arad) nor by both of them. The consequence of this is God does not resemble and be resembled by anything. Therefore, His essence is nothing else but Him. Similarly, inside others there are no his essence.

Understanding as it shows that everything that exists beside God must be new (*created*). Although this creation has different opinions, as that something is created from something that does not exist (*adam*) to exist (*creation ex nihilo*) or it was created from something exist to exist (*creation ini nihilo*).

According to al-Palimbani, God and nature are two dichotomous things, where the one is not inside the other one; he is the qadim creator who creates this nature based on His qadim knowledge with the qudrat and His Iradat, which are qadim as well. Therefore, the temporal nature of His creation does not resemble His manifestation. It reflects His justice and wisdom is absolute.

The basic principle of al-Palimbani's teaching is about God likely to attempt direct introduction (*ma'rifah*) of the Lord, because al-Palimbani explains, that *ma'rifah* to the God is heaven in this world, anyone who enters will be able to forget the heaven in hereafter. The essence of this teaching is included into high-level tauheed.

The understanding of God as mentioned above, according to al-Palimbani, is limited to ordinary people, it means that it includes to the lowest level tawhid (special level of understanding about God in ordinary

people).

As mentioned by al-Ghazali, al-Palimbani revealed that there are levels of tawheed, *first*, that someone says *La Ilaha il Allah*, while his heart probably just ignore the meaning of what is spoken. *Second*, the level of tawheed for someone who recite such lafad but justifies the meaning contained in the lafad. *Third*, the tawheed level of *muqarabin* person assessing the nature and life is full of this pluralistic condition from the aspect of the Oneness as God's creation. *Fourth* is the tawheed of *siddiqin* person who has full faith and the whole consciousness of his mental has centered on Allah. The consequences of this kind of awareness make them do not aware their status anymore as the largest veil between humankind and God. Those who reach until this stage is no longer see something other than the essence of God Almighty.

The division of the stages of tawheed as mentioned above has its own purpose for al-Palimbani. Orientation refers to the efforts to equate the highest level of tawheed with the *Wahdat al-Wujud* teaching. However, al-Palimbani tried to reconstruct the core teaching of *Wahdat al-wujud* into a simple understanding with the concept of "seven dignities".

The *first* dignity is called *ahadiyyatun Liahadiyyat*, the absolute essence of God, which can be seen through the heart (*qalb*). This dignity is also called *an La Ta'ayyun al-Itlaq zat al-Bahthi*, the second dignity, *al-Wahidah* that implies the meaning concerning the study of God about Himself and the universe globally. The process of this dignity is the appearance of God's absolute essence in the form of Muhammad's hakeekat, the third dignity, *al-Wahidiyah*, where the study of God about the essence of Himself and the universe is in the form of partial. The process of this dignity is revealing the second time of the absolute essence of God in the form of human's hakeekat, the fourth *dignity, alam alarwah*, namely the creation nur of Muhammad from nur of God, the *fifth* dignity, *Alam al-Mithal*, the manifestation of nur of Muhammad in a person's spirit. The *sixth* dignity, *Alam al-Ajsam*, is the order of nature or objects of four main components, water, fire, wind, and soil. The *seventh* dignity, called *al-Jami'ah*, its occurrence of this association is the appearance of the born of God.

Hence, the efforts of al-Palimbani in explaining his main thinking which is in line with al-Ghazali about the understanding of God and the path that must be understood to be able to know God directly. Then, he still proposed the concepts that must be taken by the Muslims to come to the stage of the highest levels of tawheed or in the understanding of the seven dignities globally and comprehensively. It requires a separate discussion on issues of the concept of tasawuf propounded by al-Palimbani.

#### 4. Closing

Al-Palimbani is an ulema in the 18<sup>th</sup> century from the archipelago who settled in Arabia. His masterpieces are still able to be read and studied by people who care about religious studies until now. Al-Palimbani's vision about God is trying to bridge the teaching of *Wahdat al-Wujud*, considered controversial by some scholar, with a simple understanding, which he called it as the teaching of seven dignities. Through the concept of these seven dignities which is proposed by him. Someone can understand and know God who is *wajib al-Wujud*. Such meaning is a valuable intellectual treasure aligned with the development of Tasawuf thinking until now, especially in the development of Islamic thinking.

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