

Representation of Sufi Educational Values in the Dialogue "Feeling Smart, Even Being Stupid Doesn't Have It" by Rusdi Mathari

M Zainul Mukhtar¹, Siti Mutholingah², Rosidin³

^{1,2,3} Postgraduate Program in Islamic Religious Education, STAI Al-Hikam Malang, Indonesia;
siti.mutholiah@yahoo.co.id

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, the flow of globalization and technological advances have shaped people's lifestyles that tend to be hedonistic and materialistic. Relationships between people have become fragile and often detached from the foundation of religious values. This article aims to explain how Sufi values are represented in the dialogue *Feeling Smart, Stupid Even Though I Don't Have It* by Rusdi Mathari to readers. This research uses a qualitative method with a library research approach. The data are in the form of sentences from the conversation between the character Cak Dlahom and his friends sourced from the book *Feeling Smart, Stupid Even Though I Don't Have It*. The results of the study show that the book contains Sufi values presented through the daily life dialogues of Cak Dlahom and other characters, which include levels of remembrance of Allah, repentance, contentment, guarding oneself from arrogance, caring attitudes, solitude and silence, trust in God, sincerity, fighting lust, cleansing the heart, and piety. It can be concluded that the Sufi values presented in the dialogue book *Feeling Smart, Stupid, Not Having Any Benefits* provide benefits, provide food for reflection, and enrich religious insight in everyday life, both at the individual and societal levels.

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Corresponding Author:

M Zainul Mukhtar

Postgraduate Program in Islamic Religious Education, STAI Al-Hikam Malang, Indonesia;
siti.mutholiah@yahoo.co.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Sufi scholars define Sufism from diverse perspectives. These differences stem from their interpretations of the practices, experiences, and lifestyles of Sufis. H. M. Amin Syukur explains that Sufism is a servant's sincerity in worshipping Allah SWT, focusing solely on Him through purifying the heart and strengthening faith (Syukur, 2012).

In the 21st century, globalization and technological advances have shaped societal patterns that tend toward hedonism and materialism. Human relationships have become fragile and often detached from the foundation of religious values. A foundation of knowledge is needed to provide direction and

measure for social life. At this point, Sufism serves as "inner medicine" for the problems of everyday life. Sufism has a positive impact, guiding behavior and offering solutions to various social deviations.

The following two case studies demonstrate the relevance of Sufism. First, a Kompas report dated August 15, 2022, reported that a police officer in South Sumatra was the mastermind behind an ATM robbery to pay off online gambling debts (Putra & Putri, 2022). These criminal acts stem from desperate situations and the desire for instant money, even through methods that violate the law and religion. Sufism offers an alternative path through *tawakkul* (religious obedience), namely maximum effort accompanied by prayer and submission to God, thereby protecting one from deviant ways of seeking sustenance.

Second, a Kompas report dated April 17, 2023, covered the case of a child who murdered his biological mother in Malang simply over money to purchase land (Hakiki & Assifa, 2023). The victim was a mother who had sent 50 million Rupiah to purchase land while working as a migrant worker abroad. Impatience, anger, and lack of self-control led the perpetrator to this heinous act. From a Sufi perspective, this behavior contradicts the teachings of not harming anyone, especially a mother who holds a noble position and should be respected and prioritized. Both cases reinforce the role of Sufism in character formation and self-control to prevent deviant behavior. Sufism serves to manage mental illnesses such as *su'uzan* (*su'zan*), envy, and jealousy, which often become the seeds of conflict.

Imam al-Ghazali formulated the essence of Sufism in two main points: the relationship between humans and God and the relationship between humans and others (Ghazali, 2015). This formulation was deliberately kept brief for ease of understanding. Abu Bakr al-Kattani, as quoted by al-Ghazali in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, stated that Sufism is related to morals. A person with noble morals has practiced Sufism. A servant whose soul is accustomed to doing good is walking the path of Islamic guidance. Moreover, if that goodness is accompanied by asceticism, he is walking on the guidance of faith (Ghazali, 1995). From this perspective, it appears that noble character is the first step to true Sufism. Najmuddin Amin al-Kurdi viewed Sufism as the science of the good and evil of the soul, how to cleanse the soul of blameworthy traits and adorn it with praiseworthy ones, and a guide to the journey toward God while avoiding all His prohibitions (Al Kurdi, n.d.). Sufism serves to guide human life, reminding them that they are always under God's supervision, thus deterring them from committing sins.

The knowledge of Sufism has become highly urgent in the 21st century. Rapidly developing communication technology has opened up space for preaching in various media, both print and digital. Sufism knowledge can be disseminated through books, essays, articles, newspapers, short stories, novels, and also through social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. One influential millennial preacher is Habib Husein Ja'far al-Haddar. He is known for his tolerance, breadth of knowledge, and style of presentation that aligns with youth culture. In addition to preaching through digital platforms, he has also written books such as "*Tuhan Ada di Hatimu*" (God Is in Your Heart) and "*Seni Merayu Tuhan*" (The Art of Seducing God). His writings are simple, easy to understand, and rich in religious meaning.

2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with library research methods. Danandja defines library research as a research activity that utilizes various library sources, such as reference books, articles, notes, and relevant previous research reports (Danandja, 2014). The goal is to collect, process, and summarize data using specific techniques to answer the problem formulation. Qualitative research produces data in the form of words, not numbers, and does not rely on statistical calculations (Moleong, 1998). The primary data source for this research is a document, namely the 2016 book "*Mengrasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya*" by Rusdi Mathari, published by Mojok.co.

The steps taken in the library research were as follows: First, the book "*Mengrasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya*" was read thoroughly and repeatedly to understand the context and content. Second, eleven of the thirty essays were selected as samples because they were considered representative of the variety of representations of Sufism values. Third, categorize the words, phrases, and sentences in the essays

according to the levels of Sufism they refer to. Fourth, present and interpret the data in the form of descriptive-analytical descriptions.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Book Overview: Feeling Smart, Stupid, Not Enough

The development of the literary world has given rise to many writings that are not only entertaining but also hold life lessons. The book *Feeling Smart, Stupid, Not Enough* is among them. At first glance, this book appears to be a work of light fiction. However, each chapter contains a moral message related to religious practice and social relations. The author doesn't stop at describing the individual but also critiques the way religious society operates.

The term "stupid" in the book's title can be read as an affirmation of humanity's position before God. Humans often feel they understand God's commands, when in reality, they remain creatures full of limitations. The feeling of "feeling smart" masks the reality that humans are truly ignorant before God's knowledge.

Writing is an activity that Rusdi Mathari has long been involved in. He is known as a senior journalist with extensive experience. His experience includes work in both domestic and international media. He was a freelance journalist for *Suara Pembaruan* (1990–1994), an editor for *Detik.com* and *Infobank* (1994–2000), a staff member at *Tempo* magazine (2001–2002), an editor at *Trust* magazine (2002–2005), a managing editor at *Koran Jakarta* (2009–2010), a managing editor at *BeritaSatu.com* (2010–2011), editor-in-chief of *VHR Media* (2012–2013), and executive editor at *Rimanews.com* (2015–2017). He has also received numerous awards for best news writer and participated in an investigative reporting program in Bangkok through ISAI Jakarta.

In addition to his work as a journalist, Rusdi Mathari has written several books. These include *Aleppo* (2016), *Because Journalism Is Not a Journalist's Monopoly* (2018), *They Are Busy Counting Chickens' Moves* (2018), and *Feeling Smart, Even Stupid Doesn't Have It*, which is the subject of this research.

Rusdi Mathari was born in Situbondo on October 12, 1967, and died in Jakarta on March 2, 2018, after a year-long battle with cancer. His first essay on *Mojok.co* was for the *tausiah* series.

Ramadan was published on June 17, 2015, featuring figures such as Cak Dlahom, Mat Piti, Romlah, the neighborhood head, Bunali's wife, Sarkum, and the village head. The series continued into *Ramadan* the following year due to strong reader response. Each article was read between twenty and forty thousand times, resulting in the series generating approximately six hundred thousand readers in two years.

Feeling Smart, Stupid, Not Having Much depicts the daily life of Cak Dlahom, an elderly widower who lives next to the village head's stable in a village in Madura. His unique perspective makes him considered strange by his neighbors. Cak Dlahom often expresses religious views that encourage others to rethink their worship and religious practices.

This book is divided into two parts: *Ramadan One* and *Ramadan Two*. The inspiration for the writing came from various sources, including the stories of Emha Ainun Najib (Cak Nun) and Hizbul Wathan. The name Cak Dlahom itself is derived from an East Javanese term meaning "somewhat stupid."

The book *"Feeling Smart, Stupid, Not Having It"* offers light reading but is full of meaning. The stories are close to everyday situations, interspersed with humor and suspense caused by Cak Dlahom's behavior. Beneath this narrative lie Sufi values aligned with the teachings of Sheikh Abdul Wahab as-Sya'rani and Imam Nawawi al-Bantani. This study analyzed eleven of the thirty essays in the book. These eleven essays are considered to represent a variety of representations of the eleven levels of Sufi values, as follows:

Scholars emphasize that forgetting Allah is a sign of disbelief. Those who easily forget Allah and make no effort to combat their negligence are like those drowning in lies, thus hindering them from God's path. In *Minah as-Saniyah*, it is stated that a wise person who neglects to remember Allah even

for a moment will be possessed by Satan (As Sya'rani, 1995a). This demonstrates the importance of remembering Allah in all situations, because humans have no power or strength without His help. One of Cak Dlahom's dialogues explains this:

"Yes, Mat. Calamities are a blessing for those who understand. The most difficult trials and tribulations come when a person is blessed with abundant blessings and is fully capable in all worldly matters. This is not the case when faced with difficulties and limitations." (Mathari, 2016)

This dialogue emphasizes the importance of remembering Allah and being grateful for His gifts under any circumstances. Trials are seen as blessings that bring people closer to Allah, while worldly blessings often become the most difficult tests because they have the potential to give rise to negligence. People who are immersed in material abundance easily forget that they are essentially poor and dependent on Allah SWT's help.

Every human being sins, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Repentance means returning from reprehensible actions to praiseworthy deeds. Repentance has an initial (*bidayah*) and a final (*nihayah*) dimension. In the initial stage, repentance includes abandoning major sins, minor sins, and *makruh* (rejected) actions, as well as feeling the constant need to improve oneself (As Sya'rani, 1995b).

Cak Dlahom reminds us of the importance of repentance through the following dialogue:

"Damn you, Dul. Damn you all. Now it's my turn to call the midnight call to prayer, and you're all coming to the mosque in such a frenzy. Who's truly crazy, Dul? Who's lost?" (Mathari, 2016j)

The context of this dialogue depicts people too busy with worldly activities and lulled by comfort, resulting in the mosque being deserted. Cak Dlahom's midnight call to prayer is an invitation to remember Allah and repent immediately. Small sins left unheeded can become obstacles to happiness in the afterlife if not followed by sincere repentance. Conversely, small acts of kindness, often taken for granted, can become a major help in the hereafter.

Contentment

Contentment means being content and accepting with an open heart what Allah has decreed. Imam Shafi'i emphasized that sustenance will not burden a person if they have a contented heart. A contented person is as if they own the entire world (al Bantani, n.d.).

Cak Dlahom expressed this with the metaphor of water:

"Water always accepts what comes to it. It floats the moon and corpses alike." (Mathari, 2016)

Water accepts everything that comes to it, from sacred objects to filth, but still provides great benefits for life. This metaphor teaches that humans need to accept Allah's provisions, whether in the form of pleasure or hardship, with an open heart. Excessive complaints about circumstances will only narrow their perspective on life. A contented person continues to strive, but does not make this world the primary measure of happiness.

Guarding Against Arrogance

Arrogance is a heart disease that often afflicts humans. In *Minah as-Saniyah*, it is explained that feeling sweet and proud of one's own worship is a sign of arrogance. Someone who worships solely according to their own desires will find pleasure when it aligns with their desires, but will become lazy if it deviates from their desires.

Cak Dlahom alludes to this in the following dialogue:

"I know. You are too hasty in judging Allah's creation. All of His creation is useful, including the devil." (Mathari, 2016)

This statement reminds us that all of Allah's creation has a function, even the devil. The devil plays a role in testing the sincerity of human worship, testing economic intentions, and testing steadfastness. Humans are the most perfect creatures among Allah's creations, but they still come from the earth and will return to the earth. Therefore, feeling superior because of lineage, wealth, position, or knowledge is a form of neglect. All creatures are interconnected, including animals, plants, and even the devil. This awareness erodes the attitude of belittling others.

Caring

Islam teaches solidarity and concern, especially for vulnerable groups such as orphans and the poor. The Prophet emphasized his closeness to orphans, demonstrating the virtue of helping them.

Cak Dlahom rebukes the residents' indifference through dialogue:

"Your worship and other matters are your business with Allah, but Sarkum, who has no father and whose mother is a widow and poor, should be our business." (Mathari, 2016)

The story depicts Sarkum, an orphan who lives with his poor mother. When his mother falls seriously ill and dies, the residents are so busy building a mosque and other religious activities that they neglect their plight. Cak Dlahom's message is clear: ritual worship should not diminish social obligations. Caring for orphans and the weak is a tangible manifestation of faith.

Solitude and Silence

Social communication is important, but too much talk often leads to problems. Purposeful silence can be a form of kindness, as it prevents hurtful speech. Solitude and silence are seen as two forms of kindness that are beneficial in this world and the hereafter.

Cak Dlahom reflects on this in his confession:

"My mouth teaches others about good and evil, but in reality, I only seek praise for being wise and pious. My mouth also advises others, but my actions do not reflect my advice. My mouth only teaches so that I am seen as possessing extensive knowledge." (Mathari, 2016)

This statement demonstrates the tension between words and actions. A person can give advice, but their actions are inconsistent, because their primary goal is to seek recognition. An unguarded tongue triggers conflict and hostility. Therefore, scholars teach that if you cannot speak well, it is better to remain silent. Silence accompanied by self-control is an ethical practice that maintains the honor of others and oneself.

Trust in God

Every human's destiny is predetermined by God, but humans remain obligated to strive. Trust in God means surrendering the outcome to God after making efforts and praying.

Cak Dlahom describes human problems as follows:

"Romlah, all human problems are actually the same, just a fistful of weight. Just like the salt you're holding now. There are only two choices: salty in the sense of being heavy or refreshing in the sense of being light. It depends on how you place your heart. Make your heart like water in a glass or as broad as water in a lake." (Mathari, 2016)

This dialogue suggests that life's problems are like a handful of salt. Salt can taste very salty if placed in a small glass, but it will feel light when dissolved in a lake. The measure is not the severity of the problem, but the breadth of the heart that receives it. Trust in God teaches humans to broaden their hearts through surrender to God after making efforts.

Sincerity

In practice, humans often remember and count their deeds. However, sincerity means purifying intentions from the desire for praise, drawing closer to God, and forgetting the material value of the gifts given.

Cak Dlahom likens good deeds to urinating and defecating:

"Urinating and defecating are your good deeds, Mat. You expel something from your body without holding it in and immediately forgetting it. You don't remember its smell, color, or shape. You consider urinating and defecating unimportant, even though they expel something vital for your stomach or kidneys. For your blood circulation. For your health." (Mathari, 2016)

This analogy aligns with Imam al-Ghazali's explanation of sincerity. When someone defecates, they no longer think about its form or quantity. A sincere deed is similar, performed as an expression of gratitude without needing to be remembered or announced. In this way, giving becomes an exercise in recognizing that blessings come from Allah, while humans are merely intermediaries.

Combating Lust

Fighting lust means cleansing the heart of blameworthy traits and refraining from pleasures that lead to sin. Human lust is described in three forms: the lust of angels, the lust of animals, and the lust of demons.

Cak Dlahom reminded us:

"Humans are asked to eradicate all desires within themselves, such as anger, envy, jealousy, revenge, laziness, boredom, the desire to worship, and so on, with the goal of having already experienced death before experiencing physical death. Essentially, all your desires are lust, Gus. So be careful." (Mathari, 2016).

The main message of this dialogue is the importance of controlling desires before the body dies. Controlling desires makes the heart more receptive to Allah's decrees and encourages one to purify one's intentions in worship and worldly activities.

Cleansing the Heart

Human nature is diverse. Some traits tend toward evil and can have negative consequences if left unchecked.

Cak Dlahom advised:

"Calm your heart, Gus. Impure and clean exist in your heart. Waswas and lack of waswas exist in your heart. Shirk that is clearly visible will be easily overcome, but shirk that resides in the heart is far more dangerous because it is invisible. So be careful with your prejudices, the thoughts of your heart, because they are actually waswas and shirk that reside in the heart." (Mathari, 2016)

Shirk that is outwardly visible, such as idol worship, is relatively easy to recognize and avoid. The more difficult challenge is inner shirk, which is excessive dependence on others than Allah or prejudice that cuts off God's presence in one's life. Cleansing the heart is a prerequisite for worship to be valuable and for one to be able to distinguish between good and evil.

Taqwa

Taqwa is a level of Sufism that guides humans away from anything that endangers their religion and worldly life. Terminologically, taqwa means following Allah's commands and avoiding His prohibitions, both in public and alone.

Cak Dlahom criticized practices of worship that do not lead to taqwa:

"The problem is, how will you know Allah if your worship is limited to Islamic yoga. You still calculate your almsgiving in terms of your life's profits and losses. The knowledge you possess is used to steal and kill your fellow human beings. You think you're smart, but you don't even have that..." (Mathari, 2016)

This dialogue criticizes worship that only operates on a physical level, without touching the heart. Almsgiving that is still calculated based on profit and loss does not arise from sincerity. Knowledge used to oppress others demonstrates that taqwa has not penetrated the inner realm. True taqwa guides worship to become a transformative force that changes both physical and spiritual behavior.

4. CONCLUSION

Taqwa plays a vital role in human life. It guides humans to safety in this world and the hereafter, to restrain themselves from actions that contradict religious norms, and to foster an awareness that Allah SWT is always watching. The book "Feeling Smart, Stupid, Not Having" contains eleven levels of Sufi values: remembrance of Allah, repentance, contentment, guarding oneself from arrogance, caring, solitude and silence, trust in God, sincerity, combating lust, purifying the heart, and piety. These values are presented through dialogues between Cak Dlahom and other figures in everyday life.

The representation of Sufi values in this book offers relevant life messages for Muslim readers. These values can be integrated into daily life as a guide for building character, managing emotions, addressing social problems, and broadening one's understanding of happiness beyond material boundaries.

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