THE SPREAD OF SALAFI WAHABI INFLUENCE: A STUDY IN TERENGGANU, MALAYSIA.

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Abstract

The debate on Salafism and Wahabism is not a recent issue in Muslim’s community. In Malaysia, it has been discussed since the early of the 20th century, during the Islah movement in Egypt and its neighbouring countries. The movement had affected the local Muslim scholars who studied abroad, especially in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and hence brought back the influence to their homeland. Despite the strong opposition, it continues to expand and the rift between both opposing groups has coloured the scenario of Islamic preaching until now. The objective of this study is to describe the background of the Salafi and Wahabi that it was spread to Malaysia, especially Terengganu. It is also aimed to get to know the associated Muslim scholars in Terengganu and their views on this issue. This is a descriptive study which combines both literature and field study. For the literature part, references such as books, thesis, journal articles, and paper works had been used. Interview sessions with the selected scholars were conducted using structured questionnaires. Based on the findings, it was found out that this movement has been notable in Malaysia as the output from the Islah movement in the Middle East countries. It was also resulted from the spread of this influence by Malaysian students who studied in Mecca, Egypt and India who brought back the influence to Malaysia.

Keywords: Salafi, wahabi, Islah, spread, Influence

1. INTRODUCTION

The term Salafi Wahabi emerged upon the Islah movement founded by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (1699M-1792M) in Arabian Peninsular. It later has been the main adherence of the Muslims in Saudi Arabia and a few places in Islamic countries since the dynasty of King Sa’ud, as the results from the efforts of establishing al-Mamlakah al-Arabiyyah al-Sa’udiyyah (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). This movement was also the continuity and reformation of Ibnu Taimiyah’s principles, based on two main points (Muhammad Abu Zahrah 1999, 98):

i. A pure *akidah*, free from the elements which lead to shirk such as tombs visitation, *tabarruk*, *tawassul*, and *istighathah*.

ii. Following acts in accordance to what Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught, and against the acts of *bid’ah*.

This movement received full support from the government of Saudi Arabia, and spread to other Islamic countries such as Egypt, Afghanistan, India (Haji Abdul Hadi Awang 1999, 6) including Malaysia, and a few neighbouring countries. It resulted in a very strong Salafi and Wahabi influence among the alumni from the respective countries and also a prolonged controversy among the Muslim scholars. The debates happened not only in mosques, but also within schools, colleges, and universities.

2. BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT OF SALAFI & WAHABI
The influences of Salafi and Wahabi has developed and practised throughout the Muslim countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Libya, India and Indonesia. In Egypt, a number of Muslim scholars brought the idea of Islah such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani (1834-1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) dan Rashid Reda (1865-1935). They were also known as reformists that were influenced by modernism movement (Abdul Rahman Abdullah 1998, 163). In these three scholars, there were similarities in term of idea of *Islah* they brought with the one from Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab. For example, there were similarities between Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (Muhd Kamal Jum’ah 1401H, 160) such as:

i. Refuting against *bid’ah* and shirk towards tombs and *wali* (saint)

ii. Encourage *ijtihad* (independent reasoning)

For that reason, Muhammad Abduh was assumed to be partially influenced by the thoughts of Muhammad Abdul Wahhab (Muhd Kamal Jum’ah 1401H). Nik Ahmad Rosdi (2003 40-41) stated that Jamaluddin al-Afghani went to India, and subsequently Mecca for hajj. In Mecca, he met with many scholars from Salafiyyah that pioneered by Muhamad bin Abdul Wahhab in al-Hejaz. From this point, it was confirmed that Jamaluddin al-Afghani initiated his tajdid movement in Egypt and spread to the whole Muslim world. It was further confirmed by Dr. Said Ramadan al-Buti in his book discussing the term Salafiyyah, where he mentioned that the Salafiyyah started in Egypt was the result from Islah movement backed up by Jamaluddin al-Afghani and his successor Muhammad Abduh. Their idea was to bring back the Muslims to the genuine Islam, which is free from *khurafat*, *bid’ah* and dubiety (Said Ramadan al-Buti 1990, 231-232).

Rashid Reda was also assumed as one of the scholars that influenced by the idea of Islah, although he denied that allegation. (Said Abd al-Latif Mahmud Faudah 2006, 19) Syeikh Said Abd al-Latif Mahmud Faudah, a scholar from Jordan, outlined the statements of Rashid Reda in al-Manar magazine which pointed out that he was indeed influenced by the idea of *Islah*, as follows:

i. The disagreements between him and Syeikh-Syeikh al-Azhar, Syeikh Yusuf al-Dajuri and Syeikh al-Kauthari Islah issues.

ii. His similarities in da’wah with what were brought by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, which revolved around the issue of *khurafat*, tombs worship, shirk and *bid’ah*.

iii. His acknowledgement of the reign of Sa’ud family in Saudi Arabia.

iv. His follower, Syeikh Abduh, was among the people who urged not to adhere to the mazhab of Asyairah dan Mathuridiyyah.

Hasan al-Banna, the founder of Ikhwanul Muslimin, was also reputed to continue the thought of Salafiyyah in his tajdid movement throughout the Islamic world (Nik Mohd Rosdi Nik Ahmad 2003, 40-41).

In India, Salafiyyah was introduced in 1804M in Bengal by Syariatullah, a scholar who used to study in Mecca. Upon returning to India, he formed a movement against the British. Meanwhile in Punjab, Salafiyyah was pioneered by al-Sayyid Ahmad al-Bazili (born 1787), who used to study from the Salafi Wahabi scholars in Mecca (Zakaria@ Mahmood Daud & Ahmad Zaki Haji Ibrahim 1987, 38). It was spread throughout and followed by a number of other scholars within the country.
In the Middle East, it was believed that Muhammad al-Alusi (died 1835), the author of Tafsir al-Alusi, brought the influence to Iraq. It was proven based on his writings which rejected the narration of *isma’iliat*, the explanation of faith based on Salafiyyah, and his protest against *wahdah al-wujud* by Ibny ’Arabi. The same goes to his brothers Nukman al-Alusi (dead 1899) who defended Ibnu Taimiyyah, and also Shukri al-Alusi (died 1924), a Najd scholar who wrote a book to refute Syi’ah (Zakaria@ Mahmod Daud & Ahmad Zaki Haji. Ibrahim 1987, 38), and reviewed and praised the method by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab.

In Nigeria and West Africa, the thoughts of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab was brought by Shehu Uthman bin Fodio (1754-1817) via his mentor Jibril bin Umar. During hajj, he was said to contact the Wahabi movement. He also observed and scrutinized the movement and its effects towards the Arabs. During that period, the movement, called al-Muwahhidun, was in its peak by establishing an Islamic nation based on al-Quran and Sunnah. Upon coming back to Nigeria, with the assistance of his disciple, he started to spread the thought of Salafi Wahabi. Among others, the action taken was to combat *bid’ah* and *khurafat* in Hausaland (Maryam Jameelah 1997, 23-24).

In Libya, it was brought by Al-Sanusiyyah movement which was led by Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali al-Sanusi (1787-1859) in 1837 in Mecca. Although it was a *tarekat* group, it had similarities with Salafi Wahabi in adhering only to al-Quran and Sunnah, and bringing back Muslims to the genuine Islam and rejecting any form of *bid’ah* and *khurafat* (Zafar Ishaq Ansari 1978, 51). One of the main focuses of this movement was to transform the Islamic community into the one that based on al-Quran and hadis. For that reason, Maryam Jameelah thought that his movement was really influenced by Ahmad bin Hanbal, al-Ghazali, Ibnu Taimiyyah dan Muhammad Abdul Wahhab (Maryam Jameelah 1997, 12). This was due to the fact that he was in al-Hejaz for 20 years for his study, while al-Hejaz was the center of Wahabi movement during that period. This shows that the scenario was shaped by the interplay of both movements (Evans Pritchard 1974, 14).

The influence of tajdid movement in the Middle East was further spread to the South East Asia, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia. It was started in Sumatera, followed by Java Island, and subsequently to Kalimantan, Sulawesi and several neighbouring islands. In Sumatera, the person responsible for this movement was Haji Miskin and his companions who used to follow al-Muwahhidun during their study years in Mecca. It resulted in the establishment of local people to fight the Dutch for 15 years (1822-1837) during Padri War. Although they ended up at the losing side, the thoughts were still spreading throughout the island. In Java Island, Salafi Wahabi movement was spread by Muhammadiyyah founded by Haji Ahmad Dahlan in 1912 in Yogyakarta. His movement later was merged with al-Irsyadiyyah that was founded by Syeikh Ahmad Sukarti. In Mecca, he mostly socialized with the Salafi Wahabi scholars (Zakaria@ Mahmod Daud & Ahmad Zaki Haji Ibrahim 1987, 38).

Malaysia started to experience the influence of Salafiyyah *tajdid* movement with the emergence of Islah figures that were against the practice of *khurafat* and *bid’ah*. Though the influence was ambiguous whether originated from Egypt or al-Hejaz, one obvious element was that the similar approach by the Salafiyyah in al-Hejaz was also happened in Malaysia, but it was not comprehensive (Nik Mohd Rosdi Nik Ahmad 2003, 41). Generally, *Islah* and *tajdid* movement started in Malaysia in the early of 20th century by the influence from the *Islah* scholars in Egypt such as Sayyid
Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Rashid Reda dan Syeikh Muhammad Abduh. This was purely based on the relationship between the former Malaya and al-Hejaz and the observation on the political and socio-cultural of the Malay community in Malaysia.

3. THE SPREAD AND DEVELOPMENT OF SALAFI WAHABI IN MALAYSIA

The influence of Salafi Wahabi was spread in Malaysia by local students who studied in Mecca and Madinah. It was presumably started during the reign of Amir Muhammad bin Sa’ud in Saudi Arabia. They tried to establish the influence into the Malay community, which resulted in the enlightenment of the community to fight the elements of shirk and bid’ah (Zakaria @ Mahmood Daud & Ahmad Zaki Haji. Ibrahim 1987, 38).

The similar approach was taken by the Islah scholars within the tajdid movement in Malaysia such as Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin (1869-1956), Syeikh al-Hadi (1862-1953) and Abu Bakar al-Asy’ari (1904-1970). This so-called reformation movement was said to be influenced by Muhammad Abdul Wahhab via the slogan of Tauhid Salafiyyah by introducing the terms of Tauhid Uluhiyyah and Tauhid Rububiyyah (Abdul Rahman Abdullah 1998, 315-316). Meanwhile, in the view la mazhabiyah (not following any mazhab) that was championed by Syeikh Abu Bakar, he was assumed to be following the thoughts of Muhammad Abduh. Despite the non-existence of proof of meeting with Muhammad Abduh, he might got influenced by Syeikh Tahir or Tokoh Tiga Serangkai in Perlis – Haji Ahmad, Wan Ahmad bin Daud and Syeikh Ahmad bin Mohd Hashim, who were also known as Tiga Mat. They received the influence from al-Hasan Bandung, while al-Hasan Bandung was influenced via magazines and well-known Salafi Wahabi scholars, as well as scholars of Tiga Serangkai from Middle East (Nik Mohd Rosdi Nik Ahmad 2003, 270).

Nonetheless, the tajdid movement was undistinguished during that period due to the strong influence of the orthodox scholars which adhered to Asya’irah and they acknowledged the tajdid movement as deviant sect. The connection with the tajdid movement by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab could be linked by the relationship of Abu Bakar al-Asy’ari with Tiga Mat that was influenced by al-Hassan and Ahmad Surkati. These two Islah scholars, who originated from Indonesia, were apparently the advocates of Salafi Wahabi in Java. This was told by Abu Bakar Acheh and Van Der Kroef as (Prof. Dr. Bisri Afandi M.A 1999, 222-227):

Wahabi Movement was mostly originated from Arab, represented by Ahmad Surkati al-Ansari, a famous scholar who specialized in the works of Ibnu Taimiyyah and Ibnu Qayyim. He was the founder of Wahabi movement and reformist front in Egypt.

4. SALAFI WAHABI AND THEIR SCHOLARS IN TERENGGANU

Although Perlis was noted as one of the earlier states to receive the influence of Salafi Wahabi, Terengganu was also getting the similar influence among the local scholars, which subsequently spread within the community. The reasons for the spread in Terengganu were as follows (Nor Hafizi Yusof 2008, 197-207):

i. The influence brought in by the Middle East students, such as Mecca, Madinah, Egypt, as well as India.

ii. The efforts by Saudi government such as dakwah courses and tarbiyah among the religious teachers in Terengganu.
The spread was focused on the religious lectures in mosques, specifically in the area of Tauhid and Hadis. The books used were al-Jawab al-Fasil Yatamayyazu al-Haq wa al-Batil by Ibnu Taimiyyah, Syarah al-Tahawiyah by Syeikh Abdul Qadir al-Mandili, Syarh Sahih al-Bukhari and Kitab al-Tauhid by Syeikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab.

The most popular Salafi scholars were identified as Haji Muhammad bin Abdul Majid al-Fatani (70 years old) in Kampung Gong Pak Maseh, Ustaz Awang Nasiruddin bin Abu Bakar in Kampung Batu 6, Ustaz Razali Tahir and Ustaz Yahya Tahir in Kampung Gemuru, Batu Rakit (Nor Hafizi Yusof 2008,197-207).

i. Ustaz Haji Muhammad bin Abdul Majid al-Fatani

He was better known as Ustaz Mat Majid and lives in Kampung Tok Maseh, Kuala Terengganu. He was originally from Na Prodo Kupu in Fatani. He received his early education via pengajian pondok in Mecca, which were Madrasah Indonesia and Madrasah Makiyyah, and obtained his Aliah degree in 1964. He was then returned back to Fatani and furthered his study in Egypt several years after that. He obtained his degree in Syari'ah wa al-Qanun in 1970. He came to Terengganu in 1983 before settling down in Kelantan for a year. In 1985, he worked as a teacher in Sekolah Agama Durian Guling and Sekolah Menengah Atas Sultan Zainal Abidin (SMASZA) in 1987 to 1993.

He was active in dakwah as a mubaligh (missionary) for Majlis Agama Islam dan Adat Istiadat Melayu (MAIDAM). Apart from his home religious classes, he also taught in Masjid al-Muktafi Billahi Shah Ladang, Masjid Hiliran Kuala Terengganu and Surau Haji Wan Endut di Kampung Gong Tok Maseh. He translated a few books and among them was a book by Ibnu Taimiyyah entitled al-Jawab al-Fasil Yatamayyazu al-Haq wa al-Batil which he used in his teaching.

Based on his educational background, he was believed to receive the Salafi influence during his study in Mecca. He expressed that Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab was the supporter of Salafussoleh, a group of pious predecessors, during the period of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) until the fourth century. He was adhered to al-Quran and sahih hadis while preaching. He was against the practices of talkin, tahlil and Islamic events, which he acknowledged as bid’ah. He rejected the idea that some scholars categorize those practices as furu’ (branches), while it actually revolved around the matter of akidah and categorized as usul (roots).

He also stated that the term Wahabi was given by the Syi’ah and British to the opposition group toward Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab. It was mainly because there were no specific mazhab other than al-Quran and sunnah.

ii. Ustaz Awang Nasiruddin bin Abu Bakar

He came from Kampung Bukit Tok Beng, Kuala Terengganu, and settled down in Kampung Batu 6, Kuala Terengganu. He was the alumnus of Pondok Tuan Guru Haji Abbas, Kampung Tok Jiring, before pursuing his study in Hadis in Jamiah Darul ‘Ulim India. He successfully finished the study of Sunan Sittah through talaqqi method and awarded degree for that. He continued his study in Syariah wa al-Quran in Egypt in 1972, and came back to Malaysia in 1974. Upon returning back, he was nominated as the PAS representative for DUN Teluk Pasu, and won that position. His excellence in religious knowledge made him to be appointed as the Leader of Dewan Ulama PAS Terengganu until 2003.
Being a politician did not deter him to be active in *dakwah*. He used to deliver weekly lectures in several mosques in Kuala Terengganu, especially Masjid Batu 6. He emphasized on the *Salaf tauhid* and asked the community to only practice what was outlined by al-Quran and Sunnah. He was greatly influenced by Salafi during his Hadis study and in India. He was really adhered to Islamic law and rejected *bid’ah* practices such as al-Quran recitation for the deceased, *talkin*, and *tahlil*. In Masjid al-Taqwa, Kampung Batu 6, Kuala Terengganu, there was only a single azan during Friday prayer as it was the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

### iii. Ustaz Haji Razali bin Tahir

He was originally came from Kampung Gemuruh, and settled down in Kampung Bukit Besi, Dungun, Terengganu. His secondary school was Sekolah Menengah Agama Tok Jiring (1982-1988). He then pursued his study in Maahad al-Haram in Mecca (1989-1991). In 1993 and 1998, he obtained his bachelor’s and master’s degree, respectively, from Universiti Darul al-Hadis Faisalabad in the field of Hadis.

He was very active in *dakwah*, and opened a Tahfiz Institute in Bukit Besi, named Institut Tahfiz al-Mizan. He also delivered lectures to local communities to improve the understanding on Islamic values strictly based on al-Quran and Sunnah, and also the practices of *Salafussoleh*. Among the books he used in his lectures were *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, *Manhaj Aqidah Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah* by Ustaz Ismail Omar, *Taudih al-Ahkam min Bulugh al-Maram* by Abdullah bin Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, *Fiqh al-Sunnah* by al-Sayyid Sabiq, and *Syarh al-Bukhari* by Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani. He also emphasized on the Salafi thoughts in his lectures. He started to follow the Salafi thoughts while following the lectures by Ustaz Awang Nasiruddin in Masjid Batu 6, Kuala Terengganu, as well as from his brother Ustaz Yahya bin Tahir who was in Mecca during that period.

In his point of view, the term Wahhabi was incorrectly used by the community. The term was not founded by Syeikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, or his followers. It was merely a term used by the people who were against his dakwah so to imply that it was deviated from the correct path. For example, those who were against the practices of *tahlil*, *talkin*, and rejected the method of *ta’wil*, would be labelled as Wahhabi. As a matter of fact, those were the practices by *Salafussoleh* imams such as Imam Syafi’i and Imam Ahmad, way before the time of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab.

He affirmed that Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab was only an *Islah* individual who continued the teaching of Salafussoleh and brought back the Muslim community to the Islamic teaching based on al-Quran and Sunnah. He also rejected the claim made by the community that Wahhabi was firm, due to the fact that all the prophets were also firm, especially on the issue of *akidah*. For the matter of Salafi thoughts, he suggested the community to read books entitled *Manhaj al-Aqidah Imam al-Syafi’i* by Abd al-Rahman al-Qumaisy, *Tabaqat Imam al-Syafi’i* and *Usul al-l’tiqad* by Imam al-Laka’l, and a few other books on the practices of *Salaf al-soleh* imams. Ustaz Yahya bin Tahir was also beside him in spreading the thoughts of Salaf.

**CONCLUSION**

There were active activities done by Salafi Wahabi scholars via lectures and writings, but the effect was not that obvious. Ahli Sunnah from Asyairah and Syafei mazhab was more significant and dominant within the community. The research findings also
reveals that most of the scholars in Terengganu was more incline towards wasatiyyah approach to be practised by the community for their daily activities.

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