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**Indexing**



## Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali: A Malaysian Sufi of Modern Era

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### Abstract

Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali, a Sheikh in Malaysia, is a great religious thinker of the present era. His thoughts should be examined in the middle of a society to offset the social stress which exists on account of COVID-19, although previously the teachings of Islam are seen and understood by the local community as deviant teachings. Of course, such views are not acceptable only to the truth of teachings they convey. His students come from a variety of backgrounds, including educators, government officials, and speakers. The study uses qualitative research approaches, namely the Historical approach and the Islamic theory approach. The ultimate aim is to study and examine the biography of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali and his thoughts on Sufism in the Contemporary Era. With the objective to analyse and identify the history and life of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali and to express the role of his thinking on the directions of Sufism as a way to combat the stress of Covid-19. The findings of this research shows that Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali is a famous scholar who has fought with his missionary activities inviting the Muslim community in Malaysia to practice the teachings of Islam in accordance with the law of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

**Keywords:** Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali, Sufism, Tasawwuf, COVID-19 pandemic, Islam, a way of life

### Introduction

As the Muslim, we are guided by the holy Qur'ān, the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and *ijma ulama* (the consensus or agreement of Islamic scholars on the point of Islamic law) in embracing Islam as a way of life and as the main reference to all of the life's trials and tribulations encountered on all levels, be it individual, family, or the Ummah level. The COVID-19 pandemic that has struck the world circa December 2019 until this point of writing (July 2021) is no different. Let us ponder this verse: "And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient, who, when disaster strikes them, say, "Indeed we belong to Allah , and indeed to Him we will return."<sup>1</sup>

COVID-19 is a test of our conviction. 'To Allah do we belong' should us to think that whatever has been sacrificed for God has attained its legitimate end, for all things truly belong to the One. 'And it is to Him that we are destined to return' serves to remind us that

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<sup>1</sup>Al - Baqarah, 2:155-156; Adh - Dhariyat, 51:56.

man will not stay forever in this world and will return, sooner or later, to God. It is a reminder to pursue self-aggrandizement and then meet death either by sickness or other decreed means.

In facing the pandemic, the Muslims especially should take it in their stride, think positively, uphold their Imān to serve as a shield against the pandemonium, and get close to Allah in the hope of receiving His blessings and mercy in this world and the hereafter.

Those who strive and have been blessed with the knowledge of their Lord will have a higher rank for them. With such knowledge, one understands that the practices of religion are the form of wisdom and that by accepting the form, one realizes the substance. The ways and means of realizing the substance within the form is called *Sufism*.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

This study consists of five sections as follows; Section one introduces the ways of writing a study as the basis of research, including the introduction, background of the study, research problems, research objectives, research questions, importance of the study, research terms, and research methodology.

Section two is about literature review, research framework and conclusion. This section also discusses the Sheikh's narration or genealogy as a figure. Section three is the concept of Sufi Thought in the contemporary era. In this section, the author discusses the Sufi thought itself, the perspective and direction of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali's confidence in conveying Sufi thought in the contemporary era. This discussion is a must and acts as the study's essence in looking at his Sufi thoughts and concepts as the title of the study.

Section four is the misunderstanding of Sufi thinking in the contemporary era. In this section, the author discusses how the acceptance of the Muslim community in the contemporary era and the effects and methods of delivery of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali in dispelling the notion or misunderstanding. This discussion is important to know the extent of the concept of thinking of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali and his role in rejecting the notion in answering the study's objectives, research questions, and research problems.

Section five is the conclusion of this study. The author presents some conclusions and suggestions that are useful for the Muslim community, especially in Malaysia. Similarly, some suggestions to further enhance the appreciation of the Sufi concept in the contemporary era, which is the most important element in the formation of the Muslim personality as well as to combat the stress of COVID-19 and is also the primary source to get closer to Allah.

## 3. Research Background

The peace of the secret center of the heart is achieved by cleansing the heart of each thing and preparing it to receive Allah's Essence alone by means of constant inward remembrance and recital of *lā ilāha illā Llāh* (there is no God but Allah) in silence. With

this remembrance and recitation of Allah's Names, the heart wakes up from heedlessness, becomes cleansed and shining. "Be heedful; verily upon the friends of Allah there is no fear, nor do they grieve. For them there are glad tidings in this life and in the hereafter..."<sup>2</sup>

The way to realize his truth is through his pleasure. When you do deeds for his sake that meet his approval, you come close to his truth.<sup>3</sup> Good deeds are the mother that bears the child of truth: the conscious life of an actual human being. If one acts and exists for anything but Allah's sake alone, one is putting others in place of Allah. This is an unforgivable sin that sooner or later destroys one. When one reaches the state of sanctity (*fana'*), one receives eternal purity and becomes one of the companions of the garden, therein to dwell (forever)<sup>4</sup> However, one needs a great deal of patience, and Allah is with those who patiently persevere.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. Literature Review

These are the writings made by Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali himself and also other authoritative researchers on the concept of Sufism in the modern contemporary era.

The manuscript under overview of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali, contains his biography, name, age, occupation, address, and education. In writing this manuscript, Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali presents his origin as well as his struggles, the experiences of associating and preaching as well as his passion for seeking religious knowledge from his teachers during his life.<sup>6</sup> The summary mentioned the moments when he started his da'wah activities at the age of 12 years until he was appointed as sheikh tariqat An-Naqsabandiah Kholidiah, Al-Ghazaliah and As-Syazaliah. "Such are the ones who believe (in the message of the Prophet) and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Surely in Allah's remembrance do hearts find rest."<sup>7</sup>

Aside from the obligatory daily prayers and supererogatory ones, the most important Sufi practice is undoubtedly the remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*) by the recitation of Allah's names found in the holy Quran in silence or spoken aloud.<sup>8</sup>

As with the supererogatory prayers, *dhikr* aimed at interiorizing the holy Quran and its contents in order to obtain closeness to Allah. As meditations, these practices aimed at clearing the heart of anything but Allah and establish the qualities of the divine in the human being. It is mentioned, "(O Prophet), recite the Book that has been revealed to you

<sup>2</sup>Yunus, 10:62, 64.

<sup>3</sup>Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali, *Sufism, Tarekat Satu Pandangan* 2015.

<sup>4</sup>Al-Araaf, 7:42.

<sup>5</sup>Al-Anfal, 8:66.

<sup>6</sup>Manuscript, *Overview of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali*, 2011.

<sup>7</sup>Ar-Ra'd, 13:28.

<sup>8</sup>Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali, *Tariqat Al-Ghazaliah*, 2019.

and establish Prayers. Surely Prayers forbids indecency and evil. And Allah's remembrance is of even greater merit. Allah knows all that you do.”<sup>9</sup>

Treatises like *The Key to Salvation* by Sheikh Ibnu Atha'illah (d. 1309) described the psychological and existential results to be obtained from multiple repetitions of particular names of Allah. The parallelism between repetition of the divine names and Islamic theology is significant; in Ash'ari theology, the divine names are the attributes of Allah and are the faculties through which the divine essence interacts with the created world. Recitation of the divine names thus reinforced the Islamic cosmology of Sufism. The mystical psychology that accompanied these practices articulated different levels of the heart and soul, which are further differentiated in terms of multiple spiritual states (ahwāl) and stations (maqamat). “And when My servants ask you, [O Muḥammad], concerning Me - indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided.”<sup>10</sup>

Remembrance pronounced in words is, but a declaration that the heart has not forgotten Allah. The inward silent remembrance is an activation of emotions. The remembrance of the heart is through feeling in oneself the manifestation of Allah's might and beauty. The remembrance of the soul is through the enlightenment of the divine light generated by Allah's might and beauty. How far the remembrance penetrates, the level it reaches, depends solely on the extent to which Allah in His bounty has guided one.

Over and above anything you do, the material being in you must follow the straight path. That is only possible through preserving and following the *sharī'ah*. To do this, one has to be conscious and continuously remember Allah, night and day, inwardly and outwardly. “...those who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides, and who reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth. Our Lord, Thou hast not created this in vain!”<sup>11</sup> The words of purity safeguard the tongue from heedless words. The tongue is a beautiful instrument to praise the Lord, repeat His beautiful names, and form His Unity. Allah warns against heedless talk.<sup>12</sup> *Secured indeed are the believers who are humble in their prayers and who shun vain talk.*<sup>13</sup>

Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali believes that religion is the way of life that befits human nature. Social-psychology issues that are infecting modern societies globally result from chaotic argumentative reasoning about the truth that humanity has lost its view of the purpose of life. The solution is to love one another and to help humanity out of the state of confusion and heedlessness by cleansing the heart from egoistic and egotistical attributes.

<sup>9</sup>Al-Ankabūt, 29:45.

<sup>10</sup>Al-Baqarah, 2:186.

<sup>11</sup>Al-i-Imrān, 3:191.

<sup>12</sup>Abu Zar Bin Adin, *Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali's Concept of Sufism*, 2018.

<sup>13</sup>Al-Muminūn, 23:1-3.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) says, “Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed), the whole body becomes good, but if it gets spoiled, the whole body gets spoiled, and that is the heart.” It is not the blindness of the eyes but the blindness of the heart that prevents one from seeing the light of truth. Allah says: So have they not traveled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear? For indeed, it is not the eyes that are blinded, but blinded are the hearts which are within the breasts.<sup>14</sup>

The only cause of the heart becoming blind is heedlessness, which makes one forget the Almighty Creator and one’s function and purpose in life. The cause of heedlessness is ignorance of the reality of the divine laws and orders. What keeps one in ignorance is a darkness of the inner being in the forms of arrogance, pride, envy, miserliness, vengeance, lying, gossiping, backbiting and other detestable traits.

Ridding oneself of these evils requires the cleansing of the heart done by acquiring knowledge, acting upon this knowledge by effort and valour, fighting against one’s ego and multiplicity of being to get close to Allah. This struggle will continue depending on how far one has lost himself in the low desires of his flesh and ego. Eventually, the attainment of one’s goal is not like arriving at a material place, nor like knowledge leading one to a thing known, or like reasoning that leads to a rationale. Rather than that, this accomplishment is a transformation, the recognition that everything but Allah’s Essence is impermanent. “Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection. So he who is drawn away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise has attained [his desire]. And what is the life of this world for except the enjoyment of delusion.”<sup>15</sup> “and do not invoke any god besides Allah. There is no god but He. All will perish but He. To Him belongs the command and to Him shall all of you return.”<sup>16</sup>

Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali sees that knowledge acquisition begins ever since humans are created, and it will continue to be their quest throughout their existence. This is reflected in the holy Quran while having brought Adam a.s into existence, Allah imparts the knowledge of all things to Adam AS in order to clarify the supremacy of humankind and the wisdom in their being created and made vicegerent on the earth. “Then Allah taught Adam the names of all things.”<sup>17</sup> And Allah says, Read! In the name of your Lord who created.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus, in fulfilling the role of vicegerent, the holy Prophet (SAW) said, “Seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim and that the world, with all that it contains, is accursed except for the remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*) that which pleases Allah, and the

<sup>14</sup>Al-Hajj, 22:46.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Imran, 3:185.

<sup>16</sup>Al-Qasas, 28:88.

<sup>17</sup>Al-Baqarah, 2:31.

<sup>18</sup>Al-Alaq, 96:1.

religious schools and seekers of knowledge. He who goes out in the search of knowledge is in Allah's cause until he returns. Whoever takes a path upon which to obtain knowledge, Allah makes the path to Paradise easy for him.”

This implies that when humankind fails to fulfil their duty on the earth when people lack (religious) knowledge, they will lead a life without wisdom (understanding of the knowledge of the holy Qur'ān), their hearts become heedless of Allah's anger and retribution and despondent of Allah's Mercy, resulting in them being deprived of eternal blessings for Allah does not respond to a supplication from the heart of one heedless and occupied by play. Then there will remain ignorant people who, when consulted, will give verdicts according to their opinions whereby they will mislead others and go astray.

## 5. Methodology

In this research, the author uses qualitative research approaches, namely the historical approach and Islamic theory approach. The author had used interview techniques, participatory research, observation and library research. The data collection technique were also utilised. This enables us to describe the Sufi teachings in the modern contemporary era by Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali in Malaysia. In addition, the technique strengthens the data obtained from the various parties that may provide information in the form of more concrete and actual data.

### (1) Resources and Data Collection Techniques

The source of data in qualitative research is the action or word that is natural, and the author divides the source of data into two parts, namely:

(i) Primary data sources covering all magazines, newspapers, documents, archives, journals, reports, electronic media (internet) and all writings related to Sufi thinking in the contemporary era by Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali.

(ii) Secondary data sources that include various studies or theses to achieve academic degrees as well as books written and related to the title of this study.

### (2) Approaches in Qualitative research

The selection of this approach aims to ensure that the research entitled Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali sufi in the contemporary era can be studied in depth. First, the researcher used it to understand various reality events or past events in a historical approach. In this approach, the author analyzed the history of life as a form of implementation of the thoughts of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali in this contemporary era, many who acknowledge and accept the existence of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali's thoughts on Sufism which of course requires an objective attitude and far from the subjective attitude of a priori funds in providing assessment. Apart from that, it needs to reveal the history of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali's thinking in Malaysia. For this survey, the literature studies also required the availability of field studies related to the involvement of some figures as surviving sources.



Second, in terms of the Islamic theory approach, the author reveals the relevance of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali's thinking on the concept of Sufism in the contemporary era, whether there is a new theory has been presented or just the development of the concept of classical scholars that already exist, or compare it with contemporary scholarly figures. In addition to the above two approaches, the researchers also used comparative methods that compared the thinking of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali with that of the other scholars. The comparative approach seeks to compare by revealing the similarities, differences and relationships between the objects of the study. This comparison is made to make conclusions on some of the data obtained especially in assessing whether or not the influence of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali's thinking exists in the contemporary era.

## 6. Result and Discussion

Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali is one among the many thought leaders on the concept of Sufis in the modern contemporary era that has much influence on the Muslim community in Malaysia. This study is to clarify the color of Islamic thought in Malaysia to avoid misunderstandings about the concept of Sufism itself. In addition, this study can benefit researchers, thinkers, preachers, and university lecturers interested in the topic of Sufism or Sufism in terms of theory and the practitioners. The result of the study can contribute to theory building, the concept development of the practitioners, expanding knowledge treasures, especially those who are related to the thinking of figures about the concept of Sufis in the contemporary era.

## 7. Conclusion

Allah's Messenger said, "A man shall be asked concerning four things on the day of resurrection: concerning his life, how he spent it; concerning his youth, how he grew old; concerning his wealth, whence he acquired it, and in what way he spent it; and what was it that he did with the knowledge that he had."

Human conscious or subconscious desires to seek better knowledge. Everyone hopes to find the right source to guide them in decision-making and motivate learning crucial for healthy body, mind, and soul development. Curiosity is a fundamental element of our cognition; we spend much of our time seeking and consuming information from various sources.

This study has examined the biography of Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali and his thoughts on Sufism in the Contemporary era. Additionally, this study has analyzed and identified Sheikh Lokeman Hazli Azali's history and biography, emphasizing his importance in thinking about the paths to Sufism as a critical tool for coping with Covid19.

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