

# The Concept of Mahabbah and Makrifah in the Sufism Thought of Rabiah al-Adawiyah and al-Ghazali: Relevance for Contemporary Islamic Spirituality

Ninin Riska Syahfitri Kaharu<sup>1</sup>, Indo Santalia<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UIN Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia; nininkaharu1303@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> UIN Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia; indosantalia@uin-alauddin.ac.id

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the thought of Sufism Rabiah al-Adawiyah and al-Ghazali, two central figures in the Islamic spiritual tradition. Rabiah al-Adawiyah developed the concept of *mahabbah* (love), which is sincere and deep love for Allah as a form of pure selfless devotion. Al-Ghazali, on the other hand, introduced the concept of *makrifah* (knowing), which leads to a spiritual understanding of God through deep inner experience. This study uses the literature study method, by utilizing relevant literature, to examine these concepts in the context of the development of Sufism. The results of the research are expected to provide insight into the influence of these two figures' thoughts on Islamic spirituality and its application in the lives of Muslims today.

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## Corresponding Author:

Ninin Riska Syahfitri Kaharu

UIN Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia; nininkaharu1303@gmail.com

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The historical dynamics of Islamic thought show that the kalam problem began when Muslims were engaged in politics. Islam as a religion, but the political problem that became the origin of kalam in Islam is not about religious issues and this is a reality in history (amin nurdin, 2022).

Why politics? Because, as is known, since the move of the Prophet Muhammad Saw in 622 AD, the Prophet was not only a religious leader, but also a leader of the state or head of state. The Prophet Muhammad was the first human being to have a respected and listened to power in Medina, which was previously a divided kingdom (Harun Nasution, 1986).

The kalam problem began during the Shiffin War between Ali bin Abi Talib and Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan, which ended with the tahkim or truce. As a result of this event, some of the Ali group left the ranks of Ali and became known as the Khawarij. The Khawarij initially disagreed with Ali's attitude and the peace agreement with Muawiyah and the results of the tahkim. This is the beginning of the emergence of the kalam problem in Islam, the Khawarij question faith and kufr and associate it with tahkim as a great sin. The problem of kalam continued to develop until the Abbasid Dynasty, precisely during the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mun, a discipline known as Kalam Science was formed (amin nurdin, 2022).

The destruction of the Abbasids led to the emergence of a school of mysticism in Islam known as Sufism or Sufism. The main teaching in Sufism is the ability to be able to consciously relate between the human soul and God which is pursued by the path of self-isolation and contemplation. Sufism is a way and guidance so that a Muslim feels always close to Allah SWT (Prof. Dr. Harun Nasution, 1973).

## 2. METHODS

This study uses the motto of literature study, which is a research approach that relies on literature as the main source to obtain and analyze data. This method makes use of different types of sources, such as books, scientific articles, and popular articles, that are relevant to the research topic. The literature study approach not only helps in the preparation of the conceptual framework, but also allows researchers to evaluate and integrate previous findings as a basis for producing more comprehensive conclusions (Zed, 2014). In addition, this method is efficient in identifying unanswered research gaps, so that it can make an important contribution to the development of science (Hartono, 1980).

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. *Life History of Rabiah Al-Adawiyah*

Rabiah was born in 95 AH in Basrah. At that time, Basrah was filled with many scholars consisting of jurists, kalam (theologians), and zahids. In addition, in Basrah there are also many noble palaces and behind the grandeur of the palace, there is also a slum suburb consisting of slum huts that are home to the less fortunate and in one of the huts is the birthplace of Rabiah (Garib, 2022). He said, the reason for the name "Rabiah" was because his mother had given birth to three daughters before, therefore his father named her Rabiah (fourth). Even though he is poor, Rabiah's father and mother are still steadfast in maintaining the morals of their children. Rabiah was able to memorize the verses of the Quran at the age of ten. Her penchant for memorizing makes Rabiah quick in memorizing 30 Juz of the Quran, in addition to Rabiah's internal factors, Rabiah's environment also encourages Rabiah's ability to be filled with righteous people and behave in zuhud. Rabiah's father also encouraged his daughter by often taking her to the mosque on the outskirts of Basrah, where Rabiah worshipped and was in contact with Allah SWT (Prof. Dr. Asep Usman Ismail, 2015).

The city of Basrah which is full of luxury, Rabiah grew up and developed in a slum hut with her poor family and always haunted by hunger, but nevertheless Rabiah remained rich in faith and piety to Allah SWT which made her firm in facing the trials (source) of the city of Basrah which has many different nations and religious sects, in this city there are also Khawarij and Shi'ah who are very hunted by the Caliphs of the Umayyads and at one time There was a riot that spilled many lives. After that event, Basrah experienced a natural disaster in the form of a prolonged drought that caused the poor to suffer even more and Rabiah could not escape this strangeness (Semait, 1990)

Because of this incident, Rabiah and her three sisters wandered in search of a decent livelihood, but in the middle of the journey Rabiah was separated from her three sisters and Rabiah was only walking alone, in such a condition Rabiah was captured by robbers and made into a slave for six dirhams (Khamis, 1928). Rabiah became a slave after being sold for six dirhams to a family of Mawali Al-Atik, still having kinship with the Banu Adwa and Al-Atik himself was a Qais tribe and was often called or known as Al-Qaisyah or Al-Adawiyah.

Rabiah during her time as a slave often experienced violence, because the master who bought her was very cruel and cruel. But all these trials were faced patiently by Rabiah with the strength of faith she had. Rabiah during her time as a slave worked with the work that had been ordered by her master and at night, Rabiah would worship Allah SWT. Master Rabiah who listened to Rabiah's prayers when the night was touched and freed Rabiah and allowed her to stay in the house if she still wanted to stay in the house (Ahsan Nauli, 2024).

Rabiah al-Adawiyah is a prominent female Sufi who is known as the main initiator of the concept of love (mahabbah) in Sufism. Mahabbah refers to a sincere and spiritually deep love for

Allah SWT, which goes beyond love for Allah must be pure without hope of heaven or fear of hell. Thus, that true love will always be connected to Allah SWT. (Schimmel, 1975). Basically consciousness comes from His majesty and the desire to be with Him alone. This concept changed the Sufi view of the relationship between man and the creator, placing love at the heart of the spiritual journey (Nasr, 2007). Rabiah's thinking has influenced the tradition of Sufism in the Islamic world and has become an inspiration for many other Sufi figures (Rihanah, 2011).

### 3.2. The Concept of Mahabbah in Rabiah al-Adawiyah Sufism

Rabiah al-Adawiyah in studying Sufism so that he is known as one of the most prominent Sufi figures, is called very unique, because it is not related to the Sufis of his time. Rabiah al-Adawiyah never learned or received spiritual lessons from a Sufi figure, but Rabiah al-Adawiyah sought it out on his own based on his personal experience of being directly related to God (Fida Afrah, 2024).

According to Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jailani, there are two ways for Sufis to get closer to God: First, a person who wants to get closer to God will initially look for a teacher to teach and show the way to God and become an intermediary between the seeker of God and God, and this method does not get valid evidence that this path follows the way of the previous Prophet. Second, a person in his quest to seek God does not emulate or follow the same path as other creatures of God, because God has purified his heart and his heart has always been adrift of God. According to some Sufi scholars, Rabiah al-Adawiyah is classified as taking the second path (Margert Smith, 2007). This path was taken by Rabiah al-Adawiyah due to poverty so that Rabiah did not have the opportunity to go to school or go to a teacher's place to learn about Sufism. However, with his father's patience and piety to Allah SWT, his father taught all the knowledge he mastered and practiced it together with Rabiah, besides that his father also instilled good and commendable values in Rabiah al-Adawiyah so that he had a clean and holy heart (Rihanah, 2011).

The provisions instilled by Rabiah al-Adawiyah's father and his search so far led him to give birth to the concept of al-Mahabbah (Pure love for God) which is the pinnacle of Rabiah al-Adawiyah's Sufism. This was shown in creating his Sufi poems that contained expressions of love for Allah and even influenced other Sufis, such as Jalaluddin Rumi, Ibn al-Farj, al-Hallaj and other Sufis (Neor Iskandar, 2001). The famous verses of Rabiah al-Adawiyah are as follows:

*"I love You with two loves, love for myself and love for You. Love for me is a state of always remembering You. Love for Yourself is the state of Yourself revealing the veil until You see it. Both for this and for that. Praise is not for me. Praise be to You for all that"* (Risfan Sihalo, 2020).

Based on this verse, the concept of love referred to by Rabiah al-Adawiyah shows the concept of true love (al-Hubb al-Haqiqi) and profane love (al-Hubb al-Danasi). Both terms denote love for God and love for someone other than God (Syahuri Arsyi, 2021). The verse of Rabiah al-Adawiyah in the form of a salute to Allah SWT is as follows:

*"O my Lord, sink me in love with You, so that I may no longer worry about You. O Rabbi, the stars in the sky have twinkled, the eyes have slept, the gates of the palace have been locked, and every lover has been alone with his beloved, but here I am in Your presence."* (Rara Zarary, 2022).

Rabiah al-Adawiyah set his way of life in the nature of zuhud and was mentioned by some experts, in his lifetime Rabiah never married, all marriage proposals that reached him were all rejected. These proposals came from various prominent people such as Amir Abassiyah in Basrah in 145 AH, namely Muhammad bin Sulaiman Al-Hasyimi, there were also those from scholars such as Abdul Wahid bin Zaid, Hasan al-Basri, Malik bin Dinar, Tsabit al-Banani (Rihanah, 2011). Rabiah al-Adawiyah's life is always filled with wirid, dhikr and recitation. Istithat only when receiving guests and the arrival of students who want to learn Sufi and ask for kindness from their words, worship continues to be carried out throughout their lives to Allah SWT until their last breath is blown (Yusuf al-Qardhawi, 2020).

### 3.3. *Al-Ghazali's Life History*

His real name al-Ghazali is Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Thusi who is pinned to the title Abu Hamid with the nickname Zainuddin. Al-Ghazali was born in Ghazalah in 450 H and died in 505 H. Al-Ghazali was one of the many prominent thinkers in Islam who was very prominent and very famous for his intelligence, al-Ghazali's knowledge covered jurisprudence, logic, Sufism, kalam, morals, philosophy and others, and was evidenced by his profound and extensive works (Prof. Dr. Asep Usman Ismail, 2015). Al-Ghazali gave birth to hundreds of books and many of them disappeared due to the dynamics of the Islamic caliphate. Al-Ghazali was born at a time when Baghdad was on the verge of its fall and felt the fall of the Abbasids until it was replaced by the Seljuk Dynasty. Some of the books that al-Ghazali has written include, Tahafut al-Falasifah, Al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal, Maqashid al-Falasifah, Al-Qithas al-Mustaqim, Kimiya'u al-Sa'adah, Mizan al-Amal, Ihya Ulumuddin and many others (Fahrudin Faiz, 2023).

Meanwhile, Al-Ghazali is known by the title Hujjatul Islam which means the truth of Islam in addition to that title, al-Ghazali is also held Zain Addin which means religious jewelry. Al-Ghazali was given the title because of his patience and perseverance in pursuing knowledge starting from his birthplace to going out of the city far from his hometown. This pride of al-Ghazali came from his father who bequeathed towards the end of his life to one of the Sufis to educate and raise his son (Al-Halim Kusuma, 2023).

Al-Ghazali's perseverance in seeking knowledge could not be separated from the influence of his father, who was a simple Sufism expert. Before he died, his father advised one of the Sufis to educate and raise Al-Ghazali and his brother. This will was the first milestone in the intellectual journey of Al-Ghazali, who would later be known as one of the most influential thinkers in the history of Islam. One of his very monetary works is Ihya' Ulum al-Din, which not only discusses aspects of spirituality and Sufism, but also becomes a synthesis between Islamic teachings and Philosophy that successfully answered the intellectual challenges of that time (Smith, 2001).

Al-Ghazali's thinking has had a great impact in the Islamic world, especially in harmonizing religious teachings with rationality. He also contributed to criticizing Greek philosophy, which at that time began to influence the thinking of Muslims, with an approach that prioritized revelation as the main source of knowledge. Therefore, Al-Ghazali is not only respected as a scholar, but also as a figure of renewal who provides the basis for the harmony of faith, reason, and spirituality (Wat, 1963).

al-Ghazali's journey in studying began at a young age until he became an adult. Initially, al-Ghazali learned from Sufis bequeathed by his father, by learning to write (preaching) and learning about fiqh from a teacher named Ahmad ar-Rodzakani. Al-Ghazali then continued his journey to study to Naisabur and learned from Imam al-Juwaini who greatly helped al-Ghazali in honing his intelligence and the power of memorization, under the guidance of Imam al-Juwaini, al-Ghazali gave birth to al-Mankhul in the field of ushul fiqh. Al-Ghazali then moved to Baghdad and was appointed as a professor at Madrasah Nidzomiyah and the Grand Imam of Iraq because of al-Ghazali's intelligence in solving problems and confirming his opinions. Al-Ghazali then received a lot of praise for his knowledge until finally al-Ghazali chose to live a zuhud life and busy himself by increasing worship and affairs in the hereafter. In 488 H, al-Ghazali went on Hajj and after the Hajj al-Ghazali stayed in Damascus for 10 years and wrote his monumental work Ihya Ulumuddin. After all these achievements, al-Ghazali then returned to his hometown and produced works on Sufism, morals and purification of the soul until al-Ghazali died while trying to recite the Quran (Wildan Jauhari, 2018).

### 3.4. *Konsep Makrifah dalam Tasawuf al-Ghazali*

Al-Ghazali divides Sufism into two parts, namely as the science of mukasyafah and Sufism as the science of mu'amalah. According to al-Ghazali, Sufism as the science of mukasyafah cannot be told to just anyone unless it is conveyed symbolically. Al-Ghazali also disagrees with the understanding of ittihad, hulul, and shatahat of Sufism experts which are dangerous to the general public. Therefore,

most of al-Ghazali's works in the field of Sufism are aimed at ordinary people or Sufis who just want to learn Sufism. Al-Ghazali in his book *Ihya Ulumuddin* divides 8 levels of a Sufi, namely; repentance, patience, gratitude, hope, fear, zuhud, tawakkal, and love (Azra, 2012). According to al-Ghazali, the path to happiness is taken by controlling anger and orgasm and the path is by using knowledge that culminates in makrifatullah (knowing Allah SWT). Makrifatullah cannot be obtained by learning theories from books, makrifatullah must be practiced and makrifatullah can only be achieved if it is close to Allah SWT (Fahrudin Faiz, 2023).

Meanwhile, the Sufis who stated that man and God are united is wrong, al-Ghazali argued that man is a servant of God and God is the master of the almighty. Al-Ghazali said; that makrifat means that I know about you, something that is outside of me (Fahrudin Faiz, 2023). The concept of makrifat put forward by al-Ghazali is to know the secrets of the creator and God's decrees regarding everything that exists. al-Ghazali argued that the tool to achieve makrifat is the heart, not using the senses and not with the intellect. Makrifat in the form of karomah, according to al-Ghazali, is at a level just below the revelation (Humas UGM, 2015). Makrifatullah can be achieved by starting to purify the soul by reciting continuously so that they are able to look at God with a clean heart (Murni, 2014).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Sufism teaches to be able to obtain a clean heart so that it can be close to Allah SWT. Sufi scholars in their own way use that path to be close to God, as practiced by Rabiah al-Adawiyah with the concept of *mahabbah* (love) and al-Ghazali with the concept of *makrifah* (knowing) which aims to gain pleasure from Allah SWT.

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