Rabi’ah al-Adawiyah’s Sufism Toward the Culmination of Spirituality in the Perspective of Irfani Epistemology

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Abstract
Islam with its teachings and guidelines for life will be able to make moslems more resilient to the problems of the modern era. In reality, Muslims have not achieved these ideals. Thus, there is a need to reactualize the spiritual dimension. This article aims to present the path of love towards Allah attributed to Rabi’ah Al Adawiyah and examine her concept with irfani sufism concept. The method in this research is library research by reviewing various literature in the form of journals, books, scientific articles, and other sources related to irfani Sufism and Rabi’ah Adawiyah’s mahabbah. The results of this study explain that Rabi’ah Al Adawiyah is one of the famous irfani figures with the concept of mahabbatullah which comes from inspiration to achieve makrifah. This concept provides a new style in taking the maqamat/spiritual journey of a salik to reach the level of karf. From the concept of Rabiah Adawiyah's mahabbah, although it slightly differentiates the stages of maqamat, the stages are in line with the concept of irfani. So that a unification between mahabbah and irfani will be obtained by combining the practice of sharia and riyadhah.

Keywords: Rabi’ah al-Adawiyah’s Mahabbah, Irfani Sufism; Islamic Spirituality; Islamic Sufism

Introduction
Modernization not only brings progress with its arrogance but also presents various problems in modern life that are increasingly demanding to be resolved. A small example is juvenile delinquency. Teenagers with their high curiosity and sophisticated technology even tend to make them experience moral decline. In addition, Azyumardi Azra in his view of modernization said that modernization has presented rationalization, liberalization, and also dehumanization. This will
erode spiritual values, which can cause modern society to lose direction and even lead people to immoral actions.¹

Westerners have reconsidered the spiritual dimension, due to ideological factors, the dominance of industrial technology, and the phenomenon of dysfunctional places of worship.² Their worldview is materialistic and secularized. From their perspective, it basically makes Westerners deny the purpose of life. Looking at the condition of Muslims, it should be with the teachings and guidelines of life that they have clearly owned will make them more resilient to face the problems of the modern era. In reality, Muslims have not yet achieved these ideals.³ This condition requires the reactualization of the spiritual dimension to help find a way out of these problems.

Islam as a religion of rahmatan lil 'alamin is very feasible to continue to realize the welfare of its people even in the midst of the modern era. Islam itself in the dimension of Sufism has long taught love or mahabbah to Allah, including sourced from the Qur'anic verse QS Ali Imran: 31, and QS Al-Maidah: 54. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad called for mahabbah to Allah while mentioning its great rewards both in this world and in the hereafter.⁴ And when the emergence of Sufistic life, the teaching is known as al-hayah al-ruhiah or spiritual life based on khauf (fear) and climbing the stage of tawakkal. From this fact, mahabbah is considered imperfect because it actually still means an obedience that ends in surrender. In the next Sufistic era, the Sufis' journey in mahabbah developed and based mahabbah on a selfless love for Allah because of the Sufi's own desire to be with Allah.

The discourse on Sufism is indeed very interesting, and this discourse does not last even though it has now entered the era of modernization. In fact, Sufism can be an alternative to relieve problems in the modern era. Mahabbah as a discourse in Sufism pioneered by Rabiah Adawiyah is important to be reviewed and used as one of the references for modern spiritual life. That is why there are many observers who study it both in terms of sources, validation, and so on, such as research conducted by Mutholingah who explained that irfani Sufism can be implemented in Islamic Religious Education⁵, Arafat and

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¹ Azyumardi Azra, Paradigma Barn Pendidikan Nasional, Rekonstruksi Dan Demokratisasi (Jakarta: Buku Kompas, 2002).
³ Sakdullah, “Tasawuf Di Era Modernitas (Kajian Komperhensif Seputar Neo-Sufisme).”
⁴ Abd al-Karim al-Qusyairi, Al-Risalah Al-Qusyairiyah (Kairo: Dar al-Khair, 1982), 218.
Farhan explained that Sufism is a manifestation of the concept of *ihsan* which is essentially a complement as well as a perfection of faith and Islam⁶, Prawira Negara explained that irfani is obtained at least through three stages, namely the stages of preparation, acceptance, and disclosure. As for irfani, although it is a philosophical study, irfani has developed into an independent branch.⁷

From the existing studies can be grouped into three focuses of study, namely validation and verification in irfani and the concept in mahabbah, in this article has a slight difference with the existing studies, namely, in this article will be studied about the concept of mahabbah Rabii‘ah Al Adawiyah in the world of Sufism and how the irfani perspective responds to the presence of the concept of mahabbah which has a different style from the concept of makrifat at that time. This article aims to describe irfani sufism especially the concept of mahabbah Rabii‘ah Al Adawiyah, and how the irfani perspective responds or examines Rabiah Adawiyah concepts. The expected benefits of this article can provide insight and knowledge in the process towards makrifat and make this article a reference in order to get closer to Allah SWT.

**Method**

The object of discussion in this research is the teaching of Robi‘ah 'Adawiyah regarding the concept of *mahabbah* which is a concept in Irfani Sufism. Researchers conducted *library research* from several previous journal articles and books on Irfani Sufism, especially about Rabii‘ah Adawiyah and her path of love towards Allah. book manuscripts, scientific articles, other people’s research results. This research is studied using a socio-historical approach by looking at the historical context experienced by Robi‘ah Adawiyah in finding the path of love towards Allah. The method of analysis is content analysis as follows: **First**, the researcher determines the irfani figure who is the focus of the object of research, namely Rabii‘ah Al Adawiyah, **second**, the researcher collects research data and sorts the data according to the focus of the study, **third**, the researcher describes the data obtained as a research discussion.

**Result and Discussion**

**Irfani Epistemology and Muslim Spirituality**

Linguistically, the term irfani or Irfan comes from *'arafa* and is synonymous with makrifat. Thus, Irfan alludes to knowledge that comes directly from God and is obtained on the basis of *hubb*. It is clear that irfani Sufism has the goal of

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reaching the point of realization by *kashf* or revelation.\(^8\) Irfan if classified is knowledge that belongs to the class of 'ilm hudhuri because it is obtained without an intermediary either sense or reason.\(^9\) Among the classifications of the early emergence of irfani are: (1) the assumption that irfani originated in Persia on the grounds that many people came from the Magi, (2) the application of *riyadhah* has been applied in previous religious teachings, (3) irfani originated in India, (4) Aristotle's theology which is a blend of *porphyry* and *Proclus* systems. Nevertheless, it is clear that in the lives of the Prophet, companions, and tabi’in, irfani has been practiced with *riyadhah* and *mujahadah.\(^10\)

The method used in irfani is in the form of three stages, the **first** there is preparation in receiving the abundance of knowledge from Allah known as *kasyf*, a salik should be required to go through spiritual phases to achieve it, at least here there are seven phases that must be passed by salik, such as *repentance, wira’i, zuhud, faqr, Shabar, tawakal and ridho*.\(^11\) **Second**, acceptance, in this stage a salik will get an abundance of knowledge from Allah with illuminative, in this second level the salik will obtain the reality of absolute consciousness (*kasyf*), to be able to do *musyahadah*. **Third**, the disclosure of mystical experiences that are interpreted and spoken to others through writing or expression, al-Ghozali calls it *ladunni*.

The central issue of Irfan is dzahir and batin. In Irfan one will understand from the meaning to the lafadz or from the inner to the outer. Irfan's knowledge relates to the union of God's presence in the self and vice versa or the presence of the self in God, so not all experiences and knowledge that is so clear can be expressed, thus many Irfan observers divide it into two stages, **first** a knowledge that cannot be expressed, **second**, a knowledge that can be expressed. A knowledge that can be expressed is divided into three parts: A knowledge that the actor conveys; Knowledge conveyed by others who are still in the same tradition (*Muslims with other Muslims*); Knowledge conveyed by others who are not in the same tradition (*Muslim to non-Muslim or vice versa*).\(^12\)

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\(^12\) Khudlori Sholeh, *Filsafat Islam Dari Klasik Hingga Kontemporer* (Jogjakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media, 2013), 256.
Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah's Sufism Toward the Culmination of...  

Based on the graphic above, Irfani has a fundamental structure, including its source which comes from revelation, through an intuitive approach and has basic principles in the form of morals, maqamat, and ma'rifah. Irfani is a form of emotional, spiritual and other inner experiences. Because it dominantly plays the work of the mind compared to the intellect, and as a form of spiritual revolution, Sufism becomes a system that gives birth to noble ethics.

In life in the modern era, Sufism should be used as a means of creating harmonious multi-religious associations. In contemporary studies, Sufism has proven to be active in disseminating its own approach, in harmony with pluralism, democracy, tolerance and coexistence. Among the thoughts in Sufism is the concept of Irfani Sufism in the form of Rabiah Al Adawiyah's mahabbah.

The concept of love taught by Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah is different from Sufistic understanding in general, through her view of love for the creator, Rabi'ah has passed through the vast field of ma'rifat with various efforts to purify herself which ultimately led Rabi'ah to find Allah. Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah signified the sincerity of her love and purity of her heart with her ignorance of the existence of heaven and hell. In a narration, it is told that Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah had run with a torch in one hand and a bucket of water in the other. Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah said that she wanted to extinguish the fire of hell and burn heaven with what she was carrying so that she could love Him solely lillah.13

**Rabi’ah al-Adawiyah’s Culmination of Spirituality; Towards Allah**

Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah has found her way to get closer to Allah. Robia teaches the path of love or what is known as mahabbah, and furthermore the purpose of her life is to immerse herself in loving Allah, which is a key to

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obtain the happiness in the world and hereafter.\textsuperscript{14} Imam Al-Qusyairi defines \textit{mahabbah} as a form of love that does not expect anything i

Rabi‘ah Adawiyyah did not leave behind any scholarly literature except her \textit{syi‘ir} for which were strongly remembered by her disciples and could only be written down a few years after her death. One of the most popular Rabiah Adawiyyah syi‘ir:

\begin{equation}
\text{أحبك حبيبى حب اللهوى}
\end{equation}

\begin{equation}
\text{فأنا الذي وحى بهوى}
\end{equation}

\begin{equation}
\text{فكشفك لي الحجاب حتي أراك}
\end{equation}

\begin{equation}
\text{فلا الحمد في ذا ولا ذلك لي ولكن لك الحمد في ذا وذاك}
\end{equation}

In the poem, Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyyah mentions two types of \textit{hubb}. The first is \textit{hubbul hawa}, and the second is \textit{hubb anta ahl lahu}. The meaning of \textit{hubbul hawa} is a love that is present and generated because of the goodness, enjoyments, or pleasure of Allah. The pleasures that comprise \textit{hubbul hawa} are material or \textit{indrawy}.\textsuperscript{15} While \textit{hubb anta ahlun lahu} means the opposite, not at all influenced by sensory pleasures but directly driven by the One who is loved because of His worthiness to be loved.

In essence, the first line of her syi‘ir above clearly illustrates that Rabi‘ah feels love for God as a whole, because when loving God, not only can feel love in a human way, but love for God becomes perfect when that love is based on the essence of God. Love, which is loving Allah because He is the Most Loving and the Owner of Love, the most loving and should be the only one most loved.\textsuperscript{16} In the next stanza, it is revealed that the love Rabi‘ah al-Adawiyyah felt for her own love as a person then influenced how God loved her. Rabi‘ah loves Allah by remembering Allah’s creatures, she loves Allah by remembering Him, remembering His creation, and by contemplating the existence of His creation.

Continuing in the next stanza, the concept described is about true love, namely loving Allah without any reason and without any attachment to other than Him. And in the last stanza, Rabi‘ah al-Adawiyyah in her poem shows that all goodness, pleasure, glory, are because of the will of Allah, so it should be returned to Allah.

\textsuperscript{14} Ma‘mun Gharib, \textit{Rabi‘ah Al-Adawiyyah Fii Mihrabul Hubbel Ilaby} (Kairo: Dar Gharib, 2014), 83–84.


Her most popular syiir is about mahabbatullah:

إلهي لو كنت أعبدك خوفا من نارك فأخرقني بحار جهّم
وأذا كنت أعبدك طمعا في جنتك فأحرق منيبا
وإذا كنت أعبدك من أجل محبّتك فلا تحرمني من مشاهدة وجهك

_O my Lord, if I worship You only out of fear of Your hell then burn me in Your hell. And if I worship You only for Your Paradise then expel me from Your Paradise. But, if I worship You for Your sake alone, give me Your beauty._17

Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah recited this poem very often as her hope not to be preoccupied with loving Allah because she wanted heaven or feared hell. Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah even asked her student: "If heaven and hell never existed, would you stop worshipping Him?".18 In her poem, the teaching offered by Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah regarding mahabbatullah is for humans to always serve Ilah sincerely without any reason. According to Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah, it is enough that the feeling of khushu' and pleasure in worship is the reason to continue to always be Allah’s servant.

In Sufi discourse, Rabi'ah is famous as a provocateur of the teaching of mahabbah with newer nuances than before. However, the meaning of mahabbah is not explained in detail in her various expressions. One of her expressions is that mahabbah comes from azali to the eternity. A mubibb with his mahabbah will reach the revelations of asrar or secrets that cannot be translated into words, can only be felt by al-mubibun. And the ethics of someone who has been able to mahabbatullah as taught by Rabi'ah Adawiyah, he no longer needs anything. In the teachings of Rabi’ah, mahabbah occupies a high stage and in achieving it, one must certainly go through various riyadhah. As for the division of this mahabbah, there are three levels, namely: (1) the mahabbah of the layman, which is by always remembering God; (2) the mahabbah of the shiddiq who is able to reveal the veil between God and humans and bring longing to Him; (3) the mahabbah of the wise who makes him a kassyaf or makrifah.21

The derivation of mahabbah has actually been said by Rabi'ah Adawiyah from the beginning. However, still mahabbah as a style in irfani Sufism cannot be separated from the tariqah and maqamat stages that a salik must go through.

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17 Qamar Kailani, _Fii At-Tashawwuf Al-Islamy_ (Dar al-Ma’rifah, 1976).
20 Gharib, _Rabi’ah Al-Adawiyah Fii Mihraabil Hubbil Ilahy_.
The stages of *maqamat* if based on the views of al-Sarraj al-Thusi, these stages are: *taubah, wara‘, zubud, faqr, shabar, tawakkal and ridla*\(^\text{22}\). As for the view of Rabi’ah Al Adawiyah, there is a slight difference in these stages:

![Diagram of Maqamat and Mahabbah](image)

**Graphic 2.**

**The Concept of Mahabbah Rabi’ah Adawiyah**

With the concept of *mahabbah*, a very strong teaching inscribed by Robi’ah gives the impact of *mahabbah* on humanism. Humanism upholds a freedom, in the sense that humanism does not stop in discussing the theme of freedom with humane character. If the freedom is fought for, it will create a spirit to uphold humanity accompanied by a form of humanist awareness which in essence does not want to reject the existence of the supernatural, it is impossible to reject God’s power. From here, the concept of *mahabbah* offered by Robi’ah ’Adawiyah brings a concept of religious humanism\(^\text{23}\).

Rabi’ah ‘Adawiyah creates the *bounder mahabbah* as follows:\(^\text{24}\) Love as a form of expression of love for Allah by prioritizing Allah over anything other than Him, occupying oneself to worship Him more, and accompanied by an attitude of *zubud*; Selfless love in loving Allah. This means that when someone loves Allah, he really loves Him without expecting rewards in the form of rewards, let alone heaven, and or hopes to be spared from the punishment of hell. However, it is really pure love to Him sincerely.

From the concept of mahabbah popularized by Rabi’ah Al Adawiyah, irfani is known to have a falsafi style of thought which is a development of the initial concept in the form of *divine mahabbah*, *itihaad*, and *hulul*. Robiah Adawiyah slightly differentiates with the concept of mahabbah which develops where in her teaching, in the concept of *mahabbah there is no need to cause an attitude of*

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fana’ or unconsciousness because as a person who is fall in love, he is actually aware of what he says.25

Mahabbah Rabi’ah Al Adawiyah in Irfani Perspective and its Relevance to Modern Islamic Life

The concept of Mahabbah initiated by Rabi’ah al-Adawiyah has a unique and ideal style. This is because the concept carried by Rabi’ah has a different style from other Sufism at that time. So it cannot be denied that the emergence of this style has a very large influence on the development of Sufism in later periods. Nevertheless, the concept brought by Rabi’ah did not escape being targeted by Sufism scholars, many of whom studied in depth the concept of mahabbah because it was considered interesting and unique26.

If we discuss and examine it in depth, Rabi’ah’s philosophy of mahabbah is very different from Sufistic understanding in general, through her view of love for the creator, Rabi’ah has passed through a vast field of ma’rifat with various efforts to purify herself which ultimately led Rabi’ah to find Allah. Sufism has a major role in carrying out a spiritual revolution in the Islamic world, then Rabi’ah re-describes the true form of understanding the concept of love.27

Rabi’ah al Adawiyah is one of the Irfani Sufi figures who was able to combine two Islamic thoughts: shari’ah and Sufism. That is, in addition to be a Sufi, someone has to be faqih. Imam Malik explained, “Whoever practices Sufism without the knowledge of Fiqh is called a zindiq, and whoever practices Fiqh without practicing Sufism is called a fasiq. Whoever balances between the two is the success one that finds haqiqat”.28

Rabi’ah Al Adawiyah’s view of Sufism is called irfani because of the acquisition of knowledge through various spiritual practices with the concept of mahabbah. From Rabiah Adawuyah's concept of mahabbah, the union between mahabbah and irfani. Talking about Rabiah Adawiyah’s Irfani epistemology, it is revealed that the acquisition of knowledge sources is more dominant in the context of discovery through spiritual practices known in Sufism as maqamat. The source of knowledge in Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah's irfani tasawwuf is not in the form of data or sensory representations.

27 Wahyuningsih and Hastuti, Rabi’ah Al-Adawiyah.
28 Ibnu Ajibah Al-Hasani, Al-Futuhat Ilahiyah Fi Syarhi Mubahits Ashliyah (Lebanon: Dar Al-Kotoob Al-Islamiyah, 2010), 64.
The nas dimension in irfani Sufism is divided into exoteric and esoteric. However, irfani is more inclined towards the esoteric dimension. The target of irfani is the esoteric aspect of sharia which is obtained by the *qalb* through intuition, kashf, *i'lam*, and isyraq. Unlike the bayani episteme which is dominated by the exoteric dimension through the means of the senses and intellect.  

The teaching of Sufism of Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah with the concept of *mahabbah* teaches *salik* to be smart in carrying out spiritual and emotional control so that a *salik* can remain firm with his religion in all conditions whether when dealing with calamity, luck, or various other life challenges. And the poems of Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah, one of which contains love for Allah selflessly, suggests that doing worship has real moral and social implications, namely the person manifests into real morals or behaviour.

Other Sufi figures who have the concept of *mahabbah* include Jalaludin Rumi. There is only a slight difference with Rumi’s stance that *mahabbah* or love is the fitrah of every human being. As Allah says in QS Ar-Ruum: 30, “So set your faces straight toward the religion (Islam) according to the fitrah (nature) of Allah, who created man according to it”.

From this, Rumi views that *mahabbah* is indeed human nature, already embedded in every human being. Humans are not assigned to look for love but to look for everything that hinders love to lead to the Most Love. In other words, Jalaluddin Rumi's concept of *mahabbah* is to conquer lust to actualize the potential of fitrah in the form of love so that a salik can know his Rabb and reach the highest Sufi level in the form of *makrifat*.

From the explanations above, *mahabbah* is in line with the concept of Islam as a religion of compassion. The meeting point is the outpouring of divine love which has implications for spiritual and emotional intelligence. *Mahabbah*, if used as a spiritual foothold for Muslims, is able to form a good attitude for *salik* so that they can address all the problems that exist in any era wisely.

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Conclusion

Rabi’ah Al Adawiyah is one of the famous irfani figures with the concept of mahabbatullah which comes from inspiration to achieve makrifah. This concept provides a new style in taking the maqamat/spiritual journey of a salik to reach the level of karf. From the concept of Rabiah Adawiyah's mahabbah, although it slightly differentiates the stages of maqamat, the stages are in line with the concept of irfani. So that a unification between mahabbah and irfani will be obtained by combining the practice of sharia and riyadhah. Rabi’ah Al Adawiyah has the concept of mahabbatullah, namely loving Allah solely lillah, and this is the path to makrifah.

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