

## THE DISCUSSION BETWEEN MUSLIM SCHOLARS IN THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO REGARDING THE LIGHT OF MUHAMMAD

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### Abstract

This article illustrates the origin for the word *Nur Muhammad* and its usage before Muhammad become a prophet, during his Prophethood, the time of the Companions and *tabiin* from various discipline such as *tafsir*, *hadith*, *tarekat*, history and Orientalist writing which coincides with historical evidence and the Malay Manuscript. Distinct perspective from various scholar and *ulama* in the Malay Archipelago have contributed and vastly diversified the debate as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> Century until the present day. Thus, different summarization and suggestion have been proposed regarding the knowledge about *Nur Muhammad* debate as benchmark for not just the community of Malaysia but the Malay Archipelago as whole.

**Keyword--** Discussion, Muslim Scholars, Malay Archipelago. Nur Muhammad

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### INTRODUCTION

*Nur Muhammad* (the Light of Muhammad) was a term which had been discussed by the Sufis since the third Hijra and had become the most important debate among them, especially regarding its role as a focal point in cosmology. The Sufis did not bear any thoughts or teachings which were inaccurate, misleading or came beyond the truth of Islam. In fact, they were inspired by Allah who bestowed them *wahbiyah* (the gift) as what had been experienced by the Prophets in generations by means of *iqtida* (an imitation) or *suhbah* (accompaniment). This is similar to what had been written in al-Qur'an (2: 282):

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ٢٨٢

...and be careful of (your duty) to Allah, Allah will teach you, and Allah knows all things.

Similar to the Hadith from Rasulullah PBUH quoted by al-Shawkani (considered a weak hadith due to its *sanad* (chain)) (al-Fawa'id al-Maj'mu'ah, *Kitab al-Fadail*, Chapter fi Fadl al-'Ilm, No. Hadith 43):

مَنْ عَمِلَ بِمَا عَلَّمُوهُ اللَّهُ عَلَّمَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمُ.

Whoever practices what is known by him, Allah will give him the knowledge of what is unknown by him.

Saidina Ali bin Abi Thalib had mentioned in one of the hadiths recorded by al-Bukhari (Sahih al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Jihad wa al-Siyar*, Chapter of Fakak al-Asir fihi 'an Abi Musa 'an al-Nabiyy, No. Hadith 3047, as well as other Hadiths with different articulations: 111, 1870, 3172, 3179, 6755, 6903, 6915 and 7300.)

حَدَّثَنَا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ يُونُسَ حَدَّثَنَا زُهَيْرٌ حَدَّثَنَا مَطْرَفٌ أَنَّ عَامِرًا حَدَّثَهُمْ عَنْ أَبِي جَحْفَةَ -رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ- قَالَ قُلْتُ لِعَلِيِّ -رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ- هَلْ عِنْدَكُمْ شَيْءٌ مِنْ

الْوَحْيِ إِلَّا مَا فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: وَالَّذِي فَلَقَ الْحَبَّةَ، وَبَرَأَ النَّسَمَةَ، مَا أَعْلَمُهُ إِلَّا فِيمَا يُعْطِيهِ اللَّهُ رَجُلًا فِي الْفُرْقَانِ، وَمَا فِي هَذِهِ الصَّحِيفَةِ. قُلْتُ وَمَا فِي الصَّحِيفَةِ؟ قَالَ: الْعَقْلُ، وَفَكَانَ الْأَسِيرُ، وَأَنْ لَا يَقْتُلَ مُسْلِمٌ بِكَافِرٍ.

Abu Juhaifah said: I had spoken to 'Ali, "Are you acquiring any revelation other than what is inside *Kitabullah* (Al-Qur'an)?" He replied, "For the sake of the *Dzat* (essence) who grew the seeds and created every life forms, I know none other than what had been sent down regarding al-Qur'an and what is contained inside it," I asked, "What is contained inside the pages?" He replied, "The matters of *diyat* (penalty), liberation of captives and a Muslim not killed for murdering a disbeliever".

Ibn 'Arabi (558-638H / 1164-1420C) was the first Sufi to bring the Sufi experience to be analyzed in detail which had led him from the spiritual arena (*mawakid* and *ahwal*) to the logics of knowledge and theory. He managed to create several new terms in the realm of Sufi tariqa from the result of new understanding model which had completely developed since the last six centuries. Ibn 'Arabi had been regarded as the *Qutub* (archive) of Sufi tariqa language and its terms.

The establishment of 'Abbasiyah Caliphate (132H/759C) marked the golden age of Islamic civilization especially during the ruling of Harun al-Rashid (193H/809C) and his prince, Ma'mun who built *Bayt al-Hikmah* (the House of Wisdom) (218H / 833C), until the city of Baghdad was renowned as the center of the world in knowledge. *Bayt al-Hikmah* had produced numbers of excellent scholars, such as Abu Yusuf al-Kindi, Abu Nasr al-Farabi, al-Jahiz and others. Despite this knowledge excellence, there happened to be a serious political intervention as the result of the war as well as internal and external conflicts during that time. The political conflicts tend to turn the Sufi away from the politicians, orientate themselves to the understanding of knowledge and practices as

well as to preserve their own heritage. As the result, several knowledge of *ma'rifat* (Understanding Allah) was created such as spiritual (*al-nafs*) from al-Haris al-Muhāsibī (170-243H), *fana* and *mi'raj* from Imam Abu Yazid al-Bistami (188-261H); *fana* and *maqamat* from Imam Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd al-Baghdadi (221-297H) and *mahabbah*, *tawhid* and *marhalah* of cosmological living by Imam al-Husayn bin Mansur al-Hallaj (244-309H/858-922C).

The richness in the knowledge of *ma'rifat* within the Sufis had brought the learning institution of Sufi tariqa to its golden era, while preserving the unity of the Muslim society and adapting to several conditions through the discipline of knowledge possessed by the shaykhs which was applied to the learning institution. However, the beginning of the fourth Hijriyah century marked the downfall of these Sufi tariqa schools as there were ties between the *fiqh* (Jurisprudence) institutions with the political institutions which led to the death of al-Husayn bin Mansur al-Hallaj in 309H/922C. He failed to convince the society regarding the spiritual knowledge in much simpler term to fit the logic of sharia. He was later accused of being *zindiq* (liar) and was sentenced to death.

### Nur Muhammad in History

Nur Muhammad was an extraordinary and the noblest human ever created. Allah had granted him with the highest nobility since the day he was born till the end of his life. His life was filled with the lights and miracles, and he was not just an ordinary human being, instead he was the light above all lights.

As had been mentioned by Shaykh Yusuf bin Ismail al-Nabhani (1997: 10-20) in the manuscript of *al-Anwar al-Muhammadiyah*, the understandings of Nur Muhammad consisted of on two sides. The first side was as *nur al-wujud* (the first creation ever created), and every other thing were created from it. The second side was the reality of *Nubuwwah* (*nur al-shuhud*) where Allah has placed it to the Prophet Adam and it was transferred to Siti Hawa (Eve) then to their prince, the Prophet of Shith and continued the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

According to Saidatina A'isyah RA as she recorded from the Prophet Muhammad PBUH (*al-Mu'jam al-Awsat*, Hadith no. 6285; al-Bayhaqi, 1988: 176; al-'Asqalani, 1995: 72 and a few other Hadiths):

Gabriel (the Archangel) had come to me and said: "I had gone back and forth from the East to the West of the Earth but I had never found a person with the highest nobility other than Muhammad and no other noblest descendants other than the descendants of Bani Hashim"

According to *Sahih Bukhari* (the manuscript of *Kitab al-Manaqib*, Chapter of *Sifat al-Nabi s.a.w*, Hadith no. 3557) and a few other Hadiths, as mentioned by Abu Hurairah RA recorded from the Prophet Muhammad PBUH:

بُعِثْتُ مِنْ خَيْرِ فُرُوقِ بَنِي آدَمَ فَرَأْنَا فَقَرْنَا حَتَّى كُنْتُ مِنَ الْقَرْنِ الَّذِي كُنْتُ فِيهِ.

I was sent down during the greatest generation, from the generation of the Prophet Adam to the generation I am living presently.

In *Sahih Muslim* (the manuscript of *Kitab al-Fadhail*, Chapter of *Fadl Nasab al-Nabi wa Taslim al-Hajar 'alayh qabl al-Nubuwwah*, Hadith no. 2276) and several other Hadiths had mentioned that according to Wathilah bin al-Asqa', "I heard Rasulullah PBUH said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَى كِنَانَةَ مِنْ وَلَدِ إِسْمَاعِيلَ ، وَاصْطَفَى فَرِيضًا مِنْ كِنَانَةَ ، وَاصْطَفَى مِنْ فَرِيضِ بَنِي هَاشِمٍ ، وَاصْطَفَانِي مِنْ بَنِي هَاشِمٍ.

Indeed, Allah had chosen Kinanah, the son of Ismail, Quraish from Kinanah, Bani Hashim from Quraish and me from Bani Hashim.

In the history of *jahiliyyah*, Nur Muhammad had been predicted as the sign of the appearance of the Prophet for the end of the world. A people from Christian and Jewish religion was aware about the prophecy and had been told in an event where a Jewish woman whom saw the Light from the face of Abdullah, the father to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH as well as another similar event which happened to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH with a Christian priest when he was still young. Al-Bayhaqi (1988: 102-106) had mentioned from Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, it was a story when 'Abd Muttalib was with 'Abdullah, there were a woman from Bani Asad bin 'Abd al-'Uzza named Libbarah, where she was beside the Ka'bah during that time had asked him: "Where are you going, Abdullah?" in which he replied, "To my father." "The woman asked again, "Would you like me to give it to you so you will be with me now?" He replied, "I am with my father now and I do not wish to be separated with him, what else to do things forbidden by him."

Later, his father brought him to meet the family of Wahb bin 'Abd Manaf and married his daughter, Aminah who was the best descendants of the Quraish during that time. One day, he (Abdullah) had met with the woman (Libbarah) again in which she said to him: "The Light that I saw from you on the day that we met has gone that I did not wish to be with you anymore." Similar story had been mentioned by Ibn 'Abbas, however involved a woman from Khath'am tribe (al-Bayhaqi 1988: 107-108).

Iryad bin Sariah RA as mentioned as he recorded from Rasulullah PBUH (al-Bayhaqi 1988: 80-81; *al-Mustadrak*, *Kitab Tawarikh al-Mutaqaddimin min al-Anbiya wa al-Mursalin*, Chapter of *Dhikr Akhbar Sayyid al-Mursalin wa Khatam al-Nabiyyin*, Hadith no: 4174 – 4175 and several other hadiths) the following:

أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، وَخَاتَمِ النَّبِيِّينَ، وَإِنَّ آدَمَ لَمُنْجِدٌ فِي طِينَتِهِ، وَسَأَخِيرُكُمْ عَنْ ذَلِكَ: دَعْوَةُ أَبِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ، وَبِشَارَةِ عِيسَى بِي، وَرُؤْيَا أُمِّي الَّتِي رَأَتْ، وَكَذَلِكَ أُمَّهَاتُ النَّبِيِّينَ يَرَيْنَ.

I am the slave of Allah and the last Prophet of all the Prophets, while the Prophet Adam was still buried under the ground, I will tell all of you regarding all these: Indeed I am the prayer of the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), the good news of Prophet Isa (Jesus), and the dream of my mother of what seen as well as the mothers of all the Prophets.

Indeed, the mother of Rasulullah had seen light illuminating while carrying the Prophet Muhammad PBUH inside her womb, as had been portrayed by the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, al-'Abbas RA in a poem (al-Nabhani 1997: 18):

وَأَنْتَ لَمَّا وُلِدْتَ أَشْرَقَتْ الْأَرْضُ وَضَاءَتْ بِنُورِكَ الْأَفْقُ  
فَقُحِّنَ فِي ذَلِكَ الضِّيَاءِ وَفِي النَّوْرِ وَسَبِيلُ الرِّشَادِ نَحْرَقُ

When you were born, the earth was illuminated with lights, as well as the horizon with your lights. And we were in the shining lights, and the road signs were burned in fire.

Moreover, the usage of the term Nur Muhammad had started before the Prophet Muhammad PBUH was appointed as the Prophet, as mentioned in the poetry recited by Waraqah bin Nawfal, the cousin of Siti Khadijah with the hope that he was able to see Muhammad PBUH be appointed as a prophet and how he will be able to defeat the disbelievers from the Quraisy tribe as

well as spreading the lights to the world (Ibn Hashim, 1975: 176-177)

بأن محمدا سيسود قيتنا، ويخصم من يكون له حجيجا.  
ويظهر في البلاد ضياء نور، يقيم به البرية أن ثوجا.

Indeed, the Prophet Muhammad PBUH will become the leader among us, and defeat whoever standing before his way. And he will illuminate his light across the state, shining every creature on earth.

Every story had told the similar regarding the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, from the story of him when he was born, during his lifetime until he was appointed as a prophet. All the stories had mentioned that the Prophet's life was filled with the lights of dignity as mentioned in the books of *shamail* (Characteristic), *manaqib* (Virtues) and *mawlid* (Birth) of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

#### Arguments of Nur Muhammad in Malay Archipelago

The understanding of *Nur* Muhammad was associated with the ingression of Islam to Malay Archipelago. Historians suggested that Islam was introduced directly to the Malay Archipelago during the first Hijri by the traders from the Arab Peninsula, and the first to receive those traders was Aceh. Records had shown that the Sufis played an important role in the Islamization process in Malay Archipelago.

The first Islamic kingdom was Peurlak in 225 Hijri. During that time, the Islamic civilization was at its Golden Era in Baghdad, as Baghdad had succeeded in several fields of knowledge such as Islamic knowledge, philosophy and science. Despite the achievements, it failed to abut the negative influences from taking over the positive developments. This caused several ulema and Sufis to redirect themselves to the religion knowledge and practices as well as to stay away from the power and politics which had always been used as tools for several scholars to gain wealth and influences. After the killing of al-Hallaj, the Sufis were faced with provocations from the scholars as they were accused of using the religion to gain influences and power.

Ibn 'Arabi was one of the Sufis who upheld Sufi tariqa in balancing his life between spiritual and reality, in fact he had previously completed the arguments of *dhawq* (senses) by introducing several new terms in the tariqa. He was also being oppressed as well as the other Sufis, until the emergence of the next generations such as Imam al-Sha'rani, 'Abd al-Krim al-Jili and 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi (2003).

Similar things had occurred in Malay Archipelago, from the case of Siti Jenar in Java to the case of Shaykh Nuruddin al-Raniri and the followers of Shaykh Hamzah Fansuri, all were caused by the abuse of power and influences, which was dreaded by the Sufis. This was also catalyzed by the colonization of the Western Orientalists as well as intrusions of Jewish theosophists. This knowledge in *Nur* Muhammad had worn out slowly from the society and the generation was left with those with a weak understanding in the knowledge, including the aristocrats, the royal institutions and their ulema.

During the early centuries of Islam entrainment to Malay Archipelago, several manuscripts had been brought in as well such as *al-Futuh al-Makkiyah* (n.d.), *Shajarat al-Kawn* (Ibn 'Arabi, 1985), *Fusus al-Hikam* (n.d.), *Daqaiq al-Akhbar fi Dhikr al-Jannat wa al-Nar* by 'Abd al-Rahim al-Qadi (n.d.), *al-Anwar al-Muhammadiyah min al-Mawahib al-Ladunniyyah* by Yusuf bin Ismail al-Nabhani (1997), *al-Insan al-Kamil* by al-Jili (1975) and *Bahr al-Lahut* by Shaykh Abdullah 'Arif (n.d.). In addition, a group of ulema known as Wali Songo had written regarding the understanding of *Nur* Muhammad in Java literature language

such as Wirid Hidayat Jati (Ronggo Warsito, 2005), *Serat Chintini* (Sumahatmaka, 1981) and *Serat Niti Mani* (Jawi Kandha, 1908).

Later, during the era of Islamic Kingdom ruling, ulema of Malay Archipelago had recorded their own manuscript as well as teaching and translating regarding the content of the manuscripts itself. Examples of the written manuscripts are *al-Muntahi* (Coded Or. 7291 (III), Library University of Leiden) and *Syair-Syair Hamzah Fansuri* (MS Jak. Mal. No. 83. X, Jakarta) by Shaykh Hamzah Fansuri, *Nur al-Daqaiq fi Kashf Asrar al-Haqaiq* (MS1314, H) by Shaykh Shamsuddin al-Sumaterani, *Bad' Khalq al-Samawat wa al-Ard* (1894) and *ماء الحياة لأهل الممات* (without code) by Shaykh Nuruddin al-Raniri, *Sharh al-Mawahib al-Mustarsalah* (40/NKT/YPAH/92), *Shams al-Ma'rifah* (MSS 2378A) and *Daqaiq al-Huruf* (MS1314, N) by Shaykh Abdul Rauf, *Sir al-salikin*. (n.d.) by Shaykh Abdul Shamad al-Falimbani, *Durr al-Nafis* by Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari (2013), *Manhal al-Safi* by Daud Fathani (1373H).

There were also manuscripts which had been translated into Malay language, such as *al-Kawkab al-Durri fi al-Nur al-Muhammadi* by Syaikh Muhammad bin Isma'il Daud al-Fatani (1904), *Madarij al-Su'ud* by Nawawi al Bantani (n.d.), *Sirr al-Asrar* by Syeikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailany (1994), *Sabil al-Iddikar wa al-I'tibar* by Imam al-Haddad (1998) and the manuscripts of *Kasyf al-Ghaybiyah* by Zain al-'Abidin al-Fatani (n.d.).

*Nur* Muhammad had later spread by assimilation in the building of civilization of the society in Malay Archipelago. This had raised critics by people who doubted regarding the civilisation. Several modern researchers suggested that *Nur* Muhammad was originated from Shi'ah cult especially the Isma'ilyyyah which was taken from Grecian philosophy and Zoroastrian teachings. The opinion was made by Fazlur Rahman (1979: 174, Mahayuddin Hj Yahya (1987: 16-17), Abdul Fatah Haron Ibrahim (2003: 258-261) and several other researchers. According to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1963: 3-4), most of the times, these kinds of opinions was taken from the western orientalist such as R. A. Nicholson, E. G. Browne, John Spencer Trimingham, Massingon and other researchers who made their research about Islam from secular point of view. They intended to separate the society of Malay Archipelago from the knowledge discipline of tariqa which had been the basis in building their spiritual strength and identity.

Unfortunately, these opinions had spread widely into the society in Malay Archipelago, especially Malaysia which can still be observed today. As the result, there existed several suggestions that *Nur* Muhammad should be banned as well as the manuscripts which mentioned about it. This includes the manuscripts of *Mawlid al-Barzanji* (2008), *Burdah al-Busiri* (n.d.) and *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (n.d.). Until today, the controversy regarding *Nur* Muhammad in Malay Archipelago had been regarded as an issue which was always been raised in the critics towards Sufi tariqa similarly to other understandings initiated by the Sufis such as *wahdat al-wujud*.

#### CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, *Nur* Muhammad was an understanding which had been shown clearly by revelation and had been agreed by ulema. Despite several technical issues regarding the written evidences, there were other Hadiths which can complement to prove that *Nur* Muhammad was the earliest creation of Allah and the source of all creations. It was the most suitable honour for the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, the leader of the prophets and creations.

The controversy started due to the misunderstanding regarding the understandings of *Nur* Muhammad. To really understand the

meaning of *Nur* Muhammad, a person needs to have a very high focus as well as a strong spiritual strength which could help in appreciating it under the guidance of a murshid. Confusion and misunderstanding would occur if a person only studied the matter on the surface without digging deeper into the knowledge. However, for the current society who were unable to fully grasp the knowledge, it is adequate for them to acknowledge and believe that the Prophet Muhammad PBUH was the most beloved by Allah and was granted the highest degree of honour by Allah.

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