

THE INFLUENCE OF AL-RIFĀ'IYYAH TARIQA ON DABUS ARTS IN MALAY SOCIETY

MOHD ZULHAFIZI SALIM*, WAN HASLAN KHAIRUDDIN, FAUDZINAIM
BADARUDDIN & NOZIRA SALLEH¹

ABSTRACT

The Malay community is a cultural and artistic society. Their arts and culture are highly civilized. This is due to Islamization. One of the Malay arts that are increasingly marginalized is the Dabus Dance. The art of Dabus Dance was formed through the influence of the al-Rifā'iyah tariqa. The two factors were the main problem of this paper. Therefore, the objective of this paper was to study the background of the al-Rifā'iyah tariqa and the Dabus Dance as well as to examine the influence of the al-Rifā'iyah tariqa on the Dabus Dance. To achieve the objectives, this paper used a qualitative approach that includes data collection, content analysis, historical analysis, and inductive and deductive methods. The findings included the background of the al-Rifā'iyah tariqa and the Dabus Dance as well as evidence of the al-Rifā'iyah tariqa's influence on the Dabus art. This study implied and expected to reintroduce the art of Dabus Dance and al-Rifā'iyah tariqa.

Keywords: *Sufism, al-Rifā'iyah tariqa, Dabus Dance, Malay World, Malay Arts*

INTRODUCTION

Historic records showed that Sufism has played an important role as an agent of Islamization of the knowledge and culture of the Malay community and succeeded in eliminating the superstitions that have long been rooted in the Malay community. In addition, the development of Islam among the Malay community had been widely spread by the Sufi figures (Vladimir, 1993). Another factor that also made the spreading of Islam successful among the Malay community is the principle of Islamic teaching that rejects any form of discrimination and *asabiah* (social

¹ **Mohd Zulhafizi Salim** (Corresponding Author)* PhD candidate at the Research Centre for Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan, MALAYSIA. Email: ibnsalim93@gmail.com; **Wan Haslan Khairuddin**, PhD, Senior Lecturer at the Research Centre for Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan, MALAYSIA. Email: wanhaslan@ukm.edu.my; **Faudzinaim Badaruddin** PhD., Associate Professor at the Research Centre for Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan, MALAYSIA, Email: fnaim@ukm.edu.my; **Nozira Salleh**, PhD, Senior Lecturer at the Research Centre for Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan, MALAYSIA. Email: aziera@ukm.edu.my

cohesion/tribalism/clanism). The concept of caste that exists among the Malay community resulting from the influence and belief of Hinduism teachings often causes division among the community (Werthem, 1956). Islamic teaching was accepted because it educated its followers to live peacefully without looking at their origin and color (Mohd Masir, 2013).

The gentle and well-spoken attitude of Islamic preachers is also one of the success factors of Islamic development among the Malay community. Islamic preachers have their method to deal with any element of polytheism and superstition that has existed for ages among the community, for example, Wali Songo. Wali Songo is a prominent preacher who is a practitioner of Sufi and *tariqa* (school or order of Sufism) who succeeded in winning the hearts of the community through entertainment. The Wali Songo did not judge the arts and entertainment of the community as merely haram but brought a new entertainment alternative based on religious sharia (Muhammad Abu Bakar, 1991). The historical development of the Islamization of knowledge and culture among the Malay community is through the efforts of *tariqa* and Sufism scholars such as al-Shaykh Nur al-Din al-Rāniri (d. 1658M), al-Shaykh Abd Raof al-Singkel (d. 1693M), al-Shaykh Abd Samad al-Palembani (d. 1832M), al-Shaykh Daud al-Fatani (d. 1847M), al-Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani (d. 1897M) and al-Shaykh Tokku Pulau Manis (d. 1736M). These figures successfully guided the community through studies, writing, and martial arts to form a Malay society that adheres to the teachings of Islam (Mana Sikana, 1983 & Syukri Yeoh and Redzuan, 2011). These religious figures also spread the *tariqa* teachings among the community. Among the earliest *tariqa* that spread among the Malay community were al-Rifā'iyah, al-Qadariyyah, al-Naqshabandiyyah, and al-Ahmadiyyah (Wan Suhaimi & Che' Zarina, 2003).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In today's era of globalization, some people have expressed their inclination towards the teachings of Sufism and Tariqa. History has also proven that the tariqa has played an important role in the Islamization of the Malay community (Badlihisham & Othman, 2003). Whereas, according to the Mufti Department of Negeri Sembilan 8 tariqas have done official historical registration and are bound by the enactment of tariqa in Negeri Sembilan (Muftins, 10 April 2019). Based on the report issued by the Negeri Sembilan Mufti Department, it was found that the Al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa was not included in the list. Although al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa is not officially registered, it is seen to

be spreading its teachings among the Malay community. This can be proven through the Bai'ah meetings conducted by the scholars of the al-Rifā'iyyah Tariqa in Malaysia.

Among the al-Rifā'iyyah Tariqa figures who were once in Malaysia and gave permission to the community to practice al-Rifā'iyyah Tariqa were al-Shaykh Fawwaz al-Hasani, a figure from Jordan (Darul Fawwaz, 2016), al-Shaykh Samir Qadi who gave the pledge at the Baitussaadah Study Center, Damansara (Baitussaadah, 2017), and al-Shaykh Sabah al-Din who was Al-Rifā'iyyah figure from Iraq (Zahafiz, 2019). The entrance of the Rifā'iyyah figures shows that there is an effort to develop the teachings of this tariqa. History also recorded that the al-Rifā'iyyah Tariqa is not a new tariqa known to the community because according to Wan Suhaimi & Che' Zarinna (2003), al-Rifā'iyyah Tariqa was among the earliest tariqa in the Malay world. It is also recorded that a Malay art known as the Dabus Dance also known as the Rapa'i Dance is a dance exactly similar to the performance found in the Rifā'iyyah Tariqa teachings (Snouck, 1906). Therefore, there is a need to study the background and development of the Rifā'iyyah Tariqa and its influence on the art of Dabus Dance.

This study on the art of Dabus Dance also responds to YAB Dato' Sri Ismail Sabri's call in the opening speech for the launch of the National Cultural Document (DAKEN) to elevate and dignify the nation's art, culture, and heritage (Motac, 2021). Therefore, a study on the influence of the Rifā'iyyah Tariqa on the art of Dabus Dance is a study that will introduce and raise awareness of this art to the public.

Based on this problem, the researcher believes that a study on the background and development of the Rifā'iyyah tariqa needs to be carried out. In addition, the study of the influence and relationship of the Rifā'iyyah Tariqa and the art of Dabus Dance needs to be studied to see the relationship between the two.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study aims to examine the background and development of the Rifā'iyyah Tariqa as well as examine the influence of the Rifā'iyyah Tariqa on the art of Dabus Dance.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the objective, the researcher chose a qualitative approach that contained historical, inductive, and deductive analysis. The historical method aimed to study the background of the Rifā'iyah Tariqa and the Dabus Dance. Data collection used various valid sources such as books and journals. The data that had been collected would be analyzed through three main methods such as inductive, deductive, and comparative. Inductive is a process of elaboration that leads to a theoretical conclusion from specific facts or information (Mohd Faiz & Nurhanani, 2019). Meanwhile, deductive is the process of making conclusions or summaries from information or facts based on deduction methods or the process of making conclusions from general information (Abdul Salam et.al, 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussions were focused on achieving the objectives of the study. Therefore, this article focused on studies related to the Background of al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa, the Development of the al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa in the Malay World, and the Influence of al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa on the art of Dabus Dance.

Background of *al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa*

The development of Islam in the Malay community could not be separated from the development of tariqa and Sufism. It had been explained that the prominent preachers who spread the teachings of Islam were among the practitioners and teachers of tariqa. The term tariqa refers to organized practices to increase the spiritual level of its practitioners. The tariqa development started from personal practice and finally formed certain groups. According to Triminggam (d. 1987 AD), the tariqa's development went through 3 main phases starting from the 10th century until the 15th century. In the 10th century, the practice was only focused on reciting *zikr* (ritual prayer or litany) and *wirid* (a citation from the Koran which is read repeatedly as a way of asking for God's forgiveness), which was practiced by individuals. Then, it developed to form certain doctrines, and centers of the tariqa practice were created. In the 15th century during the Ottoman Turkish Empire, the spread of the tariqa expanded to form an identity and congregations (Triminggam, 1971). Syed Naquib (b. 1931 AD) explained that the tariqa development in Malaya had started at the beginning of 1448 AD in the era of the Malacca Malay sultanate, and the Malay Sultans of Malacca were

also practitioners of the tariqa teachings (Syed Naquib, 1963). Among the tariqa that had developed and gained a place in the Malay community was the al-Rifā'īyyah (Syed Naquib, 1963 & Wan Mohd Saghir, 2000).

The al-Rifā'īyyah Tariqa is a tariqa attributed to the name of its founder al-Sayyid Ahmad al-Rifā'ī who died in Umm Abidah, Iraq in the year 1178 AD. The al-Rifā'īyyah Tariqa began as a personal practice carried out by al-Imam al-Rifā'ī (d. 1178 AD) and then when he established a center for the tariqa's dissemination of knowledge and practice, the personal practices were adopted by the students. The development of the al-Rifā'īyyah Tariqa began in Ummi Abidah, Iraq, and then expanded widely during the Ottoman Turkish Empire. There were almost 20 Rifā'īyyah practice centers that were created during the leadership era of al-Sultan Abd Hamid II in 1877 AD. This is because the religious adviser of the Ottoman Turkish Government at that time was al-Shaykh Abu al-Huda al-Şayyādi (d. 1909 AD) who was one of the main figures of the Tarekat al-Rifā'īyyah (Zulhafizi, 2019).

Among the main principles of the al-Rifā'īyyah Tariqa that had been recorded by al-Shaykh Abu al-Huda al-Şayyādi (d. 1909 AD) in the book *Tarekat al-Rifā'īyyah* (T.th), the al-Rifā'īyyah tariqa called for perfect monotheism with the belief that Allah Almighty is *Al-Qadim*. The al-Rifā'īyyah tariqa also asserted the obligation to uphold and make the Qur'an the first source of law and demanded to always carry out all the commands and abandon all the prohibitions contained in the Qur'an. In fulfilling the responsibility of a Muslim and the rights towards the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, the al-Rifā'īyyah tariqa demanded the followers to always do the Salawat (prayer or salutation) on the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and his family. The principles mentioned are the main obligatory principles of the followers of the Rifā'īyyah Tariqa (al-Şayyādi, T.th).

The Development of the al-Rifā'īyyah Tariqa in the Malay World

The al-Rifā'īyyah Tariqa continued to grow until it arrived in the Malay World. The introduction of the al-Rifā'īyyah tariqa into the Malay Civilization started with a figure who came from the village of Ranir located in Gujarat, India. He is Sheikh Nur al-Din al-Ranīri who had settled in Pahang in the year before 1637 AD to spread and preach Islamic teachings. The history of his arrival began in Aceh during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda but his presence was not welcomed by the Palace, thus he moved to Pahang and settled there (al-Ahmadi, 1981). He returned to Aceh

after the death of Sultan Iskandar Muda and the leadership was handed over to Sultan Iskandar Thani. There, he was appointed as *Qadi Muluk*, the *Qadi* (a judge in an Islamic country) for the Islamic Kingdom of Aceh (Catherine, 1979).

Al-Ranīri was the figure responsible for spreading the al-Rifā'īyyah teachings in the Malay World. He was permitted and entrusted to spread the teachings of this tariqa by his teacher, al-Sayyid Abu Hafis Umar bin Abdullah Ba Shayban al-Tārimi al-Hadrāmi also known as al-Sayyid Umar al-'Aydarus (Ahmad Daudy, 1978). The reason why he managed to gain a place in the community and influence the local community was because of his position as a Qadi Muluk for the government, which made it easier for him to spread religious teachings and tariqa. In addition, his mastery of the Malay language also helped, which can be proven through two Malay works written when he was in the Malay Peninsula entitled *Şirāt al-Mustaqīm* which discussed the *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *Hidāyat al-Ḥabīb fī'l-Taghrīb wa al-Tarhīb* which was related to the *hadith*, which was written in both Malay and Arabic. Through his language mastery, he also spread the Sufism teachings through his masterpiece while in Aceh, entitled *Bustān al-Salātin*.

Additionally, another factor that was seen to widely expand al-Rāniri's da'wah was due to the polemic that occurred between him and the *al-Wūjudiyyah* group. This group was pioneered by the great figures of Aceh such as Hamzah al-Fanşūri. He assumed that al-Wūjudiyyah followers had an element of unification between creatures and God, that al-Rāniri labeled them as people who had fallen into disbelief, impiety, and heresy. Moreover, al-Rāniri also issued a fatwa of the death penalty for the *al-Wūjudiyyah* group and burned all their writings (Azyumardi, 1995). Apart from the issue of *al-Wūjudiyyah* or *Wahdat al-Wujud*, another reason that became a polemic between al-Rāniri and al-Fanşuri was the *al-Wūjudiyyah*'s beliefs towards the Qur'an. According to al-Rāniri, the *al-Wūjudiyyah* group had the same belief as the al-Muktazilah and al-Qadariyyah groups on the issue of the Quran because they hold that the Quran is a creation. The *al-Wūjudiyyah* group was also claimed by al-Rāniri to be dangerous because they believed that the spirit and soul are neither creatures nor the *Khaliq* (Creator) (al-Attas, 1966).

The authority and the position of al-Rāniri began to falter after the death of Sultan Iskandar Thani in 1641 AD. The leadership was replaced by Sultanah Safiyat al-Din (d. 1675 AD) who was the wife of Sultan Iskandar Thani. Al-Rāniri's position was challenged when the State of Aceh was surprised by the arrival of a Shaykh from India named Shaykh Sayf al-Rijal. The arrival of

Shaykh Sayf al-Rijal also gave new life to the al-Fanşuri's followers because he explained all the confusion and accusations of al-Rāniri against the al-Wujudiyah group. The climax of the al-Wujudiyah polemic led to a debate between al-Rāniri and Sayf al-Rijal, a victory in favor of Sayf al-Rijal, thus Sayf al-Rijal began to gain attention and a place in the administration of the Sultanate. Al-Rāniri accepted the defeat and resigned as Qadi Muluk, among other reasons because al-Rāniri did not agree with the leadership of a woman. Al-Rāniri abdicated and returned to Rānir, India until he died (Ito Takeshi, 1978).

The Influence of the Al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa on the Art of Dabus Dance

Dabus is a dance or a play that combines several aspects of sounds such as drums, *dabus*, gongs, and poetry consisting of zikrs streamlined with the rustling sound of *Anak Dabus* (a Dabus musical instrument used by the dancers) which ends with a performance using sharp instruments (Mohd Kipli, 2016). There is also a view that states this dance in the early stages, is an art of self-defense founded by Sayyidina Ali R.A, which aimed to cause the enemies terror and fear (KKKM, 2011).

Dabus dance is believed to have been introduced in the Malay world more than 200 years ago. Dabus Dance began in Perak and expanded in Selangor. The Malaysian Ministry of Communication and Culture (KKKM) recorded that the Dabus Dance was used by Commander Kulop Mentok to fight the Dutch on Pangkor Island around 1680-1690 (KKKM, 2003). In addition, the British in 1826AD borrowed Pangkor Island for trading purposes from Perak. At that time, there was the seizure of trading ships by pirates. So the British asked Dabus members for help to fight the pirates until finally the pirates were defeated with the strength of 100 Dabus dancers. The work also recorded the impact of the *Dabus* success in the community as a factor for the continuous growth in Kuala Selangor. The Dabus dance continues to have a strong foothold in Kuala Selangor to the extent that the Selangor Cultural Council declared this dance a traditional dance. Moreover, the Selangor Cultural Council also published a research series entitled *Dabus Daerah Kuala Selangor* (Syed Mahadzir & Awaludin, 2009).

Dabus is also known by the Acehnese people as the Rapa'i Dance. Notice the pronunciation of the word Rapa'i is similar to the word al-Rifā'i, which is also one of the strong proofs that there is an influence of Al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa on the Dabus Dance. Snouck Hurgroje (d. 1936AD) noted that the Rapa'i Dance is an art that spreads among the Aceh community and was influenced by the

teachings of the al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa (Snouck, 1906). Ghulam Sarwar (b. 1939M) also thought that the history of the Dabus Dance originates from Baghdad, which was founded by the Rifā'iyah Tariqa and the entry of the Dabus Dance into the Perak was through Daieng Mentanu when he wanted to save Perak and Malacca from the pirate colonization (Ghulam, 2015). The evidence and argument that there is an influence of the al-Rifā'iyah Tariqah were further strengthened by J. Vredendregt's argument that the art of the Dabus Dance had a strong connection with the Islamic teachings and that the Dabus Dance was led by a Shaykh who practiced the teachings of the Rifā'i Tariqa (J. Vredendregt, 1973). Through early historical records of the Dabus Dance, there is clear evidence of influence between the al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa and the Dabus Dance.

The concept and background of the Dabus Dance in the Malay World begin with careful preparation before being performed in front of the audience. The Dabus team must have at least 22 members consisting of musical instrument players, dancers or *anak Dabus* players, and a *Khalifah* or *Shaykh* (leader). The Khalifah is the main teacher of the Dabus Dance and the person responsible for ensuring the safety of the group members. According to KKKM (2003), Khalifah started the performance by opening the Dabus Arena. The Dabus Arena would be smoked and the stage, musicians, and dancers would be sprinkled with spelled water. One of the main purposes of this practice of smoking and sprinkling water is to avoid any spiritual interference and any maliciousness intended to test the Dabus players. This is because Dabus players will stab themselves with sharp tools (KKKM, 2003).

Some prohibitions for the Dabus players to ensure the smoothness of the performance and avoid any unwanted things every Dabus player must maintain personal hygiene and the cleanliness of the Dabus performance sites or arenas. The second prohibition that must be observed by the Dabus players is to maintain inner cleanliness by always being aware of immoral acts and abandoning all abusive, sarcastic, and obscene words. Dabus players are also forbidden to be envious and hostile towards fellow Dabus members. Prohibition when using tools or Anak Dabus, it is mandatory to carefully keep the Anak Dabus by placing it in a special place and not stepping on it (Fatimah, 2013).

The protocol of the Dabus performance started with the beat of the drum played by the musicians. Then, *Maulid al-Barzanji* or sometimes *Burdah al-Busiri* is recited. There is also a performance using Malay verses of praise. The verses of praise are of divinity, love for Prophet

Muhammad S.A.W, and advice for the community. Among the verses that have been arranged in Malay are as follows:

*Baju putih selendang putih,
Baju dipakai pergi sembahyang,
Allah kasih Muhammad kasih,
Rasulullah terlalu sayang*

*Bismillah di utus Ya Allah mula di surat-surat
Ya Rasulullah
Setelah disurat Ya Allah digulung-gulung
Ya Rasulullah
Nabi Muhammad Ya Allah belum
Berangkat
Ya Rasulullah
Malaikat yang banyak Ya Allah
Mengembangkan bayu
Ya Rasulullah*

The lyrics contained in the verses above explain the demand to maintain a relationship with Allah S.W.T and Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. In addition, some verses are sung as advice and encouragement to the community to continue doing good deeds, for example:

*Tuan Haji berbaju jubah,
Pergi ke Padang berburu rusa,
Orang mengaji memuji Allah,
Orang sembahyang mengampun dosa*

*Budak-budak pergi ke sekolah,
Lagi mendapat lagi terpuji,
Cukup duit pergi ke Mekah,
Boleh berziarah ke Makam Nabi*

It is clear that based on the lyrics sung by the Dabus players, it is not a fable or mere entertainment, but this performance is used as a stage to give advice and call on the community to practice religion. The highlight of the Dabus performance is the showcase of heroism by stabbing themselves using Anak Dabus. This act is a symbol to show the heroic nature that is never afraid of any danger (KKKM, 2011).

As for the Dabus performance in the teachings of the Rifā'iyyah Tariqa, it is performed in the zikr ceremony. Before the Dabus is performed, the Dabus players have to wait for permission from the Tariqa Shaykh. After receiving permission from the Tariqa Shaykh, the ceremony will

begin with the recitation of zikr, Salawat, and verses from the Qur'an. The Dabus dance is also performed along with the recitation of Maulid, Qasidah (a form of poetry), and Salawat. The Dabus performance ended with a prayer and was sometimes ended with religious lectures as advice and guidance for the congregation (Fawwaz, 20 Jun 2022).

In general, the concept of Dabus Dance which uses sharp tools as the main performance tool is exactly similar to the performance in the teachings of the Rifā'iyah Tariqa. The sharp instrument used by Dabus Dancers is known as *Anak Dabus*. The similarity between the practice of al-Rifā'iyah and the Dabus Dance on the use of sharp tools proved the relationship between the two. In addition, the use of the term Dabus also exists in the al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa's practice. Al-Baḥṭāwi who is an al-Rifā'iyah's figure has recorded that among the teachings of the al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa is practicing the Dabus Dance (al-Baḥṭāwi, 2015). There is no record of al-Sayyid Ahmad al-Rifā'i ever using sharp instruments in the ceremony he led, but there are still some narrations that state among the performances in the al-Rifā'iyah teachings is playing or stabbing oneself with a sharp instrument (al-Alusi, T.th). Ibn Khallikan (d. 1282 AD) also narrates about the superiority of the congregation of al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa to play with sharp instruments such as Dabus by stabbing themselves without causing any harm (Ibn Khallikan, 1978).

Conclusion

The al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa is one of the definitive tariqas that has true Sufi discipline and ethics. The development of the Al-Rifā'iyah Tariqa in the Malay world also influenced the artistic elements of the Malay community. History also records that Dabus Dance is not merely a performance dance but is a martial art to defend religion, nation, and civilization.

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