Functional Sufism and Integrative Islamic Practice: The Legacy of KHR. Syamsul Arifin in Contemporary Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores the functional Sufism model developed by KHR Syamsul Arifin in the context of contemporary Islamic praxis in Indonesia. The aim is to understand how the integration of figh, akidah, and tasawwuf is functionally realized in the religious and social life of the people. Using an exploratory qualitative approach, this research explores texts by Syamsul Arifin as well as empirical data related to his Sufistic practices, which are analyzed through an interpretive framework based on current academic literature. The results show that Svamsul Arifin's functional Sufism emphasizes therapeutic, moral, and educative aspects. This model is able to answer contemporary challenges such as the crisis of spirituality, social disintegration, and secularization of education. The practice of wirid and dhikr has been proven to contribute to the formation of the practical spirituality of everyday Muslims. Comparative discussions with other models of Sufism in Southeast Asia show that this approach is more applicable and solution- oriented, especially in the fields of education, spiritual healing, and social reform. The findings have implications for the development of transformative Islamic education models and inclusive public spirituality. This study opens a new space in contemporary Sufism discourse and offers a new direction in the study of locally-based applicative Sufism.

A. INTRODUCTION

In the development of contemporary Islam, Sufism faces various complex and multidimensional challenges, both conceptually, socially, politically, and technologically. As one of the main elements in the Islamic tradition, Sufism is now not only required to maintain its spiritual purity, but also to be relevant to the context of modern life which is increasingly

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plural and dynamic. Conceptually, the plurality of interpretations of Sufism that are present in the form of Guénonian traditionalism, New Age spirituality, Islamic humanism, to neomodernist liberalism has led to friction within the tariqah and outside the Sufi community (Piraino, 2023). Coupled with the need to reinterpret spiritual values to be contextualized with contemporary society, Sufism is faced with a dilemma between maintaining its authenticity and the demands of changing times (Gani, 2019).

In the social and political realm, Sufism has come under pressure from the Salafi and revivalist movements who view it as an obstacle to the modernization of Islam. This view has been entrenched since the 20th century and is still strong in contemporary religious discourse (Weismann, 2005). However, at the same time, Sufism has also played a significant role in shaping Islamic cultural narratives and political discourses that emphasize the values of tolerance, social justice, and spiritual ethics (Ichwan et al., 2024). On the other hand, the digital revolution has changed the landscape of Sufism practice. Sufi communities are now flourishing in cyberspace, which brings new challenges in defending traditional epistemic categories and the authenticity of spiritual teachings (de Diego González, 2025).

These challenges reveal a fragmentation in the practice and conception of Sufism. One of the main problems that emerges is the separation of the three main elements of Islam: fiqh (the legal- formal aspect), aqidah (theological beliefs), and tasawwuf (the spiritual dimension). This separation not only hampers the personal integration of Muslims in religion, but also makes it difficult to actualize Islamic values at the social level (Leaman & Rizvi, 2008) . In this context, efforts to reintegrate the three become important so that the practice of Muslim religiosity becomes intact, comprehensive, and grounded.

Various approaches have been developed to answer this fragmentation. One of them is the transcendent theosophy model (al-hikmah al-muta'āliyah) developed by Mulla Sadra. He united sharia, kalam, philosophy, and tasawwuf in an integrative framework that combines intellectual intuition and rational proof (Mufid, 2023). Another approach came from al-Ghazali who successfully integrated Aristotelian philosophy and Sufism into orthodox Islamic theology, paving the way for the development of natural sciences and humanities based on spirituality (Griffel, 2009). In the realm of Islamic psychology, approaches integrating theology and contemporary understandings of the human psyche were also developed for the needs of Islamic psychotherapy (Rothman & Coyle, 2018).

However, these approaches have not been sufficiently grounded in the daily religious practices of Muslim communities, especially among the laity and rural communities. This is where the relevance of the "functional Sufism" approach emerges, which is a model of Sufism that does not merely dwell on esoteric experiences, but touches on the social and legal-formal praxis of Muslims. The concept of functional Sufism presupposes that authentic Islamic spirituality arises from the harmonious integration of sharia (fiqh), aqidah (belief), and wirid (spiritual practice), and not from the dichotomy or domination of one over the other (Younes et al., 2024).

Several studies have shown that functional Sufism plays an important role in the development of social ethics, mental health, and resistance to radicalism. In the context of rural communities, Sufism has become an important instrument in maintaining social harmony, strengthening community cohesion, and building a spirituality-based work ethic (Chowdury, 2024; Kamran & Shahid, 2015) . Even in the context of psychotherapy, Sufistic approaches are considered capable of responding to the existential emptiness and spiritual disorientation often experienced by modern generations (Bakri et al., 2025; Solihin & Munir, 2017) .

However, there are still few studies that specifically examine how the integration between fiqh, aqidah, and tasawwuf is systematically practiced by local figures in the form of pedagogy and social praxis. This gap is an important entry point in developing a study of functional Sufism. In this regard, the thought of KHR Syamsul Arifin is an interesting example. In his works such as Asasul Mubtadiin and Asasul Muttaqin, he formulated a system of

tasawwuf that combines the legality of charity (fikih), purity of faith (aqidah), and the habituation of wirid in one applicable and transformative Islamic framework. This study aims to explore and analyze the functional Sufism model in KHR Syamsul Arifin's thought, focusing on the integration of fiqh, aqidah, and wirid in the religious practices of Muslim communities. The study departs from the assumption that his approach offers a concrete solution to the fragmentation of contemporary Islamic practices. The novelty of this study lies in the approach of analyzing local works and practices as valid epistemic sources in the development of modern Sufism studies. This study also has a scope that includes analyzing KHR Syamsul Arifin's main texts, his theological insights, and their implications for strengthening the Islamicity of the lay community. Thus, this study is expected to enrich the treasures of Islamic thought and contribute to the formulation of a more complete and transformative model of religiosity in the contemporary era.

B. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a critical-interpretative study design that combines text analysis, cultural observation, and historical tracing of KHR Syamsul Arifin's works, especially Asasul Mubtadiin and Asasul Muttaqin. This approach was chosen because it is able to reach an integrative framework in Islamic thought that unites fiqh, aqidah, and tasawwuf as down-to-earth spiritual praxis. This research bases its method on a combination of contemporary methodological approaches used in integrative Islamic studies (Khoiri et al., 2025; Wimra et al., 2023) .

The initial stage began with a systematic literature study of KHR Syamsul Arifin's main texts. The researcher collected, copied, and classified the important parts of the two books related to the dimensions of law (fiqh), belief (tawhid and the attributes of God), and ritual practice (wirid and zikir). In this text analysis, the hermeneutic method is used to understand the meaning contained in the editorial and writing structure of the text, as recommended in the study of Sufistic tafsir (İzmirli, 2020). Hermeneutics plays a role in revealing the hidden dimensions of the text, including symbols, language styles, and authorial intentions in building an integrated scientific system.

Furthermore, the thematic analysis method is used to identify key themes in functional Sufism, such as the concept of tawhid in the shahada, the attributes of God, the correlation between worship and morals, and the integration between wirid rituals and social praxis. The analysis draws on a grounded theory approach that emphasizes inductive concept development from field data and text (Amiruddin et al., 2024) . In this way, key concepts are not predetermined but emerge through direct engagement with data and interpretation of texts.

In reaching the praxis dimension of KHR Syamsul Arifin's thought, participatory observation was conducted in a pesantren environment that still teaches his works. Researchers noted how the values in Asasul Mubtadiin and Asasul Muttaqin were realized in the daily lives of santri and the surrounding community. This observation is complemented by in-depth interviews with several ustaz and senior santri, who are used as key informants to reveal how the dimensions of fiqh, aqidah, and wirid are combined in the formation of Islamic character.

In analyzing the manuscript text, the historical-critical method is used to trace the context of writing the book. The researcher examines how the book responds to the social, cultural and political dynamics during KHR Syamsul Arifin's lifetime. This approach enables an understanding of the intention and relevance of the book to the pesantren community at that time and now (Handoko et al., 2024) . By understanding the historical setting, the analysis becomes more contextual and not trapped in a purely textual approach.

In addition, an intertextuality approach is used to see the relationship between KHR Syamsul Arifin's texts and other classical Islamic texts, including references to the Qur'an,

hadith, and the works of previous scholars such as Imam al-Ghazali and Imam Sanusi. This approach strengthens the argument that his works do not stand alone, but are part of a continuous Islamic intellectual heritage (Demircigil. 2025).

To explore the social influence of the idea of functional Sufism, the researcher uses a sociological analysis framework based on text ethnography. Through this approach, texts are not only seen as scholarly documents, but also as agents of social change that influence people's actions and norms. This approach refers to the analytical method used in Fiqh Nusantara studies, which integrates field data with classical literature (Khoiri et al., 2025) . Thus, the text is understood in relation to social structures, power relations, and the construction of religious identity.

This research also adopts a phenomenological methodology in understanding the subjective experiences of the practitioners of KHR Syamsul Arifin's teachings. This approach is used in the context of the integration of fiqh and medical ethics in the abortion discourse (Faisal Hamdani, 2024) . In this context, phenomenology is used to explore the inner meaning of the practice of wirid and daily worship, and how these spiritual experiences shape individuals' religious orientation.

The naql and aql methods (transmission and rationalization) are also used to examine KHR Syamsul Arifin's scientific building. Naql refers to the authority of the text (al-Qur'an, hadith, and classical books), while aql is used in compiling arguments and correlations between propositions and practices. This combination reflects the traditional methodology in the history of Islamic thought (Spawi & Ali, 2017) , and is relevant for understanding the consistency of his thinking that bridges the nash and social reality.

The data obtained were analyzed using a triangulation approach of sources and methods to ensure validity and reliability. Triangulation was conducted between texts (kitab), field observations, and interviews. The analysis was conducted iteratively to compare the findings with the theoretical framework of the integration of Islamic sciences and contemporary Sufism practices, including the discourse of applied Sufism and criticism of metaphysical Sufism (Solihin & Munir, 2017; Younes et al., 2024).

Through this combination of methodologies, this research not only produces a conceptual description of functional Sufism, but also reconstructs the way of thinking and religion of the pesantren community influenced by KHR Syamsul Arifin's thought. This research is expected to contribute to the development of applied Sufistic studies that are contextual, integrative, and relevant to the spiritual and social needs of contemporary Muslims.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Integration of Jurisprudence in Functional Sufism

The integration of fiqh and Sufism is found to be the main pillar in Syamsul Arifin's framework. This is reflected in his teaching that deeds must not only be valid in sharia but also accompanied by intention and deep spiritual awareness. This finding is in line with historical findings in various Islamic Sufism traditions, such as the view of Kiyahi Shalih Darat who asserted that fiqh without Sufism is dry and Sufism without fiqh will mislead (Kasdi et al., 2023). In the text Asasul Mubtadiin, Syamsul Arifin elaborates that acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, and zakat must be performed according to the rules of fiqh but strengthened with sincerity and awareness of God's presence (ihsan). This approach illustrates the continuity between the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of Islam.

In various Islamic traditions, this model of integration also emerges, as found in the Chishtiyyah order in South Asia which combines fiqh practices with local spiritual rituals, making Islam inclusive for pluralistic societies (Kamran & Shahid, 2015). In the context of the archipelago, Syamsul Arifin's model is in line with the adaptive approach of al-Raniri in spreading sharia and Sufism at the same time in the Malay region (Quddus, 2019). This proves

that the integration of fiqh and spirituality in Syamsul Arifin's thought is not anomalous, but part of the global Islamic tradition that is internalized locally.

The research also reveals that the spiritual validity of any religious practice in Syamsul Arifin's teachings is always linked to the observance of sharia law. No charity, even dhikr or wirid is considered valid if it is not based on the correct aqidah and the implementation of legal fiqh. This is reinforced by literature that explains the importance of legality in religious rituals, both in the Islamic tradition and other religions. For example, in the Eastern Catholic church, canon law ensures the legality and blessing of liturgical practices (Přibyl, 2017) , and in the Islamic context, loyalty to sharia has been shown to contribute to the formation of legal and moral consciousness in Muslim societies (Bayoumi et al., 2020).

2. Integration of Akidah in Functional Sufism

In the text Asasul Muttaqin, Syamsul Arifin explains that aqidah is not only the foundation of belief, but also a conceptual map for spiritual meaning. He divides Allah's attributes into two broad categories: istighna' attributes and iftiqor attributes. The attribute of istighna' explains God's perfection that does not need creatures, while the attribute of iftiqor shows the total dependence of creatures on God. This division confirms the relational dimension of Islamic theology as emphasized in the kalam tradition of Ahlus Sunnah such as al-Sanusi and al-Ash'ari (Brodersen, 2024; El-Bizri, 2008) . This structure also supports the development of Sufistic epistemology in explaining the existence of God and his relationship with creatures through the principles of tanzih and tashbih.

In practice, the integration of aqidah and tasawwuf in Syamsul Arifin's teachings can be seen in the way he instills the concepts of tawhid not only conceptually, but also through structured wirid practices. This approach is in line with contemporary studies showing that Sufism is not only a mystical discourse, but also a psycho-spiritual therapy that aids self-transformation through deep theological understanding (Curry & Ohlander, 2012; Douglas-Klotz, 2015).

3. The Role of Wirid and Zikir in Practical Spirituality

On the other hand, wirid and dhikr in Syamsul Arifin's view are not empty rituals, but rather means of character building and spiritual perseverance. In Asasul Mubtadiin, the wirid is organized into a daily structure that includes praise to Allah, salawat of the Prophet, and requests for forgiveness, with specific frequencies and times. The study found that the structure of the wirid had a significant impact on the discipline of worship and spiritual resilience of the students and the general public. Empirical studies on dhikr practices outside formal tariqahs show that dhikr can strengthen social cohesion, improve mental health, and deepen moral sensitivity (Irawati et al., 2023; Sejin, 2024).

This integration of wirid in the formation of daily life is not a new phenomenon. In the global Islamic tradition, the practice of wirid has been a medium of learning, therapy, and cognitive enhancement. In Southeast Asia, Malay manuscripts such as MSS 2906 even mention dhikr as an auxiliary tool for students to strengthen memorization and open sustenance (Mamat & Zarif, 2019) . Syamsul Arifin also explained that wirid is a balance of the cognitive and spiritual aspects of worship, making a person not only legally obedient, but also gentle in behavior and calm in spirit.

Research results also confirm that repetition of wirid and dhikr rituals has an impact on the psychosocial well-being of Muslim individuals. Through interviews with senior students and practitioners of Syamsul Arifin's teachings, it was found that daily dhikr increases emotional resilience, reduces anxiety, and strengthens moral orientation in social life. This is supported by research showing the effectiveness of Islam-based religious interventions in significantly reducing anxiety and depression (Isgandarova, 2019, 2024; Saged et al., 2022) . In addition, spiritual approaches combined with ethical principles of Islamic therapy have also shown that dhikr practices can enhance self-awareness and ethical relationships between

therapists and patients (Rassool, 2024).

All of these findings prove that KHR Syamsul Arifin's functional tasawuf model is an epistemic and praxis synthesis between sharia, faith, and spirituality. He not only manages to maintain strict Sunni orthodoxy towards fiqh and aqidah, but also presents spirituality that is grounded, shapes morals, and strengthens social structures. This finding is in line with the integrative framework in contemporary Islamic studies that encourages the unification of normative knowledge and religious practice as a strategy to answer the challenges of modernity.

This research presents an important contribution in explaining how classic local texts such as Syamsul Arifin's works have great potential to be developed as an alternative model of authentic, contextual, and applicable religiosity. Thus, these findings are not only descriptive but also normative, opening up opportunities for the development of tasawwuf that is more inclusive, relevant and solutive in contemporary Muslim life.

4. Comparison of KHR Syamsul Arifin's Sufism Approach with Integrative Models in Southeast Asia

KHR Syamsul Arifin's approach to Sufism in his texts, especially through the formulation of functional Sufism, shows a tendency to make Sufism an integrative therapeutic system between physical and spiritual health. He offers a spiritual approach that not only emphasizes ritual and asceticism, but also touches the daily aspects of the people through Sufistic therapy. This is reflected in the seven basic principles of Sufistic therapy, such as belief in healing, body-soul balance, spiritual dominance, blood circulation, positive suggestion, patience, and submission to God (Islamy et al., 2022). This approach is in line with the spirit of contemporary Sufism which is oriented towards recovery and self-empowerment through holistic methods.

When compared to other integrative models of Sufism in Southeast Asia, KHR Syamsul Arifin's approach shows prominent differences. For example, in the context of the Muhammadiyah movement, tasawwuf functions more as a moral and spiritual value system that emphasizes ethics without attachment to a particular tarekat (Muttaqin et al., 2023) . The focus is more on strengthening tawhid and noble morals implemented through social action and public ethics reform, not spiritual therapy or holistic medicine.

Meanwhile, in the televangelism model as developed by Abdullah Gymnastiar and M. Arifin Ilham, the Sufistic aspect is expressed in the form of mediating spiritual intimacy through mass media. This approach emphasizes broad and modern broadcasting of spiritual values, incorporating Sufistic messages in a popular communication style (Howell, 2008) . This differs from Syamsul Arifin's approach which is based on local communities and an emphasis on individual therapy.

Modern tarekat models such as al-Tariqah al-Kasanzaniyyah also offer socially transformative Sufism. This tariqah aims to form a virtuous society by emphasizing tazkiyah al-nafs and moral empowerment as a response to contemporary challenges (Younes et al., 2024) . This shows similarities with Syamsul Arifin's approach, especially in the aspect of strengthening collective values and morals, but with a more formalized tarekat style.

On the other hand, Harun Nasution proposed rational Sufism by integrating rationalism within the framework of Sufism as a critique of conservative theological doctrines (Musa & Khaidir, 2023). His approach is very philosophical and theoretical, different from the Sufistic therapy proposed by Syamsul Arifin which is practical and applicable.

Thus, KHR Syamsul Arifin's Sufism approach can be said to be a form of creative synthesis between traditional Sufism, local Islamic values, and the pragmatic needs of contemporary society.

5. Implications of Functional Sufism for Religious Education and Spiritual Pedagogy

Syamsul Arifin's functional Sufism model has broad implications for Islamic religious education and spiritual pedagogy. First, the model is able to balance students' intellectual, emotional and spiritual development. In the midst of a competitive education system that tends to ignore the affective dimension, integrating Sufism in the curriculum can strengthen students' spiritual intelligence, as evidenced in various case studies in Islamic universities in East Java (Muhammad et al., 2024).

This model is also relevant for solving psychosocial problems through the integration of Sufism values in counseling and Islamic psychotherapy practices. By integrating spiritual values and contemporary psychology, this approach has proven effective in reducing anxiety, shaping spiritual identity, and building resilience (Bozorgzadeh & Grasser, 2021; Douglas-Klotz, 2015) . It has also been adopted in Sufism-based social services used for stress management and character building in communities (Hatta, 2009) .

In the context of moral and ethical formation, Sufism-based education has proven to be more effective than conventional approaches in shaping students' honesty and morals (Rahmat & Yahya, 2021) . Sufism teaches spiritual concepts such as ikhlas, qana'ah, and muraqabah which are the foundations of Islamic character building (Gani, 2019) . In addition, Sufistic approaches also encourage participatory learning and pedagogical ethics, as described by Deighton-Mohammed(2024) through community training models and resistance to patriarchal structures.

Furthermore, the integration of Sufism with modern aspects such as entrepreneurship (riyādat al-a'māl) demonstrates the potential of Sufism in educating economic independence while upholding spiritual values (Abitolkha, 2022) . In this context, Sufism is not only a personal spirituality, but also a socio-economic education strategy.

Digital transformation in the Islamic world also opens up new spaces for the integration of Sufism in pedagogy. Technologies such as digital wirid apps enable the implementation of dhikr in a structured and accessible manner, helping the internalization of Sufistic values in the millennial lifestyle (de Diego González, 2025). Thus, the functional Sufism approach provides a great opportunity for Islamic education to create a transformative, ethical and contextual learning model.

6. Functional Sufism's Contribution to Islamic Reform and Spirituality in the Public Sphere

Functional Sufism as developed by KHR Syamsul Arifin has an important role in the discourse of Islamic reform and public spirituality. With its integrative approach, Sufism is not only a contemplative path but also the foundation of public ethics and social participation. In this context, Sufism contributes to the reconstruction of social values such as justice, tolerance, and love, which are urgent needs in plural societies (Bardakçı, 2021; Younes et al., 2024).

Various studies show that Sufi groups are not apolitical, but rather active in social and political renewal. They are involved in religious discourse and advocacy for social change based on moderate Islamic values (Malik, 2017; Milani, 2017). Thus, functional Sufism can be an important instrument in balancing spirituality and social activism.

One of the main contributions of Sufism in the current global context is as a counterpoint to radical ideologies. By emphasizing compassion, inclusiveness, and respect for differences, Sufism becomes the basis for seeding a friendly and peaceful Islam (Alqahtani, 2023; Geaves & Gabriel, 2013). This role is increasingly significant in an era of disruption and ideological conflict, making Sufism the guardian of social harmony.

Sufism's cultural and intellectual contributions are also enormous in shaping contemporary Islamic narratives. Sufistic interpretation of the Qur'an emphasizes spiritual and ethical aspects that can enrich Islamic hermeneutical approaches and refresh the discourse of modern Islamic thought (Heck, 2007; Ichwan et al., 2024).

In addition, globalization and digitalization have allowed the expansion of modern Sufi orders such as the Tijaniyah or Naqsyabandiyah to reach a global audience through online media, making Sufism a spiritual element that crosses geographical and cultural boundaries (de Diego González, 2025). The practice of tazkiyat al-nafs and the emphasis on adab in the Sufi tradition also contribute to the formation of a moral and inclusive society (Kostadinova, 2023). Sufism thus functions as a moral force in the public sphere that leads people to a spiritually meaningful and socially responsible life.

D. CONCLUSION

This research reveals that functional Sufism as practiced by KHR Syamsul Arifin is an integrative approach that combines the dimensions of fiqh, creed, and Sufism into a unity of applicable spiritual praxis. Through the Sufistic therapy model he developed, it can be seen that Sufism values are not only relevant in ritualistic aspects, but also in strengthening mental health, social ethics, and character education. The main findings show that practices such as wirid and dhikr play a significant role in shaping the daily spirituality of Muslims, even outside the formal tariqah structure. Furthermore, this Sufistic approach can strengthen religious education through the integration of morals, spirituality and transformational pedagogy.

The discussion shows that Syamsul Arifin's approach is distinctive from other Sufistic models in Southeast Asia, whether they are oriented towards ethics (such as Muhammadiyah), media (such as televangelism), or philosophical rationalism (Harun Nasution). The implication of this finding is that functional Sufism can contribute to Islamic reform, the development of public spirituality, and the strengthening of value-based education.

This research enriches contemporary Sufism literature by presenting an integrative model that is locally relevant and globally applicable. Further studies can be directed at evaluating the long-term impact of this functional Sufism model in the context of national education policy and religious-based social welfare programs.

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