

FROM POWER TO CULTURAL LANDSCAPES Rewriting History of Shi'ah in Aceh

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Abstract: This article aims to re-examine the history of Shi'ah in Aceh by looking at the influence of Persian in Acehnese political and cultural landscapes of the society. There have been many studies on presence of Shi'ah in Aceh by local, national, and international scholars. However, there is still gap among scholars about the coming of Shi'ah and its influence in the province, due to the influence of Persian traditions. Through socio-historical and socio-anthropological approaches, this study describes the roots and influence of Persian in history of Aceh. This is to say it is necessary to look at how the impact on Persian in Acehnese society. It is also argued that the presence of Shiah in Aceh in contemporary era has led to cultural rather than political and theology. However, because of conflict between Sunni and Shi'ah in Middle East, issue on anti-Shi'ah gives serious impact to religious life in the province.

Keywords: Persian, Shi'ah, *Ahl al-Bayt* Aceh, history, culture, Peureulak

Introduction

This article aims to examine the history of Shi'ah¹ in Aceh by looking at the influence of Persia in the province. There have been two

¹ The overview on Shi'ah in Indonesian languages, see Abdul Azis Dahlan (ed.), *Ensiklopedi Hukum Islam*, vol. 5 (Jakarta: PT Ichtiar Baru van Hoeve, 1997), pp. 1072-1708. Aboebakar Atjeh, *Aliran Syi'ah Di Nusantara* (Jakarta: Islamic Research Institute, 1977). Dicky Sofjan, ed., *Sejarah & Budaya Syiah Di Asia Tenggara* (Yogyakarta: Sekolah Pascasarjana Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2013). Imam Ghozali, AM Safwan, and Edy Y. Syarif, eds., *Peran Ahlulbait Dalam Penyebaran Islam Di Nusantara* (Yogyakarta: Rausyan Fikr, 2013). On history of Shi'ah in Indonesia, see Zulkifli, "The Struggle of the Shi'is in Indonesia" (Ph.D. Thesis, Leiden University, 2009).

groups of scholars who argue about the coming of Shi'ah to Aceh. First, there is no evidence on the influence of this sect in the province. This argument can be found in Azyumardi Azra's works in which he said that Shi'ah is only as myth in the history of Aceh.² According to Azra, the popularity of Shi'ism in Indonesia was part of the impact of Islamic Revolution in Iran.³ Second, Acehese scholars who believed that Aceh was a meeting place between Sunni and Shi'ah. I have examined this issue in my previous works on the contribution of Aceh to the development of Islamic law in Indonesia.⁴ In this study, I found that there were many elements of Shi'ah in Acehese culture.⁵ My point in that study was to show that three schools of Islamic legal thought had been in Aceh namely: Shi'ah, Hanafi, and Syafi'i. Regarding the issue of Kingdom of Peureulak, I used a manuscript which has listed the genealogy of Sultan. The title of manuscript is *Tazkīrah Thabaqāt Jumū' Sulthān al-Salāthīn*,⁶ which is authored by

² Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Reformis Dinamika Intelektual Dan Gerakan* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo, 1999), pp. 129-155. Azyumardi Azra, "Kaum Syiah Di Asia Tenggara: Menuju Pemulihan Hubungan Dan Kerjasama," ed. Dicky Sofjan (Yogyakarta: Sekolah Pascasarjana Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2012), p. 6.

³ Azra, "Kaum Syiah Di Asia Tenggara: Menuju Pemulihan Hubungan Dan Kerjasama," p. 6. On Islamic Revolution in Iran, see Ervand Abrahamian, "Ali Shari'ati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," in *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements*, ed. M. Ira Lapidus and Edmund Burke (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988), pp. 289-97. Mansoor Moaddel, "Ideology as Episodic Discourse: The Case of the Iranian Revolution," *American Sociological Review* 57, no. 3 (1992), pp. 353-79. Paul Ludwig, "Iranian Revolution' and Iranian-Islamic Revolutionary Ideology," *Die Welt Des Islams* 39, no. 2 (1999), pp. 183-217. Shahrough Akhavi, "The Ideology and Praxix of Shi'ism in the Iranian Revolution," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25 (1983), pp. 195-221.

⁴ Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, *Islam Historis: Dinamika Studi Islam Di Indonesia*, Revised (Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2017). Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, "Kontribusi Daerah Aceh Terhadap Perkembangan Awal Hukum Islam Di Indonesia," *Al-Jamiah* XII, no. 64 (1999): pp. 143-75.

⁵ See also Yusny Saby, "Jejak Persia Di Nusantara: Interplay Antara Agama Dan Budaya," in *Sejarah & Budaya Syiah Di Asia Tenggara* (Yogyakarta: Sekolah Pascasarjana Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2013), pp. 188-192.

⁶ In the manuscript, the title of Sulthan is always called *Syab*. According to this manuscript the names of Sulthan of Peureulak are: Al-Malik al-Sulthan Ibrahim Makhdūm (232 - 279 H); Al-Malik al-Sulthān Mansyur Syah (279-282 H); al-Malik Sulthan 'Umar Syah (282-287 H); al-Malik Sulthan Muhammad Syah (287-290 H); al-Malik Sulthan Ahmad Zahid Syah (290-299 H); al-Malik Sulthan Mansur Muhammad Sa'īd (299-315 H); al-Malik al-Sulthan Ahmad Sa'd (315-319 H); al-Malik Sulthan Khadiwan Syah (319-325 H); al-Malik al-Sulthan Sa'īd Zayn al-Abidin Syah (325-329 H); al-Malik Sulthan Ahmad Syah (329-333 H); al-Malik Sulthan Nashir Syah (333-342 H).

Syeikh Syamsul Bahri Abdullah al-Asyi. The text was re-written by Said Abdullah Ibn Saiyid Habib Saifuddin on 1275 H.⁷ These findings are published in 1999, when I investigated on the issue of early history of the development of Islamic law in Indonesia.⁸

In 2013, I was invited in an international conference on the presense of Shiah in Southeast Asia. In this meeting I argued that it is a necessary to clarify on the coming and influence of Shi'ah and Persia in Aceh. Then, I expanded the paper which was published in *Sejarah & Budaya Syiah di Asia Tenggara* (History and Culture of Shi'ah in Southeast Asia).⁹ This article which is based on the paper that I presented in the conference, is to examine some data on the influence of Persia and Shi'ah in Aceh. There have been bibliographic study on the Persian and Shi'ah studies in Southeast Asia by Majid Danesghar in 2014.¹⁰

However, in this article I will study the history of Shi'ah through socio-historical and socio-anthropological approaches. As an Acehnese, I have witnessed that many of Acehnese traditions are still as partly imported rituals.¹¹ This is because we cannot disagree with the fact that the impact of Persian tradition¹² and its relationship with two

H); al-Malik al-Sulthan Muhammad al-Fath Amin Syah (342-359 H); al-Malik al-Sulthan Ibrahim Syah (359-377 H); al-Malik al-Sulthan Muhammad Syah (377-389 H); al-Malik al-Sulthan Mahmud Syah (389-398 H); al-Malik Sulthan Mansur Syah (398-400 H); al-Malik Sulthan Ahmad Syah 'Abid (400-406 H); al-Malik Sulthan 'Abd Allah Hamid Syah (406-410 H); al-Malik Sulthan Muhammad 'Ali Syah (410-433 H). See Bustamam-Ahmad, "Kontribusi Daerah Aceh Terhadap Perkembangan Awal Hukum Islam Di Indonesia," p.157-158.

⁷ A. Hasjmy, "Adakah Kerajaan Islam Perlak Negara Islam Pertama Di Asia Tenggara," in *Sejarah Masuk Dan Berkembangnya Islam Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: PT Al Ma'arif, 1993), p. 144.

⁸ See also Bustamam-Ahmad, *Islam Historis: Dinamika Studi Islam Di Indonesia*.

⁹ Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, "Sejarah Syiah Di Aceh," in *Sejarah Dan Budaya Syiah Di Asia Tenggara*, ed. Dicky Sofjan (Yogyakarta: Sekolah Pascasarjana Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2013), pp. 197-212.

¹⁰ Majid Danesghar, "The Study of Persian Shi'ism in the Malay-Indonesian World: A Review of Literature from the Nineteenth Century Onwards," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* VII, no. 2 (2014): pp. 191-229.

¹¹ See generally Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, *Acehnologi*, 6 vols. (Banda Aceh: Bandar Publishing, 2017).

¹² On the influence of Persian in Southeast Asia, see M. Ismail Marcinkowski, *Contacts Between Iran and Islam in 17 Century: From Isfahan to Ayutthaya* (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 2005). M. Ismail Marcinkowski, "Jejak Kehadiran Persia Di Asia Tenggara,"

Islamic kingdoms in Aceh i.e. Peureulak and Samudra Pasai. Historically, the first king of Peureulak was Sulthan Alaidin Sayyid Maulana Abdul Aziz Syah. The genealogy of this Sultan is: Abdul Aziz bin Ali bin al-Muktabar al-Baqir bin ‘Ali Muhammad Zainal Abidin bin Husin al-Syahid bin ‘Ali bin Abi Thalib. The coming of Shi’ah was due to the conflict in the era of Khalifah Makmun (167-219), namely the case of Muhammad bin Jakfar Shiddiq bin Muhammad Bakar bin ‘Ali Zainul Abidin bin Hassan bin ‘Ali bin Abi Thalib who was against the Khalifah Makmun. The Sultan had asked the group of Shi’ah to expand Islam to other regions such as Hindi and Southeast Asia. This group had arrived in Peureulak and established the Kingdom of Peureulak on 1 Muharram 225 H.¹³

Indeed, local scholars such as A. Hasjmy, Junus Djamil, and Aboebakar Atjeh have argued that “there was Shi’ah in Aceh.”¹⁴ This statement needs to be reviewed on how Sunnis declare that they were part of history of Shi’ah in Southeast Asia. As many go further to claim that Sunni in Aceh should “thank” to the teachings and traditions of Shi’ah. Why should the Acehnese do this? As we know in the history of Aceh we might find that it is only the history of Sunni in Aceh, not the history of Shi’ah. In other words, the history of Islam in Aceh is the history of Sunni. Why then, they (Acehnese) declare that Acehnese tradition could not stand without Shi’ah tradition. An informant said, the decline of Aceh in the 17th Century was because the issue of *Wabdatul Wujûd*. And, some argued that this teaching such as hidden Imâm¹⁵ was part of Shi’ah teaching in Aceh. Can, then, we say that the

in *Islam, Iran, & Peradaban: Peran Dan Kontribusi Intelektual Iran Dalam Peradaban Islam* (Yogyakarta: Rausyan Fikr, 2012), pp. 543–60. Imtiyaz Yusuf, “Pengaruh Historis Persia Pada Islam Di Asia Tenggara Dan Kesatuan Umat Muslim,” in *Sejarah & Budaya Syiah Di Asia Tenggara*, ed. Dicky Sofjan (Yogyakarta: Sekolah Pascasarjana Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2013), pp. 73–108.

¹³ Hasjmy, “Adakah Kerajaan Islam Perlak Negara Islam Pertama Di Asia Tenggara,” pp. 155–57. See also Hilmy Bakar Almasaty, “Relasi Persia Dan Nusantara Pada Awal Islamisasi -Sebuah Kajian Awal Pengaruh Persia Dalam Politik Aceh” (International Conference The Contribution of Persia in Nusantara: Past, Present and Future, Banda Aceh: Media Syariah IAIN Ar-Raniry, 2013), pp. 1–21.

¹⁴ See for example Atjeh, *Aliran Syi’ah Di Nusantara*.

¹⁵ See Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Just Ruler (Al-Sultan Al-Adil) in Shi’ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

teaching of *Wabdatul Wujûd* which was promoted by Hamzah Fansuri¹⁶ as the continuity of the concept of *Imâm* among Shi'ah? It is not easy to answer this question without taking into account the concept of *Imâmah* in Shi'ah and *Insân Kamil* in Sunni. Thus, Ali Hasjmy put forward by saying the concepts were Aceh and ended in the 17th Century. After the decline of Acehnese Kingdoms, the dominance of Muslim group in Aceh had been Sunni. It is argued that there have been many evidences on the presence of Persian and Shi'ah culture in Aceh. However, it needs to differentiate on the impact of Persian and Shi'ah in the province. This article is divided into three parts. The first part is an investigation on the influence of Persian and Shi'ah domination in the early of history of Aceh. This section will examine the roots of the coming of both traditions in Aceh.

The Roots

Historically, the discussion of Shi'ah and Persia in Aceh could be categorized in five aspects. The first is Shi'ah as ideological power during the first era of Peureulak, as the oldest of Islamic Kingdoms in Aceh. The second is the problem of Shi'ah in Aceh as part of conflict among Muslim in Middle East. These historical facts have influenced Acehnese, especially among Sunnis, where the conflict between Sunni and Shi'ah had always referred the history of *Ahl al-Bayt*. The third is the influence of Persian language which is sometimes seen as part of the internationalization of Shi'ism in Southeast Asia. This can be examined in the history of political languages in Aceh which are adopted from Persian tradition.¹⁷ The fourth is the problem of Shi'ah that can be studied in the history of literature or art such as *hikayat*. It is argued that many of *hikayats* in Aceh have been imported from the

¹⁶ On this teaching see Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1970). Abdul Hadi W.M., *Tasawuf Yang Tertindas: Kajian Hermeneutik Terhadap Karya-Karya Hamzah Fansuri* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001).

¹⁷ See Azyumardi Azra, *Renaissance Islam Asia Tenggara: Sejarah Wacana Dan Kekuasaan* (Bandung: Rosdakarya, 1999), p. 77.

Persian literature.¹⁸ The fifth is the problem of Shi'ah in Aceh currently is entrapped in the global conflict between West and Iran.¹⁹

Each of aspect underlines some concepts. The first tells us the history of political power from Middle East to Aceh. Historically, the coming of Islam to Aceh was during the era of *Sahabat* (companions). Accordingly in this era there was no separation between Sunni and Shi'ah. But, some argued that after the death of the Prophet there were two groups: *ahl al-bayt* and non-*ahl al-bayt*.²⁰ From the first group it is named as Shi'ah,²¹ while the second is called as Sunni.²² I would not open the conflict between the two groups, as many scholars have elaborated on the issue,²³ but the main problem is: why did and does the issues of “should be” and “should not be” among the two still influence our religious belief? M. Ismail Marcinkowski in his study on the root of Persian tradition in Southeast Asia maintains that it is mistaken to claim that all of Persian influences in the region remain Shiite teaching. This is because the era of Shiite Kingdom in Persia was started during the era of Dynasty of Safawi Shah Ismail I (1501-1524) until early of the 16th Century.²⁴ Majid Daneshgar maintains that “this

¹⁸ See for example L.F. Brakel, *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyah*, trans. Junaidah Salleh, Mokhtar Ahmad, and Nor Azmah Shehidan (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1988). V.I Braginsky, *Yang Indah, Berfaedah Dan Kamal: Sejarah Sastra Melayu Dalam Abad 17-19* (Jakarta: INIS, 1998).

¹⁹ See generally Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, “Iran: An Old Civilization and a New Nation State,” *Focus on Geography* 49, no. 4 (2007): pp. 20–32.

²⁰ Jalaluddin Rakhmat, “Tinjauan Kritis Atas Sejarah Fiqh: Dari Fiqh Tabi'in Hingga Madzhab Liberalisme,” in *Kontekstualisasi Doktrin Islam Dalam Sejarah*, ed. Budhy Munawar-Rachman (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995), pp. 251–310.

²¹ Literally means follower, party, group, associate, partisan, or supporters. See Syed Husain M. Jafri, “Shi'i Islam,” ed. John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 55.

²² It has generally meaning of “customary practice.” See Michael E. Marmura and John L. Esposito, “Sunni Islam,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 139.

²³ See for example Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shiite Response to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1998).

²⁴ Marcinkowski, “Jejak Kehadiran Persia Di Asia Tenggara,” p.545. On Dynast of Shafawi, see Muhammad Hasyim Assagaf, *Lintasan Sejarah Iran: Dari Dinasti Achaemenia Ke Republik Revolusi Islam*, ed. Smith Alhadar (Jakarta: The Cultural Section of Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2009). See also Daneshgar, “The Study of Persian Shi'ism in the Malay-Indonesian World: A Review of Literature from the Nineteenth Century Onwards,” pp. 191–92.

Persian Shi'ah influence extended beyond South Asia into the Malay Archipelago, yet the exact nature of this influence remains somewhat unknown.”²⁵

When Islam came to Aceh, Muslim did not declare that they were Sunni or Shi'ah. It is unlikely to find any resources about the declaration of the first Muslim in Aceh claiming that they were the follower of Shi'ah or Sunni. But, their arrival of Shi'ah to Aceh was as an impact of conflict in Arab Peninsula. When I travelled in the area where Aboebakar Atjeh claimed as the place of Shi'ah in North Aceh, I found that many of the tombs were from Persia. It is important to note that the area of these tombs is near the sea and river in North Aceh. Taqiuddin Muhammad, a local archeologist told me that he did not find any fact about the presence of Kingdoms of Peureulak in East Aceh.²⁶ However, he found many of tombs that are through his reading can be claimed from Persian's name. What struck me is why we should pay attention to the Kingdom of Peureulak, not the mausoleums. A local archeologist informed us that the distance of grave is about 30 km from the Strait of Malacca. However, many of the tombs in the forest are not preserved by the government.²⁷ This tells us that many of archeological facts are not being investigated by scholars. They focus on the nearest place to coastal area.²⁸

Recently, Taqiuddin Muhammad during his archeological research in North Aceh, has listed many of the graves in North Aceh which are seen as impact of the coming of Persian to Samudra Pasai: First, Ibn Khaddajih in Matang Ulim, Samudera, North Aceh. It is found the date of his death was on 681/1283. The word of Khaddajih is from Persian which means as teacher. This date is older than the grave of Sultan al-Malik al-Shalih, dated 696/1297.²⁹ Second, according to

²⁵ Daneshgar, “The Study of Persian Shi'ism in the Malay-Indonesian World: A Review of Literature from the Nineteenth Century Onwards,” p. 192.

²⁶ See also Hasan Muarif Ambary, “Sejarah Masuknya Islam Di Negeri Perlak Ditinjau Dengan Pendekatan Arkeologi,” in *Sejarah Masuk Dan Berkembangnya Islam Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: PT Al Ma'arif, 1993), p. 445.

²⁷ Taqiuddin Muhammad, *Danlah Sbalibiyah Di Sumatera: Ke Arab Penyusunan Kerangka Baru Historiografi Samudra Pasai* (Lhokseumawe: Center for Information of Samudra Pasai Heritage, 2011).

²⁸ Taqiuddin Muhammad, “Jejak Kebudayaan Persia Di Kawasan Tinggalan Sejarah Samudrai Pasai,” *Media Syariah: Jurnal Hukum Islam Dan Pranata Sosial* XV, no. 1 (2013), pp. 31–41.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

report of Ibn Baththuthah there were two Persian *ulama*'s in Samudera Pasai: al-Qadhi asy-Syarif Amir asy-Syirazi (Syiraz) and Tajuddin Al-Ashbahaniy (Isfahan). They were jurists during the era of Samudera Pasai.³⁰ Third, Nur Khatun 'Umar (d. 805/1403). The location of this grave is in Kuta Krueng, Samudera, North Aceh. The word of "*khatun*" is from Persian which means as madam.³¹ Fourth, Na'ina Husamuddin bin Na'ina Amin (d. 823/1420). The location of this grave is in Gampong Pie, North Aceh. It is suspected that the title of *Na'ina* is also from Persian word. In this tomb there is a poem from great Persian Sufist, Sa'diy Syiraziy.³² Fifth, Ash-Shadrul Ajal Khawwajah Muhammad bin Sulaiman (d. 845/1445) in Kuta Krueng, Samudera, North Aceh, near to grave of Nur Khatun 'Umar. The title of "*ash-shadrul ajal*" is from Persian same as "*khawwajah*."³³ Sixth, Khawwajah Tajuddin bin Ibrahim (d. 857/1453), near to the grave of Khawwajah Muhammad. Seventh, Mir Hasan (d. 910/1505) in Kuta Krueng, Samudera, North Aceh. The word of "*mir*" is from Persian language which means prince.³⁴ All of these evidences show that the coming of Persian to Samudera Pasai has not been included in Islamic historiography in Nusantara. Many of historical reports by scholars always focus on the kingdom of Samudera Pasai, not on the role of Persian *ulama* in the region.³⁵

Furthermore, scholars who found the contact between Persia and Samudera Pasai did not say much about the coming of Shi'ah, but only give historical narrative on Persian and 'Ali bin Abi Thalib.³⁶ The finding such as poem on the tomb of Sultan Malik al-Salih (1297) has

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p. 38.

³² Ibid. On discussion of Persian poet in the tomb, see Daneshgar, "The Study of Persian Shi'ism in the Malay-Indonesian World: A Review of Literature from the Nineteenth Century Onwards," p. 193.

³³ Muhammad, "Jejak Kebudayaan Persia Di Kawasan Tinggalan Sejarah Samudrai Pasai," p. 39.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See also Muhammad Gade Ismail, *Pasai Dalam Perjalanan Sejarah: Abad Ke-13 Sampai Awal Abad Ke-16* (Jakarta: Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Sejarah Nasional, 1993). Ghozali, Safwan, and Syarif, *Peran Ahlulbait Dalam Penyebaran Islam Di Nusantara*.

³⁶ See for example Daniel Perret, "Aceh As a Field for Ancient History" (First International Conference on Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies, Banda Aceh: Asia Research Institute, 2007).

not been claimed as the influence of Shi'ah, but 'Ali bin Abi Thalib.³⁷ At the same time, the title of *Sulthân al-Adîl* in one of gold coin as the oldest currency in Nusantara during era of Sultan Muhammad Malik al-Zahir (1297-1326) was not seen as part Shi'ah's concept on Just Ruler, but it was taken from the *Kitab Taj al-Salâtin*.³⁸ The translator of this *kitab* was Bukhari al-Jauhari in 1603 during the era of *Kerajaan Aceh Darussalam*.³⁹ In fact, the discussion of *sultan al-'adîl* is one of Shi'ah's teaching on leadership such as concept of *walaya*. In doctrine of Shi'ah, *sultan al-'adîl* "was responsible for *tadbîr al-anâm* - that is, managing the affairs of humanity. One of the fundamental functions of the *sultan* is to implement the Islamic ideology based on the principle "enjoining good and prohibiting evil" in Muslim society."⁴⁰ In Aceh, the title was used not only in Samudera Pasai, but also Aceh Darussalam, from Sultan 'Ali Mughayat Syah (1514-1530-1530) until Sultan Ri'ayat Syah (1589-1604).⁴¹ During the Pasai era, it is reported that a century later that coinage came to be used in international trade throughout the archipelago.⁴²

In terms of the literature, as mentioned above, there has been Persian spirit in some Acehnese literatures. Again, scholars would not argue the influence of Shi'ah in this matter. Through Aceh era (1500-1600), many Persian *adab*-works were translated or adapted into Malay language.⁴³ This can be found, for example, in the text of *Taj al-Salâtin*,

³⁷ See Ibrahim Alfian, "Samudra Pasai Dan Melaka Sebagai Bandar-Bandar Niaga Dan Pusat Agama Dan Kebudayaan Di Sekitar Selat Melaka," in *Wajah Aceh Dalam Lintasan Sejarah*, by Ibrahim Alfian, ed. M. Hasan Basry (Banda Aceh: Pusat Dokumentasi dan Informasi Aceh, 1999), p. 17.

³⁸ On *Taj al-Salatin*, see Hussain Khalid, ed., *Taj Us-Salatin* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1966).

³⁹ Alfian, "Samudra Pasai Dan Melaka Sebagai Bandar-Bandar Niaga Dan Pusat Agama Dan Kebudayaan Di Sekitar Selat Melaka," p. 13.

⁴⁰ Sachedina, *The Just Ruler (Al-Sultan Al-Adîl) in Shi'ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence*, p. 99.

⁴¹ Alfian, "Samudra Pasai Dan Melaka Sebagai Bandar-Bandar Niaga Dan Pusat Agama Dan Kebudayaan Di Sekitar Selat Melaka," p. 4.

⁴² Amirul Hadi, *Islam and State in Sumatra: A Study of Seventeenth-Century Aceh* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 51.

⁴³ Jelani Harun, *Bustan Al-Salatin: A Malay Mirror for Rulers* (Pulau Pinang: Universiti Sains Malaysia Press, 2009), p. 82. On the influence of Persian to Malay literature, see Abdul Hadi W.M., "Jejak Persia Dalam Sejarah Kebudayaan Dan Sastra Melayu," in *Islam, Iran, & Peradaban: Peran Dan Kontribusi Intelektual Iran Dalam Peradaban Islam* (Yogyakarta: Rausyan Fikr, 2012), pp. 447-72.

which is according to Braginsky probably the author who came from an Indian-Persia tradition.⁴⁴ Besides the *Tāj al-Salātin*, in Aceh era, there was a book written by Syaikh Nurdin Ar-Raniry entitled *Bustān al-Salatin*. It is believed that the model of story in this *kitab* was influenced by the Persian tradition. Jelani Harun says that:

Many Persian historians, who wrote in the Persian language, emerged alongside the Arab historians and produced universal histories. But, from the sixth century onwards ... the Persian historian began to diverge from Arabic historiography and to form their own style of historical writing. Some of well-known Persian historians are al-Bayhaqi (d.c. 470 A.H. /1077), al-Qashani (d. 703 A.H./1303), al-Qazwini (d. 750 A.H. /1349), Mirkhwand (d. 910 A.H./1504) and Khwandmir (d. 942 A.H. 1535). In all their historical works, the influences of the Persian tradition are very obvious, particularly in regard to the Persian tradition of the stories of Creation and ancient kings. After the era of al-Tabari, al-Mas'udi and Ibn Khaldun, the writing universal history moved towards the Persian tradition.⁴⁵

Abdul Hadi has argued that several factors on the influence of Persian in the text of *Tāj al-Salātin*.⁴⁶ The explanation in his book consists of humanity, justice, and morality. It also describes on how to understand the concept of "self". It is said that the chapters are inspired by al-Ghazzali's *Kimīyah al-Sa'adah*. There are also some Persian references such as *Syar al-Mulk* and *Siyasah Namah* (1092 - 1108) by Nizam al-Mulk, *Asrar an-Namah* (1188) by Fariduddin al-'Attar, *Akbar al-Mulk*, *Sifat al-Mulk*, *Sifat al-Salatin*, *Adab al-'Umara*, and *Akblaq Mahasin* by Husayn Wais al-Kasyfi (1495). There are also some Persian words in in the text of *Tāj al-Salātin*, such as *nawruz* for a new year. It is safe to say that the intellectual contacts between Aceh and Persian or Aceh and Shi'ah occurred before 17 Century. Nevertheless,

⁴⁴ Harun, *Bustan Al-Salatin: A Malay Mirror for Rulers*, p. 82. Braginsky, *Yang Indah, Berfaedah Dan Kamal: Sejarah Sastra Melayu Dalam Abad 17-19*, pp. 322-35.

⁴⁵ Harun, *Bustan Al-Salatin: A Malay Mirror for Rulers*, p. 105.

⁴⁶ Abdul Hadi W.M., "Jejak Persia Dalam Sastra Melayu," *Media Syariah: Jurnal Hukum Islam Dan Pranata Sosial* XV, no. 1 (2013): pp. 93-94.

there was also impact of Persian in the mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri as shown in his works.⁴⁷

It is reported that the ultimate Acehnese civilization had declined when the issue of *Wahdatul Wujud*⁴⁸ and the *fatwa* from Mecca for the abolishment of women as rulers. Ever since, the Kingdom of Aceh was controlled by the family of Jamal al-Layl from Arab.⁴⁹ Soon after this tragedy, the Persian or Shi'ah traditions were seen as cultural heritage. The people have practiced the tradition from Persian or Shi'ah until today, which can be found in Acehnese arts and cultures.⁵⁰ This is why local scholars from Aceh are still arguing that Acehnese tradition cannot be separated from the Shi'ah or Persian traditions.⁵¹

However, the Acehnese would not claim themselves as the followers of Shi'ah. This is because every cultural heritage is seen as part of *endatu* tradition. For them, *endatu* is a group of old generation who came to Aceh for not only religious purposes, but also for trading. The Acehnese may not focus on the background of their *endatu*, but on what the *endatu* had inherited them as cultural which seen as *reusam* or *adat istiadat* (customs). For religious teaching, the Acehnese will only follow three aspects: Syafi'i, al-Ghazzali, and Asy'ari. These aspects have been crystallized in the institution of *dayab* (traditional Islamic boarding school).⁵² It seems that the Shi'ah traditions can be found outside *dayab*. However, the elements of custom in Aceh have been mixed in space, time, and history of the people. This is so because the roots of Acehnese culture are imported from Middle East and South

⁴⁷ Mohamad Nasrin bin Mohamad Nasir, "Pengaruh Persia Dalam Mistisisme Hamzah Fansuri," in *Islam, Iran, & Peradaban: Peran Dan Kontribusi Intelektual Iran Dalam Peradaban Islam* (Yogyakarta: Rausyan Fikr, 2012), pp. 357–78.

⁴⁸ On the controversy of *Wahdat al-Wujud*, see Azyumardi Azra, "Kontroversi Dan Oposisi Terhadap Wahdah Al-Wujud: Wacana Sufisme Di Daerah Indonesia-Melayu Pada Abad 17 Dan 18," in *Islam, Iran, & Peradaban: Peran Dan Kontribusi Intelektual Iran Dalam Peradaban Islam* (Yogyakarta: Rausyan Fikr, 2012), pp. 515–42.

⁴⁹ Azyumardi Azra, *Menuju Masyarakat Madani* (Jakarta: Logos, 1999), p. 29.

⁵⁰ Bustamam-Ahmad, *Islam Historis: Dinamika Studi Islam Di Indonesia*.

⁵¹ Almascaty, "Relasi Persia Dan Nusantara Pada Awal Islamisasi -Sebuah Kajian Awal Pengaruh Persia Dalam Politik Aceh."

⁵² On this see Yusny Saby, "Islam and Social Change: The Role of the Ulama' in Acehnese Society" (Ph.D. Thesis, Temple University, 1995). Yusny Saby, "The Ulama in Aceh: A Brief Historical Survey," *Studia Islamika* 8, no. 1 (2001), pp. 1–54. Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, "Pesantren Sebagai Pusat Peradaban Muslim: Pengalaman Indonesia Untuk Asia Tenggara," *Edukasi* 8, no. 2 (2010), pp. 3939–66.

Asian.⁵³ The meetings of many traditions can be found near the coastal areas.

Cultural Landscapes

It seems that the influence of Persian tradition is important in the history of religious intellectual in Aceh. However, it is hard to conclude that the Persians were Shi'ism, because the Acehnese had known Persian intellectual tradition before the controversy of Shi'ism in Nusantara.⁵⁴ It is believed that the word "Aceh" is coming from Achaemenia in the era of King of Darius (521-486 BC).⁵⁵ Some Acehnese believe that the origin of Acehnese people were from the Achaemenia people.⁵⁶ Regarding the Achaemenian, it is said that "They had created "world empire" encompassing of the oldest and most honored kingdoms and peoples of the ancient Near East."⁵⁷ In addition, the Achaemenian along with Sasanian influenced Islamic or Arabic civilization.⁵⁸

It is interesting to note about the identity of Achaemenian. Local scholars have argued on the impact of Achaemenian era in Nusantara. There is a song by a local artist (Rafly Kande) on the honour of King Darius as part of Acehnese dignity. The lyrics are as follow:

*Beek tabeob kada wangsaw mentuwab; turounan mengab meuri-ri wangsaw;
khujiwa ngoen majjawa lakap gepajab; turounan mengab darius raja.⁵⁹*

⁵³ See for example Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, "Faith on the Move: Inside of the Ijtima' of Jama'ah Tabligh in Pekan Baru," *Studia Islamika* 18, no. 3 (2011): pp. 463–96.

⁵⁴ Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, *Acehnologi* (Banda Aceh: Bandar Publishing, 2012).

⁵⁵ On the history of Achaemenia, see Assagaf, *Lintasan Sejarah Iran: Dari Dinasti Achaemenia Ke Republik Revolusi Islam*.

⁵⁶ A. Jamuda and A.L. Wangsa, *Pengajaran Penturi Droew Keudroew* (Sigli: Angkasa Muda, 2000).

⁵⁷ John P. McKay, Benneth D. Hill, and John Buckler, *A History of World Societies* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), p. 63.

⁵⁸ Taqiuddin Muhammad, "Jejak Kebudayaan Persia Di Kawasan Tinggalan Sejarah Samudra Pasai" (International Conference the Contribution of Persia in Nusantara: Past, Present and Future, Banda Aceh: Media Syariah IAIN Ar-Raniry, 2013), p. 3.

⁵⁹ Don't refuse as a noble people; From glorious descent of nation; Khujiwa and Majjawa are labelled; From glorious descent of King Darius.

Local authors even go further by saying: “Persian people came to Pulau Ruja (Island of Ruja) in the era of King Darius who had power from Egypt Hindi until Pulau Ruja. Their coming to the island was to establish a country which was later called as Aceh.”⁶⁰ Pulau Ruja is another name for Aceh. Historically there were two groups from outside Aceh who played an important role in establishing the Pulau Ruja: *suke inmuem pent* (group of four ‘*ulamas*) and *suke tok bate* (group of technicians). They had come to Aceh from the Middle East and South Asia. In fact, both of groups were a group of religious leaders from Arab, Turkey, and Persian.⁶¹

Among the Acehnese society which is near the Strait of Malacca,⁶² there is a triangle of cultural landscape: mosque, *dayah*, and market. The triangle has been developed near the river. Thus, it is not surprising that Acehnese villages were built by *endatu* (old generation) near to river as a means for good transportation with both insiders and outsiders. The reproduction of culture was started near to sea then moved to village that was closed by river. After the triangle, the *endatu* started to build the *kampongs* according their cosmological belief. The name for this effort was called as *puga nanggroe* (build village). The *kampongs* would not be far from the sea. The last destination of the process was to establishment for another area for *kampung* near the jungle. During my trip in North Aceh, the graves of unknown ‘*ulama* were found in between the paddy field and the jungle. The grave of Kings can be seen near the triangle of cultural landscape. The coming of the Dutch was through the sea. They attacked the villages near to triangle.⁶³ Many of Acehnese had to move to last front: jungle or mountain. During this process, the Acehnese faced not only the

⁶⁰ Jamuda and Wangsa, *Pengajaran Penturi Droë Keudroe*, p. 3.

⁶¹ H.M. Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh and Nusantara* (Medan: Pustaka Iskandar Muda, 1961), pp. 20-21.

⁶² On history of Malacca and it influence to Aceh, see Wazir J. Karim, ed., *Straits Muslims: Diasporas of the Northern Passage of the Straits of Malacca* (Penang: Straits G.T., 2009). Nordin Hussin, *Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka: Dutch Melaka and English Penang, 1780-1830* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007).

⁶³ Anthony Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra: Atjeh, the Netherlands and Britain 1858-1898* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969). Ibrahim Alfian, “Aceh and the Holy War (Prang Sabil),” in *Verandah of Violence: The Background to the Aceh Problem* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), pp. 109–20. Ibrahim Alfian, *Perang Di Jalan Allah: Perang Aceh, 1873-1912* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1987).

destruction of Kingdoms by the Dutch, but also the custom which was changed by Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje.⁶⁴

What I would like to show is that the Acehese culture has been in catastrophic situation. Acehese don't have any single Kings or even Kingdoms anymore. After the colonial period, the Acehese were also in a conflict between 'ulama and *ulee balang* which is seen social revolution. Soon after that, the Acehese were in conflict with central government. Thus, the roots and cultural production have become unclear. The Acehese society has attached their religious belief only to the 'ulama from *dayah*. At the same time, the people still see that their *endatu* tradition could give spirit of identity for them. In this situation, the people are likely to tailor themselves to what *endatu* have done without asking their originality.

Given this process, it is not mistaken when Acehese scholar who tried to investigate the root of culture would meet "should not be..." i.e. Shi'ah. The Acehese did not see Shi'ah as "problem" as we might found in Islamic history⁶⁵ and what has been going on in the Middle East.⁶⁶ The Acehese are in the position of seeking their root of *endatu* tradition. Even there is a declaration that there were Shi'ah's elements in their cultural life, the people would not visit the holy places in Iran. The Acehese would not publish Shi'ah's book as we found in Java. In this context, the Acehese understand Shi'ah for culture only, not for political consciousness or even for political ideology. During the visit of Iranian Ambassador to Aceh, an Acehese student still asked: can Sunni and Shi'ah be an umbrella of the *ummah*. This situation has led to efforts of intellectuality in Aceh without being entrapped in conflict between Sunni and Shi'ah. Some Acehese, especially in urban area, still see Shi'ah as the enemy of Sunni. However, when they return to

⁶⁴ Harry J Benda, "Christian Snouck Hurgronje and the Foundations of Dutch Islamic Policy in Indonesia," *The Journal of Modern History* 30, no. 4 (1958), pp. 338–47.

⁶⁵ Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

⁶⁶ See Said Amir Arjomand, ed., *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984). Said Amir Arjomand, "A Victory for the Pragmatists: The Islamic Fundamentalist Reaction in Iran," in *Islamic Fundamentalisms and the Gulf Crisis*, ed. James Piscatori (Chicago: The American Academy of Arts and Science, 1991). Said Amir Arjomand, "Iran's Islamic Revolution in Comparative Perspective," *World Politics* 38, no. 3 (1986), pp. 383–414. John L. Esposito, *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1997).

their originality of cultures, they might not challenge the Shi'ah's or Persian's elements.

As I mentioned above, that the reproduction of religious understanding has been in *dayah*. The reproduction of Acehnese culture has been found outside *dayah*. Who does this process? How do they manage the situation? Many Acehnese have said that the originality of their culture have been related to Hinduism and Buddhism. However, only Muhammadiyah and Wahabism have challenged the tradition by returning the society to the Qur'an and Sunnah. Both of networks have established *pesantren*, school, universities in Aceh to produce religious understanding. But, they could not change culture in remote areas. The contestation between *dayah* (traditional group) and *pesantren* (modern group) has been seen as the transformation from *teungku* to *ustaz*. This symbolic title can be used a symbol of the competition in religious learning in Aceh.⁶⁷

Some of the graduates from Wahabism *pesantren* in Aceh would be sent to Middle East. Shi'ah has not established any *dayah* or *pesantren* in Aceh. Their network has not been opened to public. As Shi'ah's culture is seen as living tradition among Acehnese, so that the society do not challenge Shi'ah. At the same time, the young generation who are graduated from Middle East or Wahabism play important role against Shi'ah in Aceh. Accordingly, they always refer to the argument of Middle Eastern *ulama*. In a session of discussion about Shi'ah in Aceh, the young speaker who is a graduate from Egypt brought many *kitab* in front of audience to present his argument about anti-Shi'ah. After his presentation, the participant asked him not to bring the problem of Middle East to Acehnese society. We, according to a participant, already in conflict for more three decades, please do not bring another source of conflict to Aceh. An informant told me, that the supporters for anti-Shi'ah in Aceh are Wahabism, an Islamic political party, a group of young Acehnese who finished their study in the Middle East. This group is young generation in Aceh. They play their role in urban areas. After the Tsunami, many of *pesantrens* from Wahabism were built in Aceh. They received funding from "outside" Aceh. In contrast, the tradition of *dayah* would not receive any support from other resources as *pesantren* did.

⁶⁷ Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, "A Current Portrait of Islamic Education in Aceh," *Islamika Indonesiana* 1, no. 1 (2014), pp. 1–16.

However, the tradition and village that have practiced Shi'ah tradition still can be found in some areas in the province.⁶⁸ I was told that in North Aceh, there is a group of Shi'ite. They live together with Sunni without any conflicts. Meanwhile, in Pidie Jaya, there is a *gampong* (village) which is seen as Shi'i. At the same time, a head of IJABI (*Ikatan Jama'ah Ahlul Bait Indonesia* [The Indonesian Council of Ahli Bait Associations])⁶⁹ of Aceh, informed me that they still celebrate festival of Shi'i in Bireuen, Aceh Jeumpa. In addition, many of young Acehnese who are from Sunni family are seen as pro-Shi'ah and stand for this sect as "contestation power" of the domination of Sunni in Aceh. They see that Shi'ah as very dynamic Muslim sects and it gives them some inspirations for their intellectual and spiritual life. I was informed that some of them are graduated from Iranian Universities which is not funded by Acehnese or Indonesian government. This situation is similar with young Muslim Iranians who live in Iran as the largest Shi'ah population in the world, but they are silently in agreement with their ancestor religion that is Zoroaster.⁷⁰

While for those who see Shi'ah as part of Acehnese culture are group of young Acehnese who began their religious understanding with the term of *Islam Warna Warni* (Colorful Islam). They have discussion on many of Islamic sects. The group who is anti-Shi'ah is likely supported by the government on the ground of the implementation of Islamic law. And, the issue of Shi'ah is seen as part of deviant group in Islam. Therefore, the issue of Shi'ah has turned to issue of *sesat menyesatkan*. Generally, in Indonesia, the sect is not recognizable. This is why Acehnese always bring the discussion of Shi'ah to cultural level.

Conclusion

This study has shown the impact of Shi'ah in Aceh. However, it is necessary to do more studies on Shi'ah in the province, as historically and anthropologically, might be connected with Persian traditions. As we have examined, the element of Shi'ah can be found not only in the history of Islamic Kingdoms in Aceh, but also in many of cultural aspects. In addition, the Acehnese still see that Shi'ah and Persian have

⁶⁸ Saby, "Jejak Persia Di Nusantara: Interplay Antara Agama Dan Budaya."

⁶⁹ On IJABI, see Zulkifli, "The Struggle of the Shi'is in Indonesia," pp. 223–58.

⁷⁰ Bustamam-Ahmad, *Acehnologi*, 2012.

contributed to the identity of Aceh. That is why local scholars in Aceh who understand the history of Islam would always claim Shi'ah is not an enemy or even competitor of Sunni. Nevertheless, it is necessary not to bring the conflict between Sunni and Shi'ah in Middle East to Aceh.[]

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