

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fatani and His *Bisyaratul 'Amilin wa Nazaratul ghafilin*: A Contribution in Hadith Studies

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Abstract: Manuscripts on Hadith written by scholars from the Malay Archipelago had begun in the 17th century. Ahmad al-Fatani who is the subject of discussion in this present paper had written several manuscripts that can be categorized under the earliest writings in field of Hadith. Even though the obvious integral subjects of the writings were on similar discussions on tasawuf and *fiqh*, however he was evaluated and judged by his successors as a very meticulous and vigilant scholar with regards to transmitting Hadiths. He wrote both in Arabic and Malay languages. Among his manuscripts which were classified by Wan Mohd Saghir Abdullah as works on Hadith are Kitab *Bisyaratul 'Amilin Wa Nazaratul Ghafilin*. This paper examines the main idea of his work which is considered as a reference in traditional madrasah system in the region.

Key words: Manuscripts % Hadith % Malay Archipelago % Patani % Ulama

INTRODUCTION

The history of intellectual or academic writings by scholars of the Malay Archipelago had begun from the 16th century to the early 20th century. Among the earliest manuscripts are those written by Sheikh Nuruddin ar-Raniri and Sheikh Abdur Rauf bin Ali al-Fansuri. One of the manuscripts entitled *Al-Fawaidul Bahiyah fi al-AHadith Nabawiyah* which is also known as *Hidayatul Habib fi al-Targhib* was written by Sheikh Nuruddin ar-Raniri. Another manuscript is *Syarh Latif 'ala Arba'ina Hadithan lil Imam Nawawi* which was written by Sheikh Abdur Rauf bin Ali al-Fansuri [1].

This is inferred from the first manuscript discovered by the Malay Treasure Research team. The manuscript titled *al-Fawaid al-Bahiyah fi AHadith al-Nabawiyyah*

(1045H/1635M) was written by Sheikh Nuruddin Muhammad b. Ali b. Husanji ibni Muhammad Hamid al-Raniri al-Syafi'i [2]. From the analysis of several earliest manuscripts, it can be concluded that most of those writings were in the form of manuscripts. The primary aim of those manuscripts was to give a better understanding to the Malays on advices, commands and reminders from the sayings of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.). These writings were directed and focused on discussions on *fiqh* which advocated a particular school of thought such as as-Syafi'i school of thought; discussion on tasawuf and purification of the self; and translation of various manuscripts into the Malay language targeted for those who did not understand Arabic. Instances of translated books were *Syarh Latif 'ala 'Arba'in Hadithan li al-Imam Nawawi* and *Tanbih al-Ghafilin* by Sheikh Abdullah b. Abdul Mubin Pauh Bok al-Fatani.

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Introduction to Bisyaratul ‘Amilin Wa Nazaratul Ghafilin and its Writer: Ahmad bin Mohd Zain bin Mustafa bin Mohd al-Fatani who was better known as Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani was a prominent scholar of the 18th century [3].

The book *Bisyaratul ‘Amilin wa Nazaratul Ghafilin* was literally translated by its writer as “Happiness for those who practice and fearsome for those who forget” or can be translated into modern language as “Glad tidings for those who do good deeds and reminder for those who forget”. This manuscript was completed in Makkah on Sunday night, 14th Rabiulakhir 1304M/1887H. The first edition of this writing was printed by Matba’ah al-Miriyyah Makkah in the year 1304H/1887M in a form of a manuscript. Subsequently, this book was reprinted by Persama Press, Pulau Pinang [3]. However, a new and improved edition was reprinted in 1420H/1999M under the collection of Haji Wan Saghir Abdullah. The new edition was more organized and structured. This book contains 14 chapters and 71 pages. At the end of this book there were small collections of *fiqh* rulings by Fataniyyah. However, these chapters were not included in the table of contents of the book. A total of 331 Hadith of various categories were included in various chapters of the book [4-6].

Sheikh Ahmad Al-fatani and Science of Hadith: As a scholar, Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani was particular in the science of Hadith *riwayah* dan *dirayah*. This is evident in his writing in the introduction of this book. Sheikh Ahmad wrote that he purposely omitted the Hadith chain of narrators to simplify the discussions. This is because he extracted Hadiths as evidences from prominent and renowned books such as *Riyad al-Salihin* by Imam Nawawi, *al-Jami’ al-Saghir* by Imam Jalaluddin as-Suyuthi, *Tanbih al-Ghafilin* and *Qurrah al-‘Uyun* by al-Faqih Abi Laith al-Samarqandi and *Mukhtasar Tazkirah al-Qurtubi* by Imam Abdul Wahhab al-Sya’rani [7]. The omission of the chain of narrators can be considered as common practice by many well-known scholars. Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani was considered as an expert in the science of Hadith by Wan Mohd Saghir [8]. For instance, Sheikh Ahmad was asked regarding the status of Hadith in *Ihya’ Ulumuddin* by Imam al-Ghazali particularly the status of Hadith on taking salt before eating and ending eating with salt. Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani gave an elaborated answer for the question based on the science of *Mustalah al-Hadith* and he also mentioned about *Rijal al-Hadith* (Men of Hadith).

To further prove his point, the Sheikh also mentioned names of scholars and their opinions regarding the matter as well as stating books that he referred to substantiate his views. Such books that he referred to were *al-Mawdu’at* by Ibnu Jawzi, *Taqrib Tahdhib* by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani and *al-Lali al-Masnu’ah* by Imam Hafiz as-Suyuthi [7].

Therefore, it is safe to conclude that Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani can be considered as a Malay intellectual who was very particular in the trustworthiness and authenticity of Hadith riwayat by analyzing Hadith extracted from prominent books of Hadith [8]. Further, he had written a book on *Rijal al-Hadith* (Men of Hadith) but it was in a form of incomplete manuscript. This book contains Sheikh Ahmad’s notes on a particular scholar of Hadith and other scholars with names long enough to give information about the genealogy of the scholars [7]. This book also reported names of the scholars’ teachers and gurus with complete sanad and year of birth and death of those scholars. From one perspective, we can conclude that this book could be understood and categorized as a book that is akin to books on methodology of Hadith *riwayah* and narrators. It is not on the chains of Hadith narrators but on the chains of his teachers’ teachers. This conclusion is made based on his statement “...recording the names of their teachers who can be known complete with sanad and year of birth and death...” Therefore, we can infer that he had adapted the methodology of reporting the chains of Hadith narrators to determine the authenticity of Hadith to reporting the chains of teachers of each generation to verify the validity of the knowledge passed down from generation to generation. The statement “...about names of a particular Hadith scholar...” can be interpreted as the *riwayah* of knowledge transmitted by them. But it was not on the *riwayah* of Hadith. It was more on *riwayah* of information from previous teachers using the method of chains of narrators. It is similar to how tariqat teachers transmitted down aurat *zikr* to their disciples using sanad method.

Discussion in the Book: Fundamentally this book can be considered as an endeavor towards disseminating knowledge on tasawuf and purification of the self. This can be observed from the arrangement of the chapters with topics of discussion that are centered upon promoting and encouraging good behavior and doing good deeds; and reminding wrongdoers and sinners of Allah’s retributions. However, Wan Saghir Abdullah had

classified this book under writings on Hadith since the author was advocated as a scholar who was trustworthy in ensuring the authenticity of Hadiths used as evidences in his book. Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani had arranged this book which emphasized on *tasawuf* (purification of the self) for the public. This is apparent in the introduction of his book. He wrote:

"...in it are wisdoms taught by Mustafa p.b.u.h. which comprised encouragement to be obedient and warning to discourage immoral behavior" [9].

After stating the aim and objectives of writing the book, the author began the introduction chapter with an explication on the primacy of knowledge, seekers of knowledge and scholars. After a thorough discussion on knowledge, the author started the first chapter with a topic on "the significance of prayer and the benefits of congregational prayer and the punishment for neglecting prayer". In the second chapter, the author discussed "on stating the importance of fasting, the primacy of the month of Ramadhan and advantages of *lailatul Qadar*". The third chapter deals with the benefits of Haj and Umrah (pilgrimage to Makkah) and denigrating those who refused to perform it. This chapter also discusses on the rewards for visiting Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. In the fourth chapter, the author discussed on the benefits of giving *sadaqah* and the retributions for obstructing zakat. The fifth chapter focuses on punishment for usury, theft and reducing measurement in trade. Chapter six centered upon punishment for committing adultery, homosexuality and sodomy.

Chapter seven focuses on punishment for intoxication. Chapter eight exposes punishment for committing murder. Chapter nine discusses the rewards for treating parents with goodness and punishment for disobeying or mistreating parents. Chapter ten focuses on religious obligation of straitening and continuing good relationship with family and relatives and the prohibition of cutting the family ties. Chapter eleven explains the benefits of treating wife with kindness and stating the rights a wife has on her husband; and expound the obligation of a wife to respect her husband. Chapter twelve explicates the obligation to guard the tongue from lying, backbiting, backstabbing and envy, selfish and other sicknesses of the heart. Chapter thirteen states the significance of good moral behavior and several collections of good and obligatory conducts. Chapter fourteen discusses on the obligation and the importance of governing and treating people under

authority and responsibility with kindness and compassion. This chapter also gives warnings to those who govern with atrocity and glad tidings to those who govern with justice.

Methodology of Arranging Evidences and Arguments:

Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani started the discussion in each chapter of this book with an insertion of Qur'anic verses. He mentioned that "*...and I adorned each chapter of this book with verses from the Glorious Qur'an which are relevant with the context of discussion...*". However, he neither provided the number nor the chapter of the verses. Similarly, he did not mention the narrators or the reporters of the Hadiths cited in his book. He only mentioned that the particular statements were sayings of the Prophet p.b.u.h. and sometimes he disclosed the earliest reporter of the Hadith. Normally Sheikh Ahmad would use proof from the Qur'an at the beginning of a discussion by stating one or two verses of the Qur'an and he would also quote Hadiths to support and strengthen his views. Typically the number of Hadiths used in his book to support each of his view ranging from 3 to 89 Hadith. Further, he would also cite sayings of the Prophet's companions and ahar to substantiate his point of views.

Methodology of Hadith Writing:

The author had mentioned clearly the method used in writing this book. One of the methods is that he did not mention the chains of narrators of the Hadith quoted in his book for the purpose of simplifying the discussions. This is because he concluded that each Hadith used as evidence in this book was taken from prominent and renowned books whereby the authors of those books had already determined the status of the Hadith. He mostly wrote "*...and the Prophet said...*" and the rest he would write "*it is reported from Ibnu Abbas r.a. from the Prophet that the Prophet had said...*" and "*...it is reported from the Prophet that he had said...*". In addition, he would mostly translate the Hadiths without mentioning the matan. The author wrote "*...I collected this Hadith and translated them into the Malay language so that they would be as reminders for me...*"[9].

According to Sakinah Sapinah Maamor, "*...This book, Bisyarah, contains less than 331 Hadith and this...,...the researcher asserted that the endeavor to verify the Hadith in this book is difficult since the majority of matan of the Hadiths included in this book were not mentioned and only several Hadiths stated the highest narrators among the companions of the Prophet...*"[9].

Introduction to the Amount of Evidences in Bisyaratul ‘Amilin Wa Nazaratul Ghafilin: Early in the introduction of his book, Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani highlighted the focus and objectives of his book. He said that “*this is a manuscript which I incorporated in it authenticated sayings of the Prophet and several chapters of this book contains verified wisdoms of Mustafa p.b.u.h. which give glad tidings to those who do good deeds and warnings to those who commit immoral behavior...*”[9].

Research conducted by Sakinah Sapinah Maamor revealed the Hadith used in this book to support the author’s arguments. There are 17 Hadith in the Introduction. The first chapter is on rewards for performing congregational prayer and punishment for neglecting prayer. In this chapter, the author presented two Qur’anic verses and 37 Hadith to substantiate his position. The selected Hadith were from various sources and narrated by different Prophet’s companions and scholars. Only four Hadith in this chapter come with narrators and reporters to strengthen the status of the Hadith. As for the rest of the Hadith, the author only mentioned that the Prophet p.b.u.h. had said this.

In the second chapter on the benefits and rewards of fasting, month of Ramadhan and *lailatul Qadar*, the author presented one Qur’anic verse and 14 Hadith. The Hadith are related to the encouragement and rewards for fasting and doing good deeds in the month of Ramadhan.

For the third chapter, the author mentioned one Qur’anic verse and 15 Hadith to support his view on the primacy of performing Haj and Umrah; on retributions for failing to perform Haj and Umrah; and rewards and benefits of visiting Prophet Muhammad.

The author presented two Qur’anic verses and 21 Hadith in chapter four to substantiate his views on the benefits and rewards of giving alms and warnings for obstructing payment of zakat.

The author cited two Qur’anic verses and 15 Hadith in the fifth chapter to demonstrate the punishment for usury, theft and reducing measurement in trade.

To highlight and support his position on the retributions for committing adultery, homosexuality and sodomy, the author presented two Qur’anic verses and 17 Hadith in chapter six.

There are one Qur’anic verse and 6 Hadith in chapter seven to prove the punishment for intoxication.

To show the grave punishment for committing murder, the author presented evidence from the Qur’an and three Hadith in chapter eight.

Chapter nine comprises one Qur’anic verse and 17 Hadith to support the author’s position on rewards and primacy of being kind to parents and punishment for disobeying parents.

In chapter ten which focuses on the religious obligation of strengthening family ties and prohibition of cutting the family ties, the author cited three Qur’anic verses and 10 Hadith to support his assertions.

The subsequent chapter is to substantiate the position on rewards and benefits of treating wife with kindness; and to explicate a wife’s rights and obligations upon her husband, the author cited one Qur’anic verse and 12 Hadith.

Chapter twelve conveys the obligation for Muslims to guard the tongue from lying, backbiting, backstabbing, envy, selfishness and so on. To strengthen these positions, the author presented seven Qur’anic verses and 24 Hadith.

Chapter 13 comprises 3 Qur’anic verses and 89 Hadith to demonstrate and prove the significance of good moral character; to highlight and support the author’s list of several collections of deeds that are deemed favorable; and to emphasize and prove the author’s view on all obligatory matters.

Chapter 14 focuses on politics and good governance. The author cited two Qur’anic verses and 34 Hadith to substantiate his points on the obligation of a leader to govern with kindness and compassion; to give warnings and to inform on grave punishment for tyranny; and to state the advantages of ruling justly.

In conclusion, there are 331 Hadith used in this book to support the author’s views. Therefore, this book can be categorized as Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani’s contribution in *al-Tarhib wa al-Tarhib*. Further, this book can be classified as writing on moral and ethical conduct to guide Muslims of how to live their life and the Hadith collections in this book were cited for the purpose of supporting the author’s views on moral and ethical behavior. This book is not a work on science of Hadith *riwayah* and Hadith *dirayah* as claimed. Therefore, the Hadith in this book have to be analyzed and verified to maintain the authenticity of the Hadith.

Status of Hadith in Bisyaratul ‘Amilin Wa Nazaratul Ghafilin: From the analysis done by Sakinah Sapinah Maamor on 234 Hadith from this book, it is evident that the author of this book did not refer to books of Hadith but to other prominent books. He cited Hadith which were used by prominent scholars in their books. This means

that the author referred to secondary and tertiary sources as his references. The author had categorized several Hadith into *sahih* Hadith or Hadith reported by prominent scholars of Hadith namely al-Bukhari and Muslim. He also labeled some Hadith as *sahih*, *hasan*, *da'if* and *mawdu'*. He mentioned some Hadith were reported by al-Bukhari only or with other muhaddithin; Hadith reported by Muslim only or with other muhaddithin; and there were Hadith which the author did not mention their status but he cited the Hadith because the Hadith were reported by many muhaddithin, only because he was not certain of the status of the Hadith whether the Hadith were *sahih*, *hasan*, *da'if* or *mawdu'*.

Precisely, this book cited 70 *sahih* Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim, 29 *hasan* Hadith, 73 *da'if* Hadith and 5 *mawdu'* Hadith. There were 3 Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and other muhaddithin, 26 Hadith reported by Muslim and 28 Hadith were of unknown status. The biggest percentage of Hadith cited in this book is *da'if* Hadith which accounted for 31% of the total Hadith; 30% *sahih* Hadith, 13% *hasan* Hadith, 12% Hadith of unknown status. Hadith reported by Muslim were 11% and 1% reported by al-Bukhari which was the smallest amount. Therefore, it can be concluded that the majority of Hadith cited in this book were *da'if* Hadith and it shows that Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani depended on scholars before him. It also demonstrates that Sheikh Ahmad was not strict and meticulous in filtering Hadith or he may have used the Hadith without determining the status of the Hadith.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, this book focuses on discussion about *al-Tarhib* and *al-Tarhib* supported by revealed and reported evidences. The arrangement of the chapters was adapted by the author according to his understanding of the Hadith and Qur'anic verses that he had summarized which centered upon topics of *al-tarhib* wa *al-tarhib*. At the end of each chapter, the author wrote prayers related to the topic discussed. For the present and future research, it is recommended that examination and verification of Hadith cited in this book be carried out to

determine the status of each Hadith for the purpose of guarding the authenticity of Hadith. The initial endeavor to determine the status of Hadith cited in Bisjarah has been done by the previous researcher and there are still 97 Hadith which are not yet investigated to ascertain their status. In addition, the process to put diacritical markings and improve the presentation of the book in terms of language and sentence structure should be done by adding to the list of the table of content. This may improve the quality and presentation of this book for the good of the Malay public in the future.

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