



The Transformation of Rabiah al-Adawiyah and Al-Ghazali's Thought in Islamic Sufism

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 2024 Oct 01

Revised : 2024 Nov 10

Accepted: 2024 Dec 01

Published : 2024 Dec 31

Keywords

Rabiah Al-Adawiyah

Mahabba

Al-Gazali

Ma'rifah

ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the thoughts of Rabiah Al-Adawiyah and Al-Ghazali. The research method used is Library Research (Literature Study). Primary data is obtained from literature research related to the thoughts of Rabiah Al-Adawiyah and Al-Ghazali, while secondary data consists of other relevant references discussing these two figures. The research findings indicate that Rabiah Al-Adawiyah's Sufi teachings are centered on the concept of Mahabbah. The term Mahabbah originates from the root words *ahabba, yuhibbu, mahabatan*, which deeply signify love or profound affection. Additionally, *al-mahabbah* can also refer to an inclination towards something as a means of fulfilling spiritual needs. Regarding Al-Ghazali's thought, he frequently rejected certain ideas, which later became part of his creed. He criticized philosophy in his book *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), yet he himself engaged with and even supported philosophical ideas. When speaking with the Ash'arites, he appeared to be pure Ash'arite. In Sufism, he embraced the path of a Sufi. This demonstrates that he often shifted perspectives and did not strictly adhere to a single school of thought. Consequently, Ibn Rusyd criticized him, stating: "He did not remain steadfast in a single school of thought in his books. Instead, he became an Ash'arite with the Ash'arites, a Sufi with the Sufis, and a philosopher with the philosophers."

1. Introduction

Humans, as rational and religious beings, have the free will to express their thoughts, ideas, and determine their way of life. In this regard, Islam guarantees this freedom with a true sense of responsibility. Mysticism in Islam is referred to as *Tasawwuf*, while Western Orientalists call it Sufism. The term Sufism, in the context of Western Orientalists, is specifically used for Islamic mysticism and is not applied to mystical traditions in other religions. *Tasawwuf* or Sufism, like mysticism in other religious traditions, aims to establish a direct connection with God, allowing one to fully realize their presence before the Divine.



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Available online at: <https://ejournals-glm.id/index.php/pappaseng>



The essence of mysticism within Sufism lies in the awareness of communication and dialogue between the human soul and God, often achieved through seclusion and contemplation. This awareness of closeness to God can manifest in the form of Ittihad—the concept of "union with God." Tasawwuf is both a field of knowledge and a discipline that studies the methods and paths by which a Muslim can attain the closest possible relationship with Allah. (Harun Nasution, 1992)

2. Research Method

This study is qualitative research employing descriptive analysis techniques. Data collection was conducted through library research, and the evidence gathered are examined by implementing qualitative analysis method. Data sources were primarily in written forms

The research stages were carried out starting from collecting sources, then making source criticism, which is examining the accuracy of the source of information obtained and verifying the truth of the source using various approaches. Next, the sources that have been examined were then interpreted and analyzed. In this way, the data collected can be compared to reveal historical events. The final stage in this research is compiling the scientific facts gathered from various selected sources that are chronological in nature, into a systematic description of findings.

3. Biography and Thoughts of Rabiah Al-Adawiyah

a. *Biography Rabiah Al- Adawiyah*

Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah is also known as Rabi'ah binti Ismail bin Hasan bin Zaid bin Ali bin Abi Talib. She was a female Sufi renowned for her piety and deep love for Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala. Rabi'ah was a client (mawlat) of the al-Atik clan from the Qays tribe. She is known as an ascetic female Sufi. Zuhud refers to a praiseworthy attitude favored by Allah, where a person prioritizes love for the afterlife over worldly matters or material wealth. (Miftahul fikri, 2020)

According to Rabi'ah, this world is merely a means or tool to achieve the ultimate goal, which is to prepare for the life in the Hereafter. Rabi'ah's lack of interest in worldly life led her to dedicate her entire life solely to worshipping Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala. Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah was born between 713-717 CE / 95-99 AH in the city of Basrah, Iraq, and passed away around 801 CE / 185 AH. Rabi'ah was a female Sufi of the Sunni tradition during the Umayyad dynasty.

Rabi'ah was born at night. She was the daughter of Ismail Al-Adawiyyah al-Qishiyyah. (Syed Ahmad Semait, 1993) It is said in a work by Fariddudin al-Attar that miraculous events often occurred during her birth. On the night of Rabi'ah's birth, there were no valuables in Ismail's house (no cloth or clothes), not even a drop of oil to anoint the baby's umbilical cord, let alone oil for a lamp. There was not a single piece of cloth in the house to cover the newborn baby. The name

Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah means the fourth daughter, following the three daughters of Ismail. Her father had sworn that he would not ask for anything from others.

As a child, Rabi'ah was quiet and did not ask much from her parents, unlike other girls. In her daily life, Rabi'ah always observed how her father worshipped Allah, engaged in dhikr, recited the Qur'an, and performed other acts of worship. Rabi'ah would emulate and follow her father's example. Known for her noble character, Rabi'ah often filled her father with admiration. She never insulted or hurt the feelings of others, including her own parents. (Miftahul fikri, 2020)

As Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah reached her teenage and adult years, she was left by both of her parents. Rabi'ah was a child who was mentally and physically prepared, but she often cried remembering her parents. However, there were times when she cried without any clear reason. After this event, Rabi'ah would often have the same dream repeatedly at night. In the dream, she saw a very bright light that eventually merged with her soul and body.

In the midst of the wealthy city of Basrah, Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah grew up in a secluded house, enduring suffering from hunger and poverty. Despite living in such hardship, Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah was rich in faith and piety. She learned many lessons in contentment (*qana'ah*) and piety (*wara*) from her father. She began to grow and develop, and she became very fond of reading the Qur'an. She read and memorized it with deep devotion, understanding its meanings with strong faith and deep conviction. (Syed Ahmad Semait, 1993)

b. The Thought and Teachings of Rabiah Al-Adawiyah's Tasawwuf

The Sufi teachings under her guidance are known by the term Mahabbah. The word Mahabbah comes from the root words ahabba, yuhibbu, mahabatan, which, in its deepest sense, means profound love or deep affection. Additionally, al-mahabbah can also mean an inclination towards something with the goal of fulfilling spiritual needs. It also carries the meaning of al-Wadad, which signifies love, affection, and friendship. According to Harun Nasution, Mahabbah is:

1. Embracing obedience to God and despising rebellion against Him.
2. Surrendering oneself entirely to the Beloved.
3. Emptying the heart of everything except for the One who is loved. (Rihanah, 2011)

Love for Allah (Mahabbah) is a miracle that must be instilled in every individual, because without Mahabbah, a person remains at the most basic level, which is the level of a new convert (muallaf). According to al-Saraf, as quoted by Harun Nasution, Mahabbah has three levels:

1. Ordinary love, which is to always remember God with dhikr, to frequently mention the names of Allah, and to find pleasure in dialoguing with God while constantly praising Him.
2. The love of the sincere (*siddiq*), which refers to those who truly know God, His greatness, His knowledge, and more. This love removes the veil that separates a person from God, allowing them to perceive the divine secrets. They engage in dialogue with God and find pleasure in that exchange. This second level of love enables a person to eliminate their own desires and traits, with their heart filled entirely with love and a constant longing for God.
3. The love of the wise arif, which is the love of one who truly knows God. This kind of love arises because the person has a profound understanding of God. What is seen and felt is no longer just love, but the essence of the beloved. Ultimately, the qualities of the beloved enter into the one who loves. (Wasalmi, 2014)

The understanding of *Mahabbah* as described above is based on the Qur'an, as mentioned in His verse in Surah Al-Maidah [5]: 54.

فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ ۖ ٥٤

Terjemahnya: “Allah akan mendatangkan suatu ummat yang Allah mencintai mereka dan mereka mencintai-Nya.”

The teachings brought by Rabi'ah represent a new version in spiritual life, where the level of zuhd (asceticism) created by Hasan Basri, which was characterized by khauf (fear) and raja (hope), was elevated by Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah to a level of zuhd characterized by hub (love). Pure, sincere love is higher than khauf and raja, because pure love does not seek anything in return. Pure love for God represents the pinnacle of Rabi'ah's Sufism.

Rabi'ah truly lived in a state of zuhd and only desired to be close to God. She engaged in much worship, repentance, and distanced herself from worldly life, rejecting all material assistance given to her. There are even prayers of hers in which she expresses a refusal to ask for material things from God. (Wasalmi, 2014)

There is also a famous prayer that was once uttered by Rabi'ah as an expression of the love and longing of a Sufi for her Lord, to the point that for her, there is no breath or heartbeat except in longing for a meeting with her Creator. One of her famous verses is:

*O Lord, whatever gifts You grant me in this world,
Bestow them upon Your enemies.*

*And whatever blessings You grant me in the Hereafter,
Offer them to Your friends.
As for me, You alone are enough.*

*O Lord, if my prostration to You is out of fear of Hell,
Then burn me in its fire.
And if my prostration to You is in longing for Paradise,
Then close its gates to me.
But if my prostration is for You alone,
Do not turn Your face away from me.
For I long to gaze upon Your beauty.*

According to Rabi'ah, *hubb* (love) is an expression of longing and complete surrender to Allah, where all her thoughts and feelings are directed solely toward Him. This can be seen in her poignant prose, as follows:

Meaning:

"O my Lord, the night has passed, and the day is about to break. I am anxious—will You accept my deeds so that I may rejoice, or will You reject them so that I may grieve? By Your Almighty Power, this is what I shall continue to do as long as You grant me life. Even if You drive me away from Your door, I will not depart, for my heart is filled with love for You. These are some of the words that reflect the deep love that filled Rabi'ah's soul for her Lord—a love so profound that she refused marriage proposals, stating that she belonged only to the God she loved. Anyone who wished to marry her would first have to seek permission from Him.

The concept of *Mahabbah* mentioned above can be found in the Qur'an, which describes the mutual love between humans and God. (Wasalmi, 2014)

4. Biography and Thoughts of Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali is his popular name, while his full name is Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ta'us Ath-Thusi Asy-Shafi'i Al-Ghazali. He was born in the historical city of Ghazlah, in the Khurasan region of Iran, in the year 450 H / 1058 CE.

The name Al-Ghazali has a unique meaning, as it is associated with his father's occupation. The term Al-Ghazali is derived from Ghazzal, which means a wool spinner or weaver. Additionally, his name is also linked to the place of his birth—Ghazalah, a village on the outskirts of the city of Tus. (Hamdani Rizal dan Saifuddin Zuhri, 2006)

a. Education of Imam Ghazali

Before the age of 15, Al-Ghazali was an expert in Arabic language and a professional writer. He mastered the Quran, Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), and aspects of Sufi thought and poetry. During this period, he conducted research under the guidance of Sheikh Ahmad ibn Muhammad Al-Radhkani in Thus and Abul Qasim Ismail ibn Mas'ada Al-Ismaili, both renowned scholars of their time. By the age of 7, Al-Ghazali had already completed his studies in fiqh and continued his advanced education.

In his early twenties, Al-Ghazali traveled to Nishapur to pursue higher Islamic studies. He studied theology and Islamic jurisprudence under the guidance of "Imam Al-Haramain" Abdul Ma'ali Abdul Malik al-Juwaini (d. 478 H/1086 CE). Al-Juwaini was a leading scholar and taught at the famous Nizamiyyah Madrasah in Nishapur, where Al-Ghazali became one of his most distinguished students. Al-Juwaini was highly impressed by Al-Ghazali's intellectual brilliance and analytical abilities, eventually appointing him as his teaching assistant.

Al-Ghazali referred to Imam Al-Juwaini as his mentor because he mastered various disciplines, including logic (manthiq), theology (kalam), Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and its principles (usul fiqh), philosophy, Sufism (tasawwuf), and the art of debate. The knowledge he acquired from Al-Juwaini was profound, including an in-depth understanding of scholarly differences of opinion, enabling him to provide strong refutations against his opponents. Due to his expertise in these areas, Al-Juwaini referred to Al-Ghazali as *bahr mu'riq* (a drowning ocean). Al-Ghazali's intelligence and vast intellectual insight made him widely recognized, even stirring admiration in the heart of Al-Juwaini.

As soon as Al-Ghazali began teaching fiqh, theology (kalam), and hadith at the Nizamiyyah Madrasah, his name and reputation spread across the Islamic world. His patron, Nizam Al-Mulk, regularly consulted him on significant religious and political matters of the time. Al-Ghazali's daily lectures at Nizamiyyah became so famous that they were attended by as many as three hundred students at a time. However, just when Al-Ghazali believed he had achieved everything at such a young age, he suddenly found himself caught in the midst of an intellectual crisis.

b. Education of Imam Ghazali

Al-Ghazali's name is still well-known today, even though he has passed away, because the results of his written works have not faded and are still studied to this day. Al-Ghazali was both a scholar and a thinker in Islam who was actively

involved in writing. His written works span a variety of academic disciplines. Below are some of the scholarly legacies that have had the greatest impact on Islamic thought:

1. Maqashid al-Falsifah (The Goals of the Philosophers)
2. Tahafut al-Falsifah (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)
3. Mi'yar al-Ilm (Criteria of Knowledge)
4. Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din (Reviving the Sciences of Religion) (Syafanah et al., 2024)
5. Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal (The Deliverer from Error)
6. Al-Ma'arif al-'Aqliyyah (Rational Knowledge)
7. Mishkat al-Anwar (The Niche of Lights)
8. Minhaj al-'Abidin (The Path of the Worshipers)
9. Al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad (Moderation in Belief)
10. Ayyuha al-Walad (O, My Son)
11. Al-Mustasfa (The Chosen)
12. I'jam al-'Awam 'an al-Kalam (On the Word of God to Humans)
13. Mizan al-'Amal (The Balance of Actions)
14. Al-Qisthas al-Mustaqim (The Straight Path to Resolve Disputes)
15. Faysal al-Tafriq Baina al-Islam wa al-Zindiq (The Distinction Between Islam and Heresy)
16. Al-Maqashid al-Asna fi Ma'ani Asma' Allah al-Husna (The Purposes of the Most Beautiful Names of God)

c. The Thought of Imam Ghazali

Cultural perspectives, Al-Ghazali's vision to address human experiences used in the Muslim world at that time. Al-Ghazali's birth occurred in Egypt, which was established amidst political turmoil and social-cultural conditions, serving as an essential foundation for his life in this matter. (Syafiril, 2017) The decline of the Ottoman Caliphate marked the faces of Islam across the world, which were influenced by the West and local powers (such as England, France, Russia, the Netherlands, and America). Even when Egypt had achieved the independence it sought, it was not followed by independence in the economic and cultural aspects. This was the primary reason for the emergence of Al-Ghazali's ideas on Islamic civilization.

According to these events, Al-Shafi'i's thoughts can be found in his works, Al Wasith, Al Basith, and Al Wajiz. The book Al Wajiz plays an important role in the Shafi'i school of thought. They received specific messages from Al-Shafi'i's program.

Imam Adh-Dhahabi described the jurisprudential statements of the school: "Imam Sheikh, Hujjatul Islam, A'jubatuz zaman, Zainuddin Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Ahmad Ath-Thusi as-Syafi."

Today, this leads to beliefs, also known as sentiments. Many of these were controlled by Ashur refugees from Bathurst, deciding to group themselves. One of the last steps in class. This is why the book is mentioned under the title *Al Iqtishad Fil* for its identity.

But his work in aqeedah and the way he took his postulates is merely a summary of the works of the Ash'ari scholars before him (his predecessors). It does not bring anything new to the Ash'ari school. He only explained it in a new form and in a relatively easy manner. Imam Ghazali's fame as an Ash'ari figure was also accompanied by his suffering. He became a significant benchmark for the integration of Sufism into Ash'ari thought.

But what kind of Sufism did he adhere to? It is actually quite difficult to determine his form of Sufism. Since he often rejected something, he made it part of his aqeedah. He abandoned philosophy in his book *Tahafut*, but he himself pursued and agreed with philosophy. Speaking of Ash'ari thought, he appeared to be a pure Ash'ari. In terms of Sufism, he became a Sufi. This shows that he often moved back and forth and did not remain fixed within one school. Therefore, Ibn Rushd condemned him, saying: "He did not stick to one school in his books. But he became Ash'ari with Ash'ari thought, a Sufi with Sufism, and a philosopher with philosophy."

As for those who study his books and works such as *Misykatul Anwar*, *Al Ma'arif Aqliyah*, *Mizanul Amal*, *Ma'arijul Quds*, *Raudhatuthalibin*, *Al Maqshad Al Asna*, *Jawahirul Quran*, and *Al Madmun Bihi Ala Ghairi Ahlihi*, they will know that his Sufism differs from the Sufism of those before him. Sheikh Dr. Abdurrahman bin Shalih Ali Mahmud explained Al-Ghazali's Sufism by saying that the key to understanding Al-Ghazali's personality lies in two things:

1. His opinion is that every person has three aqeedah. The first is displayed in front of the common people and what they are fanatical about.
2. It circulates in teaching and sermons. The third is something that a person believes internally. No one knows it except a companion with equal knowledge. If so, Al-Ghazali concealed the special and secret side of his aqeedah. (Mukhlis, 2017)

Here is the translation: He gathered opinions and briefs that always hinted at the closeness of his beliefs. Then compare them to the views of the philosophers, because he did not lean toward the Isyraqi and Sufi philosophy, like Ibn Sina and others. He (Sheikh Dr. Abdurrahman bin Shalih Ali Mahmud) concluded the research findings and views of scholars regarding all of Al-Ghazali's thoughts. All of Al-Ghazali's Sufism is based on the Isyraqi (Isyraqi school of thought) in terms of opinions related to interests, teachings, and spirituality. These include certain Greek and Neo-Platonist philosophies. See *Al-Mausu'ah Al-Muyassarrah Fi Al-Adyan Wal-Madhahib Wal-Ahزاب Al-Mu'ashirah*, by Dr. Manis bin Hamad Al-Juhan. Specifically, it was designed as a result of the role of Ibn Sina and the Shafa Brotherhood. Therefore, the manual *Bughyatul Murtad* was identified in the past. After meeting with Shaykhul Islam, the refutation by Ibn Taymiyyah stated: "Ibn Taymiyyah's refutation of Al-Ghazali formed issues prior to and according to the sect of the Bathiniyyah in the field of mental health, because all of this is literature from Aldzhiri. If this book (*Bughyatul Murtad*, pencil) rejects the individual seeking the older philosophies and thoughts, Shaykhul Islam describes Al-Ghazali's aim. Those who attempt to interpret the narrations with the Neo-Platonic philosophy-based interpretation, as founded on the *ta'wil batin* (esoteric interpretation) of the narrations following the principles of the Isyraq scholars (followers of Neo-Platonism philosophies)." selama 1m 0s

He gathered opinions and summaries that always hinted at the closeness of his convictions, then compared them with the views of philosophers—since he did not incline toward Isyraqi thought or Sufi philosophy like Ibn Sina and others. Sheikh Dr. Abdurrahman bin Shalih Ali Mahmud consolidated the research findings and scholarly perspectives on all of Ghazali's thought and his brand of Sufism, based on the conclusions of the Isyraqi school of thought (the Isyraqi approach as employed by schools encompassing doctrinal, educational, and spiritual matters). These perspectives include elements of Greek philosophy and Neo-Platonism. (See *Al-Mausu'ah Al-Muyassarrah Fi Al-Adyan Wal-Madhahibi Wal-Ahزاب Al-Mu'ashirah* by Dr. Manis bin Hamad Al-Juhan.) Specifically, this approach was shaped by the influence of Ibn Sina and the Shafa'iyya. Consequently, the handbook *Bughyatul Murtad* was recognized in the past.

After meeting with Shaykh al-Islam, Ibn Taymiyyah's objection was expressed as follows: "Ibn Taymiyyah's refutation of Al-Ghazali has already raised issues, particularly among the Bathiniyyah sect concerning mental health, as reflected in Al-Dhiri's literature. If this book (*Bughyatul Murtad*, in pencil) dismisses individuals

who seek older philosophical ideas, then Shaykh al-Islam portrays Al-Ghazali's purpose as one who strives to interpret texts using an Isyraqi philosophical approach—one based on the esoteric interpretation of texts in accordance with the tenets of the Isyraqi scholars (adherents of Neo-Platonist philosophy)."

4. Conclusion

The transformation of thought in Islamic Sufism, as exemplified by Rabiah al-Adawiyah and Al-Ghazali, demonstrates the dynamic evolution of spiritual and philosophical perspectives within the tradition. Rabiah al-Adawiyah's concept of divine love (mahabbah) introduced a profound emotional and mystical dimension to Sufism, emphasizing a selfless and unconditional love for God. Her ideas laid the foundation for later Sufi interpretations that prioritize devotion over fear and hope.

Meanwhile, Al-Ghazali's contributions marked a significant intellectual and practical synthesis of Sufism with Islamic theology and jurisprudence. By reconciling mystical experience with orthodox Islamic teachings, he reinforced the legitimacy of Sufism within the broader Islamic intellectual framework. His emphasis on self-purification, ethical conduct, and the inner dimensions of worship provided a structured approach that influenced later Sufi traditions.

The transformation of their thoughts reflects the adaptability of Sufism in addressing the spiritual needs of different eras. While Rabiah's emphasis on divine love influenced the emotional and devotional aspects of Sufism, Al-Ghazali's integration of mysticism with rational theology provided a comprehensive approach to spiritual growth. Together, their contributions shaped the development of Islamic Sufism, making it both a personal and systematic path toward divine realization.

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