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Hadith Written in Early Islam in Malay Region

¹Latifah Abdul Majid, ²Haziyah Husain, ³Mazlan Ibrahim, ⁴Jawiah Dakir

¹⁻⁴ Faculty of Islamic Studies, The National University of Malaysia, 43600, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

⁴ Professor in Hadith Literature in Faculty of Islamic Studies, The National University of Malaysia

Latifah Abdul Majid, Haziyah Husain, Mazlan Ibrahim, Jawiah Dakir; Hadith Written in Early Islam in Malay Region

ABSTRACT

This article presents an investigation into the part played by al-Sinkili in disseminating Hadith teaching in Malay Region. Special attention is given to his techniques of writing Hadith in order to facilitate a better understanding of the Hadith to Malay readers and also his connections with his teachers and the chains of his teachers with those leading Islamic scholars in Middle East. In the interest of validity and reliability, the study provides multiple sources of evidence. These include tape-recorded in-depth interviews with specific researcher (in particular with an expert educationalist in the seventeenth century) and academicians who are biographers of the great scholar. Also included are data-gathering techniques such as library and document research. Research methods used to examine the original writings of al-Sinkili are largely qualitative, and consist of approaches such as hermeneutic and the inferential technique of content analyses. This article upon the earliest Hadith writing in the Malay world would help us to understand, the importance of Hadith within Malay-Islamic history and to understand how the Hadith is viewed by the devout and how it came to be regarded as part of Islamic Scripture.

Key words: Hadith, Malay region, al-Sinkili, earliest written, rational

Introduction

Since there is no agreement on the exact date of when Islam was introduced into the Malay region, it is, therefore, almost impossible to ascertain precisely when the indigenous population of the region first became acquainted with written Hadith. Nevertheless, Martin Van Bruinessen believed that some forms of written Hadith were taught to the Malay region simultaneously with the coming of Islam (Van Bruinessen 1999:162). This is mainly because there are two main sources for an understanding of Islam; the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith.

According to Saghir (1990) the prophetic Hadith which was appointed as one of the main sources of Islam is well-established and recognized by almost the entire Muslim community in the world. This recognition covers both formal and informal levels; it was a source of guidance for the rulers as well as for judges and scholars who were dealing with matters of law regarding all aspects of life.

There are number of verses of the Qur'an describe the roles of the Prophet such as:

'He is the authority in the way the Holy Qur'an has to be recited'; 'he has the final word in the interpretation of the Qur'an'; 'he is the only source at which the wisdom based on divine guidance can be learned and he is entrusted with the practical training of the people to bring his teachings into practice' (Al-Qur'an 3:164, 62:2, 2:129)

These roles however can never be carried out unless his teachings, both oral and practical are held to be authoritative for his followers who are placed under his training to obey and follow him (Azami n.d:9). For this reason, the Qur'an clearly expressed specific terms which give Muslims a mandatory order to obey and follow him.

Since the Qur'an is the word of Allah (S.W.T), it must be strictly followed. Similarly in the same way the teachings in the Prophet's Hadith must be observed by all who admit to being Muslims (Y.Dutton 1993: 4), as the Qur'an says: "And whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it. And whatsoever he forbids, abstain (from it)" (Al-Qur'an 59:7)

Thus, throughout the Muslim world, Hadith are held to be second in authority and importance only to the Qur'an. For Muslims, Hadith are valued as authority sources of legal knowledge and, owing to the sinless nature of the Prophet's conduct, as a model for Muslim piety and social life (Voll 1980: 1)

Materials and Methods

In the interest of validity and reliability, the study provides multiple sources of evidence. These include tape-recorded in-depth interviews with specific researcher (in particular with an expert educationalist in the seventeenth century) and academicians who are biographers of the great scholar. Also included are data-gathering techniques such as library and document research. Research methods used to examine the original writings of al-Sinkili are largely qualitative, and consist of approaches such as hermeneutic and the inferential technique of content analyses.

Results and Discussions

The existence of writing activities especially in the field of religious literature in Malay region has been identified since the 12th century, although it in small amounts. These scholarly activities are fully support by the government, whether in Perlak in the early stages, and so are the days of Mallaca, Aceh, Riau and other state in the Malay region. These activities reach its peak glory in the 17th century when scholars are so keen to produce works in various fields especially in the field of Islam.

According to Saghir (1990), the developments of Hadith commentary extended from Middle East on to other parts of the Islamic world. In this, Saghir (who describes the introduction and the developments of Hadith commentary outside Middle East to the Malay world as the most important event in the history of Hadith written in the region) asserts that written Hadith has played the most important role in transforming Prophetic Hadith to the Malay Muslim community. He further stated that the nature of travelling of Hadith scholars from centers of the Muslim world to peripheral regions, carried Islamic beliefs and ideas across language frontiers, and thus accelerated the spread of the Hadith. As a result, a number of commentaries were written.

Saghir then, concludes that the commentary on the development of the Hadith had clearly been moved from the Middle East to the Malay region, though it less certain where it came from. He however affirms that it probably came from or *via* India (due to the Islamization of the Malay region) and from there it reached North Sumatra, and was then disseminated to all over the Malay region.

As far as the evidence permits, the earliest documentation of Hadith works by Malay scholars in the Malay world was produced by an Aceh scholar al-Sinkili, Abd al-Ra'uf bin Ali al-Jawi al-Fansuri (1615- 1690), entitled "The *sharh al latif ala arba'in Hadith li al-Imam an-Nawawi*" and "The *al-Mawa'iz al-Badi'ah*".

Al-Sinkili's teachers in Hadith studies:

According to Azra and Saghir, "al-Sinkili has left us with a biographical supplement of his studies in the Middle East" (Azra 2004: 70-86, Saghir 2001: 128-129). In the appendix attached to the colophon of one of his works, *Umdat al-muhtajin ila suluk maslak al-mufridin*, al-Sinkili has supplied us with information of the teachers from whom he learnt, the scholars he met and the places where he studied. Although the account is rather concise, it gives us an excellent representation of how Malay scholars travelled to acquire knowledge and it also shows the process of transmission of Islamic learning among Muslim scholars.

According to Azra also, al-Sinkili possibly left Aceh in 1642 in the pursuit of knowledge (Azra 2004: 73) and also spent 19 years in the Middle East. He studied in a number of places in the Middle East, which is along the *Hajj* routes (such as Doha, Yemen, Jeddah, Mecca and Medina and Egypt). Al-Sinkili illustrates that he learnt from 19 teachers in various branches of Islamic discipline, and also stated 27 other scholars with whom he had personal contacts and relations. This article however does not give detailed accounts of all his teachers of Islamic sciences. Among al-Sinkili's most prominent teachers in his studies of the Hadith studies are Shaykh Ibrahim ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Ja'man, Ali ibn Muhammad al-Dayba' and Shaykh Ibrahim al-Kurani. The most prominent among them in teaching Hadith studies will briefly be identified below.

During his life in Yemen, al-Sinkili studied and established relations with many scholars mostly of the Ja'man family such as Shaykh Ibrahim ibn Abd Allah ibn Ja'man (d.1672), al-Ṭayyib ibn Abi al-Qaim ibn Ja'man and Ishaq ibn Muhammad ibn Ja'man. According to Azra, al-Sinkili was also a disciple of Shaykh Amin Siddiq al-Mizjaji and 'Ali Ibn Muhammad al-Dayba', both in Zabid, Yemen. It is believed that al-Dayba' is a scholar of the Hadith who had close relationships with the al-Ṭabari family and other scholars in Mecca and Medina (al-Kattani 1982: 587).

Azra also pointed out that another of al-Sinkili's places, where he searched for knowledge, was Jeddah where he studied with Shaykh °Abd al-Qadir al-Barkhali (*Mufti* of Jeddah). He then continued his travels to Mecca and learnt from great scholars in Hadith studies such as Shaykh °Ali ibn °Abd al-Qadir al-Tabari (d.1660) and Shaykh Badr al-Din al-Lahuri. In addition, when al-Sinkili was in Medina, he studied with prominent scholars in *Hadith* studies such as Shaykh Ahmad al-Qushashi (d.1661), Shaykh Ibrahim al-Kurani (d. 1690), and Shaykh °Abd Allah ibn Sa°d Allah al-Lahuri (d. 1673).

According to Azra, al-Kurani was a great scholar in Hadith studies in Medina and a disciple of al-Qushashi. Azra also indicates that al-Muradi calls al-Kurani "a mountain among mountains of 'knowledge' and a sea among seas of 'irfan' (spiritual knowledge)" (Azra 2004:18). Moreover, the Indian Hadith scholar (Abu Tayyib Muḥammad Shams al-Haq al-°Azimabadi [b.1857]), noted al-Kurani as the reformer (*mujaddid*) of the seventeenth century.

Al-Kattani (as cited by Azra) affirms that al-Kurani was one of the scholars most responsible in Islamic history for spreading the studies of the Hadith, its narration and its *isnad* in the Muslim world, as Azra noted:

Despite his growing fascination with Sufism, Ibrahim al-Kurani did not put aside his genuine interest in the Hadith. For that reason he travelled to Egypt in 1650, where he studied the Hadith its great *muhaddiths*, such as Muhammad °Ala° al-Din Shams al-Din al-Babili al-Qahiri al-Azhari (1592-1666), Ahmad Shihab al-Din al-Khafaji al-Hanafī al-Masri (d. 1659), and Shaykh Sultan Ahmad ibn Salamah ibn Isma°il al-Mazzahi al-Qahiri al-Azhari (1577-1644)...these scholars issued him *ijazahs* to teach the Hadith (Azra 2004: 19).

Clearly, al-Sinkili was highly educated in the study of the Hadith with great scholars in Yemen, Mecca and Medina. Undoubtedly, al-Sinkili's personal relationship with al-Kurani was very close as al-Kurani himself issued an 'ijazah' (Voll 1960:2) to al-Sinkili to transmit what al-Sinkili had received from him (Azra 2004:77). In addition, al-Sinkili also had complete education in Islamic learning from various Islamic scholars. The number of teachers he studied with and the learning he gained from them demonstrate that al-Sinkili's education was complete and comprehensive. He therefore possessed sufficient knowledge to earn fame as major Malay scholars of the seventeenth century.

Considering the status of the scholars with whom he studied, it is certain that al-Sinkili's education was a thorough one; he studied Hadith, *fiqh*, *shari°ah*, *tafsir* and *kalam*. He had a strong disposition towards the study of the Hadith, and it is evident that he studied the Hadith mostly with al-Kurani, from whom he also took chain of transmitters. The importance of mentioning these major scholars under whom he studied is to put al-Sinkili in the proper context, for it is certain those scholars played an important role in channeling Hadith studies from Yemen, Medina to Egypt and further to the Malay world.

The rationale of writing the Hadith Texts:

It is well-known that al-Sinkili's written work, the *Sharḥ laṭif °ala arba°in Ḥadithan li al-imam an-Nawawi*, is the earliest commentary on the *Ḥadith* written in the Malay region. It was written because of al-Sinkili's major concerns that some Malays could not understand Arabic fluently. In order to attract the Malays to learn and to understand the Hadith accurately, he came up with a commentary which used the Malay Sumatra language instead of Arabic for its Malay explanation. At this time in the Malay region, almost of *Ḥadith* studies were written in the Arabic language by many scholars from the Middle East; for example *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhari of al-Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ Muslim* of Muslim and others. In the introduction, he notes the intention of his work: "I wrote in the 'lisan al-Jawīyyat al-Samātraniyyah' (Sumatran Malay language) so that the people who used the Malay language should understand the Hadith precisely" (al-Sinkili n.d:204)

In the introduction to his texts, al-Sinkili provides us with the rationale for writing *Sharḥ laṭif °ala arba°in Ḥadithan li al-imam an-Nawawi* and the *al-Mawa°iz al-Badi°ah*. This was to disseminate and to provide a body of the religious guidelines of the Hadith for the Malay community. This is essentially significant since Malays on the whole did not understand the Arabic language in that particular period of time.

Data gathered from in-depth interviews with Saghir also confirms that al-Sinkili's motive was twofold. Firstly, the intention was to provide the Malay people with Hadith as sources of legal knowledge. Secondly, al-Sinkili wished to provide a model of piety for Malay Muslims based on the sinless nature of Muhammad's conduct, and this was the rationale for wishing to translate the revered commentary of as great a scholar as al-Nawawi.

In addition, Saghir (1999:22) stated that there are two copies of the manuscript of *Syarḥ*. One is kept by himself and the other one is kept in the Malay Manuscript Centre of the National Library of Malaysia or *Pusat Manuskrip Melayu Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia*, (PNM), MS1314, Folio 204-339 which contains 135 pages in manuscript and microfilm form). According to Saghir, this work was hand written in *Jawi* script which used classical Malay language and was completed in 1680. Unfortunately, the Malay readers presently find it difficult to refer to it as the

page system is unfamiliar and the manuscript was never published. Saghir, however, managed to translate the first manuscript but he could not finish the job because of some missing pages (uncompleted manuscript).

The Content of These Texts:

a) *Sharḥ laṭif^c ala arba^c in Ḥadithan li al-imam an-Nawawi:*

Under the rule of Sultanah Safiyyat al-Din, his written work contains his commentary on 40 Hadith which were written by al-Nawawi, and which covered many topics. Here, it shows substantial work done by al-Sinkili where he expounds upon ^c*ibadat* (devotional services) including the concept of faith and other related topics. This work is the first Malay translation of '40 Hadith of al-Nawawi' in the Malay region and which is always presented in Sufism teaching. In the light of this information, it is evidenced that this is a collection of Hadith concerning the basic and practical duties of Muslims in the vernacular language.

Al-Sinkili, according to Saghir and Azra, was the first scholar in the Malay region who employed a commentary on the 40 Hadith. Furthermore, by way of the *Sharḥ* he shows his fellow Muslims that Hadith studies are not confined to purely Hadith literature but include the discipline of Hadith criticism as well, as he declares "now then, as I had written the forty Hadith were *sahih* and *hasan* which are derived from *Ṣaḥih of al-Bukhari* and *Ṣaḥih of Muslim* and I was abbreviating the *isnad* because it should be easier to memorize it" (al-Sinkili : 204).

According to Saghir, the selection of al-Nawawi's 40 *Ḥadith*' selected by al-Sinkili is the first work on which this method was tried out. This was indeed dictated by the fact that since its compilation (in the thirteenth century), this collection has shown remarkably widespread acceptance by Muslims as a work that incorporates a comprehensive selection of well-authenticated *Ḥadith* of the most key aspects of religious knowledge.

It is also apparent from al-Sinkili 's work that his purpose in documentation the *Sharḥ* was not only for the people of the Malay world, but also to be used as a minor treatise in Hadith to be learnt by young students where they had to learn and memorize its contents.

Furthermore, one can hardly overestimate the role of the *Sharḥ* in the history of Hadith studies in the Malay region. Therefore, Saghir (1995: 4-5) revealed that 'it is in more than one way a landmark in the history of Hadith learning in Malay'. It is clear from the statement of Saghir that the *Sharḥ* has contributed significantly to the study of the Hadith in the Malay world. It lays the foundation for a bridge between translation and the Hadith, and thus stimulates further study of Hadith works in Arabic.

Although the *Sharḥ* was a small collection of Hadith, Saghir however asserts that it was considered a key contribution to the development of the Hadith discipline. This is because al-Sinkili's work on the Hadith is masterly and clear. Based on his methodology of writing, the *Sharḥ* is well-accepted as a good introductory text for a learner in the Hadith among the Malay Muslims.

In rendering the *Sharḥ* into Malay, al-Sinkili makes it simple or comprehensible to his fellow Malays in general. Furthermore, he leaves out the chain of transmitters and extensive commentaries which might distract the attention of his audience. Thus, it is clear that his intention is that the *Sharḥ* should be easily understood by his readers and as a consequence become a practical guide for life.

In addition, Azra also stated that al-Sinkili's Sufi teachings were against the doctrines of the *wujudiyah* group. Therefore the Sultanah Safiyyah, who agreed with *tariqah Shatariyyah*, approached al-Sinkili to attack *wujudiyah* teaching academically. She also seeks help from al-Sinkili to end the crisis between their Sufi's *tariqah* with the other groups of Malay scholars (for example Shaykh ^cAbd al-Wahab founder of Dayah in Tiro and the group of *wujudiyah* doctrines (Abd Rahman 1990: 129).

Therefore, al-Sinkili composed this commentary on the *Ḥadith* to support their *tariqah* Sufi. This is indeed historical evidence to support the argument that the commentary was produced in compliance with Sultanah Safiyyah's request.

Al-Sinkili was also active in spreading his *tariqah* in other parts of the Malay world, *via* his work. Whether he wrote the commentary to comply with his royal Queen or for the sake of people's request is actually another subject to be investigated. Importantly, however, what is clearly shown to us here is that al-Sinkili took his responsibility very seriously to disseminate the Hadith to Malay readers. Through his work, the commentary has occupied an important place in the history of the development of the Hadith in the archipelago ever since it was introduced into the region.

b) *The al-Mawa'iz al-Badi'ah by al-Sinkili:*

The significance of al-Sinkili to the development of Islam in Malay world is irrefutable in the field of emphasizing the importance of the *Hadith*. In fact, not only had he established the commentary of Nawawi, he also wrote *al-Mawa'iz al-Badi'ah*, which is a collection of Hadith *Qudsi*. He was the greatest scholar ever in this part of the Malay Muslim world to take on the enormous task of preparing Hadith *Qudsi* in Malay translation. Furthermore, al-Sinkili's selection of these works reflects his genuine concern for his fellow Muslims at the grassroots level. Basically, all he wants is to lead them to a better understanding of the teaching of Islam. As he thought "I composed this book in order to assist learners understanding upon the Hadith".

According to Azra, al-Sinkili's collection of the Hadith *Qudsi* defines fifty teachings concerning Allah (S.W.T) and His relation to creation, Hell and Paradise, and the proper ways for the individual to achieve Allah's favour. Above of all, Azra affirms that "al-Sinkili mainly highlights the need for each Muslim to find harmony between knowledge (*ilm*) and good deeds (*amal*). This is because a better Muslim not only should have knowledge but also must do good deeds" (Azra 2004:83).

As al-Sinkili was highly respected by the Malay students and pilgrims of the region, particularly among his own countrymen, his work perhaps were also very popular in Aceh, in which would have helped spread knowledge of the Hadith among the local population. According to Azra, the *Mawa'iz al-Badi'ah* was published in Mecca (in 1892 [fourth or fifth edition]) and it was also republished in the twentieth century (in Penang, Malaysia [in 1949]), and it is still used by Muslims in the archipelago.

The techniques of writing:

In order to facilitate and to spread Hadith teaching to the Malay community the commentary of the *Sharh* and the *Mawa'iz* were written in the vernacular. These texts are most suitable for his purpose, which is to present to Malay Muslim readers by using *Jawi* script and in their language, a book of reliable authorship and content based only on Hadith texts which are authentic and reliable, and characterized by brevity. *Jawi* characters were preferred because of their traditional background and its association with the Malay Muslims religion. Therefore if a book was written for the public and intended to reach a large circle or readers, it had to be written in *Jawi*.

As stated above, the work of commentaries of the Hadith among the Malay began at about the middle of the seventeenth century. At this stage, the Hadith was grouped around particular themes, of which some were classified under separate titles and chapters as exemplified in al-Sinkili's work. His discussion is also limited to only several topics in Islamic teaching.

However, regarding al-Sinkili's commentary, Hadith that relate to the various topics are placed together without being arranged in various chapters. This commentary was comprised of 135 pages which began with numbers 204 to 339. Saghir, however, states that the numbering system employed by al-Sinkili confused the readers. This is because there are two series of different numbering on the same page, for example 204 and 154 (on the same page).

In his work, sometimes, the use of recitation of the name of Allah appeared without any clear reference to either Hadith *Qudsi* or chapters (*surah*) in the Quran, therefore, the arrangement of the commentary makes it difficult for users to consult it because the Hadith were put down not according to subject matter. But, so far as the objective behind the compilation of the commentary is concerned, one can discern it by casting a glance at its topics.

As far as the methodology of writing is concerned, al-Sinkili translated the text (*matn*) of the Hadith only, and ignored the chain of transmitters. His focus was on the explanation and elaboration of the Hadith. It is perhaps that his interests were on the content of the Hadith, and not the problem of the authenticity of the Hadith itself.

In his works, al-Sinkili provides the Hadith using handwriting in *Jawi* script without punctuation marks, commas, semi-colons or paragraphs. Al-Sinkili, for example, quoting the Hadith or Qur'anic verses without any mark or sign and he did not mention the number and the name of the verses. Thus, in these compilations it is quite difficult for the reader or user to distinguish between Hadith *Qudsi* and Qur'anic verses.

Typically, al-Sinkili in their works begins with: "In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, and Most Merciful". Furthermore, at the end of the work, he ask the readers to correct any mistakes found in his writings and he beg forgiveness from Allah.

In addition, he also brought up and explained the transmitters of the Hadith to Nawawi and also gave a detailed explanation of Nawawi's biography. Then he stressed the benefit of the 40 Hadith of Nawawi to Malay readers.

In order to provide the understanding of his Sufi *tariqah*, al-Sinkili, strongly asserts that ordinary believers must be allowed to read this book on this subject, therefore in his work he sometimes provides the Sufi terms and offers the meaning of difficult words such as *ruh Muhammad* (the Light of Muhammad).

As identified earlier, during this century, al-Sinkili worked in the classical Malay language using *Jawi* script, which is why it sometimes appears to be hard to read or understand nowadays. However, it should be pointed out here that this style of language was used in that society five hundred years ago and thus was recognizable and acceptable within that period to the particular society.

Conclusion:

It is argued here that the Malay works discussed in this article provide a strong base for the study of the Hadith in Malay Muslim society due to its conscientious translation from the original Arabic texts. While not all of the material of the great collectors has been rendered into Malay, enough exist to satisfy most Malay Muslims. Since value is still placed on reading this material in Arabic and all classical collections do exist in Arabic in many places throughout Malay world, it therefore seems unlikely that Hadith are not available in the original Arabic for anyone who wants to use the material.

As a result, based on the discussion above, the present article affirms that al-Sinkili had set-up an example for later Malay scholars to undertake works on small collections of the Hadith. In other words, his works on the Hadith have great influence on similar works in Malaysia in the nineteenth century onwards.

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