

THE PERSONALITY AND TEACHINGS OF SYEKH SITI JENAR

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Abstract

When we come across to the name Syekh Siti Jenar, our mind will turn to one of the most famous walis (Moslem mystics) in the history of Indonesia. Syekh Siti Jenar is famous both for ordinary people as well as intellectual scholars dealing with the history of Islam and mysticism in Indonesia. Some people doubt that this Syekh is really a historical personality, but more people believe the existence of Syekh Siti Jenar is real. The life and teachings of Syekh Siti Jenar as exposed by many books immediately remind us of those of the martyr Sufi al-Hallāj (244-309 H/857-922 AD). There is striking similarity between two personalities despite many differences. It is suggested that the written sources seem to make easy and simple the doctrine of Siti Jenar and even said that the mystical teachings of him are clear and open to everyone; while in fact, they are not.

Key Words: Doctrine, mystical teachings, Syariat, Sufi, Syekh Siti Jenar, Wali

INTRODUCTION

The name Syekh Siti Jenar can't be separated with *Wali Sanga*. *Wali Sanga* is a group of nine (*songo*=Javanese word for nine) *walis* who are thought to be pioneers of the preaching of Islam in Indonesia, especially in Java island, when the Sultanate of Demak, which is the first Islamic kingdom in Java island, came into being. Like Siti Jenar himself, we don't know exactly about them, apart from what we can still from written sources and local tradition which are concerned less about giving historical facts, than about giving historical "tradition" itself. Siti Jenar is said to be one of the nine *walis*, although more popularly, he is known as "enemy" of *Wali Sanga* as long as these wali are represented as 'ulama concerned very much about *syariat*, as compared to Siti Jenar who is said not paying attention to the outward aspect of Islam (Solikhin 2004: 25). However, uniquely, among contemporary Javanese, the idea reigns that all esoteric doctrines called *ngelmu kasampurnan* (the

knowledge to attain perfection) were pioneered by the *walisanga* (Zoetmulder 1995: 297).¹

Sources of Siti jenar's life and teachings are preserved in many old written sources (called *babad* and *suluk*) and local tradition. The written sources dated later than supposed life-time of Siti Jenar (in the 16-th AD).

There are diverse primary sources on Siti Jenar's life and teachings, but each of them only gives incomplete story of Siti Jenar. Some of them contain details not found in others or same details construed (interpreted) very differently from others. Because of their separate descriptions of Siti Jenar, it is highly useful to compare them each other and to analyze them critically (Solikhin 2004:6-7).

Among the classical or primary sources are: *Suluk Seh Lemahbang*, popularized by van Ronkel, considered to be the oldest manuscript and published in 1913²; *Serat Seh Siti Jenar*, composed by Ki Sasrawijaya and published in 1900; *Serat Siti Jenar* Tan Khoen Swie edition, first published

1. It is in this context Siti Jenar is considered as one member of *Walisanga*.

2. Not mentioned in my source how old the manuscript is.

in 1922 in Javanese script, and then in 1931 in Latin); *Kitab Wali Sepuluh*, published in 1950. Some classical Javanese literatures containing stories of Siti Jenar are: *Babad Tanah Jawi*, *Babad Demak*, *Babad Cirebon*, *Serat Dewarotji*, *Serat Gatolotjo*, *Serat Kebokenanga* and *Suluk Walisanga*. There are also secondary sources, written on Siti Jenar's life and teachings, based on those primary sources and also translating some parts of them, the authors of some of them being: Abdul Munir Mulkhan, Dr. Purwadi, Agus Sunyoto and Muhammad Solikhin (Solikhin 2004: 12-23). Apart from the Indonesian sources, works of Western scholars on Siti Jenar are also of great importance, especially those of D. A. Rinkes, Drewes, P.J. Zoetmulder and Barend Schuurman.

Since primary sources are in Javanese, even old Javanese language, I can only depend on secondary sources. Translations of some independent *serats* of Siti Jenar are available, but they are also available in the secondary sources.

This paper will examine the life and secret teachings of Syekh Siti Jenar, especially in relation to his method of divulging these secrets and reaction of the ulama of his time to his teachings as characteristic of 'ulama who want to defend *syariah* against dangerous consequences of such esoterical teachings made public. In short, I try to give one case in the history of Indonesia of the dispute between 'ulama who pay much attention to *syariah* sufi and 'ulama whose esoteric teachings are considered heretic.

BIOGRAPHY OF SITI JENAR

Primary sources on Siti Jenar present his story in highly literary overtones which make it difficult to tell who Siti Jenar really was and what he really did. Fortunately, there are some points

upon which all the sources agree, such as that he lived sometime in the early Demak Sultanate, around 15-th until 16-th century and that he was a Moslem sufi given death penalty. Most sources (secondary ones as well as ,of course, primary ones) don't give the date of birth and death of Siti Jenar, but Muhammad Solikhin gives it, saying that Siti Jenar lived between 829-923 *Hijria* or 1426-1517 AD (Solikhin 2004: 31).

Siti Jenar has many other names. He is also called San Ali, Syekh 'Abdul Jalil, Syekh Jabaranta, Syekh Lemah Abang, Sunan Sasmita, Syekh Nurjati, Syekh Siti Brit and many others. Different names he has are partly due to the stories of his life which tell that he had visited many places in *Nusantara* –Indonesian archipelago-- (where he also preached) and even until India and Middle-East, so in Malaka he was known as Syekh 'Abdul Jalil, in Palembang Syekh Jabaranta, in Cirebon Syekh Lemah Abang (Solikhin 2004: 32). The most famous name is, of course, Siti Jenar. Siti means soil (*tanah*), Jenar means red.³ This strange name is not meaningless, since it contains mystical purport. It is related to his philosophy which said every human being in this life is dead.

Based on Solikhin's accounts, Siti Jenar was born in Pakuwan Cirebon, to the southeast of Cirebon city, West Java. His father was of Malaka origin (a Malay) named Syekh Datuk Shaleh bin Syekh 'Isa 'Alawi. 'Alawi is a sign that Siti Jenar was descendant of Ali 'ibn Abi Thalib, the cousin of the Prophet. After finishing his early education in Cirebon, Siti Jenar went to Palembang and then to the place of origin of his father, Malaka, in Malay Peninsula. Being aware that he himself was descendant of *Ahlul Bait*, he determined to visit Middle East. Siti Jenar went to Baghdad for several

3. The meaning is precisely the same with Siti Brit or Lemah Abang (*lemah*= soil, *abang*=brit=red).

years in which he studied *tasawwuf* under different sufi syaikh and also made some contact with the thought of Syiah Ja'fariyyah. Siti Jenar studied works of al-Hallaj, Abu Yazid Busthami, Qusyairi, 'Ibn 'Arabi and mainly al-Jili who died in 1425, one year before Siti Jenar's birth. Solikhin said that Siti Jenar was deeply influenced by al-Jili and al-Hallaj and even it was he who first brought their doctrines to Java. After studying in Baghdad, he made pilgrimage to Mekka and also studied Sufism there. After visiting India (also preached in Belgaum and Goa) for some time, Siti Jenar went back to Nusantara, to Pasai (Aceh), Malaka, Palembang, then to Cirebon to be the preacher of Islam, especially *tasawwuf falsafiy* (Solikhin 2004: 45).

It is mentioned above that Siti Jenar lived in the transitional period between the Majapahit kingdom and the Demak kingdom and when he came back to Java, around 1460's, the Sultanate of Demak didn't emerge yet, as it came into being around 1500. Siti Jenar preached not only in West Java, but also in East and Middle Java. Because he had proved himself to be a successful preacher and attracted many followers, he was also appointed as one member of *walisanga* in Demak who were then very active in Islamisation of Java (Solikhin 2004: 60). He was given task to preach Islam in Western part of the island. However, as time went, Siti Jenar himself became the enemy of other 'ulama called *Dewan Waly* which, among others, comprised of some members of *walisanga*, because Siti Jenar began to teach esoteric doctrines to people openly; his method was considered dangerous to the religious life of Javanese people in that time.

Siti Jenar is given death penalty by the *walis* in the reign of the Sultan Raden Fatah, the founder of the Sultanate of Demak. He is said to die in the year 1517 AD (Solikhin 2004: 145), just a year before the death of the famous Sultan in

the history of Islam in Indonesia. The death of Siti Jenar will be given special attention in this paper.

TEACHINGS OF SYEKH SITI JENAR

Manunggaling-kawula-gusti is an expression that concludes the core of Siti Jenar's teachings. Literally, it means the unity of human and God. The expression finds its equivalent in *sasahidan*: *Laa ilaha illa ana* and *ana al-haqq* (Solikhin 2004: 89).

In the *Serat Siti Jenar*, Tan Khoen Swie edition (1922), we read the translation in Zoetmulder (Zoetmulder 1995: 301):

(20) Seh Lemah Abang spoke: 'It is better that we speak frankly. I myself am Allah (21) It is I who in reality am Prabu Satmata [=Hyang Manon, the All-Seeing] and there is no other who has a divine name'. Molana Maghribi said, 'But that (which you are indicating) is called a body.' Seh Lemah Abang replied, (22) 'I preach here the highest wisdom, which concerns unity. This is no body, not in eternity, for the body exists not. What we are discussing here is, after all, the true wisdom and we are drawing back the screen (revealing the most concealed secret).

Zoetmulder says that by these teachings Siti Jenar teaches the complete identity between the speaker and Allah and that he is not hesitant to assert that the body is not him. D. A. Rinkes gives the core of Siti Jenar's concept of *manunggaling-kawula-gusti* below (Rinkes 1911: 43):

...zonder zich al te bekommeren om de sufistische en sophistische redeeneringen en beschouwingen, die worden aangevoerd, geeft de boven aangehaalde leer aan [*manunggaling-kawula-gusti*], dat de Mensch en Allah in zekeren zin als identiek zijn op te vatten, dat de Mensch is microcosmos en als zoodanig afzonderlijk aan beschouwing kan worden onderworpen, dat Hij tegenlijk...zich als macrocosmos voordoet.

Here, as with Zoetmulder, Rinkes notes in Syekh's doctrines traces of Vedanta philosophy, but Siti Jenar's doctrine is not considered as a systematical thought. If we read sources on Siti Jenar, it may not be appropriate to construct any

system at all, since the teachings are not only meant to understand with intuition but also very possibly presented with intervention of the authors' own thinking or interpretations of the doctrine. This is even more when we are aware that Siti Jenar's written works are not known.

For Siti Jenar, the meaning that human is *khalifatullah* in this life is that he (the human) is not yet completely united with Allah, because he must have *jism* (physical body) which needs to be maintained; hence, he is called *kawula* ('*abd* or slave) who needs to worship Allah (*Gusti*) with the aim to come back to unity with Him. This return to unity with God is more important for him than religion itself, since for him all religions (in the context of his time: Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam) lead to the same aim (Mulkhan 1985: 62 and Solikhin 2004: 217-222).

For Siti Jenar, the world is not "created", since the world is new, while God never creates any new being (from non-being). The world is *la auwala* (without beginning), its coming being from the concept of *drikumahiyati* (Arabic may be: *darkul mahiyyat*) which means getting the essence. God is said in all "creatures" (Mulkhan 1985: 100). He also adheres to a mystical expression: *wallahu zhahirul insan wa bathinul insan baitullahi* (Allah is the outward of human, and the inward of human, the House of God) mentioned in the *serat* as words in *Ihya 'Ulumuddin* of al-Ghazaly, when answering to the last question of the emissary of the Sultan: what is the form of God (Mulkhan 1985: 101).⁴

Another name for this kind of doctrine is *wihdatul wujud* or *wujudhiyyah* preached by Ibnu 'Arabi, al-Jili, and other Sufis. In the history of Islam in Indonesia, *Wujudhiyyah* was also taught

by Syekh Abdurra'uf as-Singkily with his *Thariqah Syattariah* (a mystical order) and widely attributed to Hamzah Fansuri's teachings; both of them were from Sumatra. In Java, it is Siti Jenar who is known to be the most recognized model of the adherents of *wujudhiyyah*, though other *walis* are also considered to preach it to some degree. As is the case elsewhere, due to the background of his time and place, Siti Jenar used Javanese idioms and symbolism. However, for many people, it looks like Javanese mysticism than Islamic one.⁵

One emphasis that frequently occurs in the *serats* of Siti Jenar is that Siti Jenar teaches so long as the human in this world he is dead. Only with deliverance from this world of death will one find his true life (Zoetmulder 1995: 304-305). The physical body that we have in this life is called corpse by him. Siti Jenar gives his support from an Arabic expression (in the Javanese tongue): *anal mayit pikruhi fayajitu kabilahu*⁶ meaning that (in the logics of his teachings) the corpse is in the realm of death, since this world is the realm of death, a human's soul is given physical body. In the realm of the true life, he is not given the container. Body is something new, not eternal, thus liable to destruction. Moreover, the body defiles the soul and is seen as a burden upon it, impeding realization of the ultimate aim of the soul (unity with God). The body that one has needs to be nourished and maintained all the time in his life. With the body, human is subject to physical pains and pleasures which often lead him astray from the right way. We read in the Zoetmulder's translation of the texts (Zoetmulder 1995:305):

4. In the *serat* it was Ki Bisana (one of the best disciples of the master) who answered all the questions of the emissaries, with the permission and agreement of Siti Jenar.

5. For example, Schuurman said "Wir stehen hier auf der Grenze ja schon jenseits der Grenze zur wilden Mystic...zerschneidet das letzte Band das sie [Javanische Mystic] an das Leben bindet. (Schuurman 1933: 43).

6. The correct Arabic may be: *amal mayyit fi qabrihi fa yajidu khalibahu* (the dead is given (physical) container (or body) in their realm of death). This expression is called *dalil Samarkandi* in the *serat*, but the *dalil* is generally known to be in the theme of Arabic rhetorics ('*ilmu balaghah*).

(33)' In truth, the *walis* and the king are just the same as I: in this world we are corpses which will soon rot and mixed with the soil. Therefore I have no wish to be governed by a fellow creature. And furthermore, know this: what is known as *kawula-gusti* does not in fact relate to ordinary humanity. (34) They [*kawula* and *gusti*] are already within me and night and day are not separated from me. But the name *kawula-gusti* is only for the present moment, only for so long as I am dead. Later, when I have again come to life, *gusti* and *kawula* will disappear and there will remain only life itself, in eternal peace with Being itself.

One teaching which is the result of the idea makes Siti Jenar take a different opinion from more orthodox Sufis. It is that he believes paradise and hell are only met in this world, not after-life. *Jroning pati suarga neraka, bagya cilaka pinanggih, yeko gumlaring donya* (in the death are paradise and hell, happiness and suffering, that is this world) (Mulhkan 1985:46). This extreme conception looks contrary to principles of Islamic teachings, which say that human's deeds, good or bad, will be rewarded not only in this world, but also, and mainly, in the *akhirat*. Some Sufis indeed hold that there will be no (physical) paradise and hell in the afterlife, since the true paradise is to meet face to face with Allah and the hell is to be diverted from seeing the beauty of God. Insofar as our sources show, there is no hint whatsoever that Siti Jenar also holds the opinion in that way. For Siti Jenar, the problem looks simple: there is no paradise and hell since this world is already with its paradise (happiness) and hell (suffering). There is Buddhist strain in the teaching and it can perhaps be attributed to the influence of previously foreign elements (Indian) in Javanese mystical thought with which Siti Jenar might have made some contact.

Considering previous ideas attributed to Siti Jenar, it is not surprising that if his adherent draws the teachings to the very end, to their practical

consequences, he would tend to neglect *syariah*. It was really that happened in Siti Jenar's time, as our sources describe it very clearly. And it seems Siti Jenar really taught them so. Siti Jenar is said to have caused people to disobey *syariah* because he taught every human who has united with God is free from any burden, including from Islamic laws. In the translation of *Serat Seh Siti Jenar* of Sasrawijaya we read, he said blantly that *syahadat*, *salat* (prayer) and fasting are not important since they are not needed and even the result of the evil of the reason. *Zakat* and *hajj* are non-sense for him. The *walis* who taught them had the very intention to cheat and manipulate people and to lead astray the fools. They are all the same, not like Siti Jenar who sees no need to obey the evil of the reason, because he obeys nothing but God (Mulhkan 1985:78).

It was seen as a real danger by the 'ulama to common people who had just been introduced to Islam at that time (16-th century). The people would have serious misunderstanding of Islamic teachings and make themselves away from being right and true Moslems. In addition to that, the very impact of this misunderstanding was likely to be contagious to other people who had no capability to rightly understand Siti Jenar's highly philosophical mysticism.

In my opinion, however, it is still debatable whether Siti Jenar really means what is said in the sources that he rejects *syariah* or Islamic laws, because if he really means that, it was very careless of him to encourage his pupils to neglect Islamic laws in a time when the details of *syariah* itself were hardly known to many people to which he explained his doctrines. It would have been more reasonable if he had lived somewhere in Middle-East where Islam was already there for a long time. The reason of such a teaching was

perhaps that the sultanate of Demak forced its citizens to obey *syariah* especially those laws dealing with *'ibadah* (worshipping God) and the people felt very annoyed. Nevertheless, it is not really possible when we know at the same time our primary sources said that Siti Jenar had an important role in preaching Islam to Javanese people still believing in some Hinduistic or Buddhistic or indigeneous doctrines. Thus, if Siti Jenar indeed means that *syariah* is not important at all, it might be a "tactics" of him to make people more interested in Islam in an easier way; in other words, that is his method of preaching.

It is also interesting to see that Siti Jenar criticized his contemporary 'ulama by calling them false and wrong 'ulama who led fool people gone astray. He called them *munafiq* (hypocrite), attached to pleasures of this world, having very intention to fulfil their physical and mental desires by pretending to teach other people and sold religion for their own benefits (Solikhin 2004:165). He especially addressed his "sarcasm" towards particular *walis* when discussion with them, calling Sunan Modang ignorant and Sunan Geseng as having no shame (Mulkhan 1985:114). However, this method was also used by his pupils, like certain Ki Lonhang Semarang who boasted himself with his knowledge and challenged all *walis* when he came to masjid Demak to advise them not to cheat people by saying that Siti Jenar's corpse had turned into a dog while in fact it was the *walis* themselves who had changed his corpse (Mulkhan 1985:128) and then gave them three suggestions before he came to death in front of the pulpit of the mosque in the way like Siti Jenar chose his death with his own spiritual power.⁷

7. These were: firstly, the *walis* should not manipulate people too much in order that they would not be ashamed in the eyes of next generations; secondly, not to disturb old heirs of Javanese culture, like old manuscripts in woods' leaves, old temples, paintings, etc; thirdly, they

This kind of criticism is frequently exercised by certain 'ulama, not exclusively Sufis, to other 'ulama who are patronized by the ruler. However, in the story of Siti Jenar the criticism is somewhat exaggerated and not really clear which aspects of the 'ulamas' life were concerned and who the 'ulama are. If the author(s) of *serats* of Siti Jenar really mean they were *wali sanga* (whose synode condemned Siti Jenar to death), we are in another problem, because for Javanese people, *walisanga* were Sufis, despite differences in teachings among themselves. And it should not be forgotten, that in the time of Siti Jenar the 'ulama were not too powerful, due to its being the beginning of Islamic preaching in Java.⁸

DA'WAH METHOD OF SYEKH SITI JENAR

As mentioned earlier, one of the main reasons why Siti Jenar was sentenced to death is that he had revealed esoteric or secret mystical doctrines openly to common people (*miyak warana*). This method of teaching mytical doctrines was considered not only inappropriate but also vulgar. It had caused many people to do misdeeds not only to himself but also to others. There were many reports about this situation and the ruler saw the need to take measures against them.

We read in the sources, Siti Jenar taught people in his *paguron* (typical Javanese public teaching building) openly. His *paguron* is said to be always attended by many people coming from many different places. He did not hesitate to talk to all of them about his doctrines. The pupils

should destroy the *masjid* with fire in order that next generations would not be gone astray any more, in prayer and in their false assumptions of God (Mulkhan 1985:132).

8. As different versions of the story of *Siti Jenar* were composed in later time (17-th century and later) in which the 'ulama were more powerful than before and some even had exercised a kind of authority to the people, due to their relation with the rulers. Hence, it is more reasonable to say that the authors attributed their own criticism to the 'ulama of their time usingr the name of Siti Jenar.

sometimes talked freely among themselves and discussed openly with him, even made noise such that as to make impression that they were talking non-sense, not addressing very important mystical doctrines (Solikhin 2004:87).⁹

Concerning his 'syllabus': first, for the *murid* to come he would be given teaching concerning *sangkan-paraning-dumadi* (the origin of life). He explained to all his pupils what is meant by the gate of life, outwardly manifest in physical body of human, and inwardly in the heart. Then Siti Jenar told that this world is nothing but the kingdom of death, the world of endless suffering. One's ultimate aim is to escape from the world of death to come to the true life. Since the release depends much on individual effort, the *mursyid* only helps them to activate their *ruh al-idhafi*, which is the key to unity with *ruh al-Haqq*. For that purpose, Siti Jenar then guided them to go through spiritual practices in attain their ultimate aim (Solikhin 2004:114).

One of the *walisanga*, Sunan Giri warned Siti Jenar not to reveal secret doctrines openly, moreover to ordinary people who lacked enough understanding of the teachings, but Siti Jenar refused to stop. He was sure that there is no need to hide the ultimate knowledge which all people need. Because, in his opinion, every human being is entitled to hear it regardless of his social status, understanding capability, or even his religion.¹⁰

We read in the translation of the text (Zoetmulder 1995:303):

For it was the intention of the sage that there be no difference among all of God's creatures. To all who wished to receive instruction, he openly and bluntly told the truth. For in the world, with regard to the Most High, there is no difference among kings or walis and all the suffering, poor and powerless. They are all the screen of the Immaterial. In the hereafter, however, even a king or Bupati, if he knows not the true meaning of life, will fall into the void. But if one is a suffering beggar along the road, if he knows the words of unity, he will be eternal and immutable.

The impacts of Syekh Siti Jenar's teachings for his ordinary pupils could be partly predicted. There were some people having heard his doctrines and understood or misunderstood them then had no patience to escape this realm of death as soon as possible. They had no patience to unite with God, so they tried all means to come to their aim by making riots, running amok in public places and making themselves killed. Some even attempted to commit suicide. This public disorder, of course, caused the ruler of Demak to take measures against them. However, the riots were not purely motivated by religious history, but also by economical motives due to difficult social and economical conditions of lay people at that time, in which only the upper classes much enjoyed the wealth of the kingdom (Solikhin 2004:115). Siti Jenar appeared to them as giving alternatives to solve their problems, though it is not likely that Siti Jenar asked them to kill themselves, but, among alternatives, to make their suffering more acceptable and to promise them that after death there would be true life in which there is no suffering, only happiness.

Relation between Siti Jenar and the ruler of Demak was getting worse not only due to misdeeds of some of his pupils, but also because Siti Jenar has different conception concerning the relation between the king and its subjects. The subjects must have freedom of expression, and

9. This impression was felt by five *walis* made necessary to visit him due to his refusal to meet the call of Sultan and *Dewan Wali* who threatened him with the death penalty.

10. In the *Serat Siti jenar* composed by Sasrawijaya, we find that after Siti Jenar discussed with a certain Ki Kebokenanga (a grandson of the last king of Majapahit kingdom and whose knowledge in Hindu-Buddhist mysticism is very good) on God and Reality, they came to conclusion that their religions in the essence teach the same (Mulkhan 1985: 62). See also Solikhin 2004:217-222.

that the ruler to them are like the mursyid to his murid. Thus, a good king is not to order, but to guide (Solikhin 2004:102-103).

It is also interesting to see when Schuurman compares method of Siti Jenar to that of *Malamatiyyah*. While Siti Jenar with his disobedience or seemingly negligence to *syariah* openly reveals mystical secrets, *Malamatiyyah* with their seemingly disobedience tend to keep their esoteric doctrines more mysterious (Schurmann, 1933:43). However, for me, it seems that by Siti Jenar's method of teaching esoteric doctrines and his views on *syariah*, there are many things left unclear or made more secret, since it is very difficult to grasp complete understanding of the real doctrine to which he adheres if we accept all what the sources on him said or if we depend solely on 'words'. If it is taken for granted that all his words all are all he means, we are not in the right way to deal with mysticism which is concerned more with inner reality than outward aspects.

THE DEATH OF SITI JENAR

One of the most interesting parts in the story of Siti Jenar is about his death. In fact, it is the death of the syaikh that is more popularly known about him than his doctrine itself.

Before going closely to the topics, it is better to give brief explanation of social and political conditions of Siti Jenar's period. In his time, the Sultanate of Demak was founded by Raden Fatah after successful separation of the regency Demak from the fading Majapahit kingdom. Supported by the *walis* who wanted to make the Sultanate as centre of Islamisation in Java, the new kingdom immediately came to be based on the foundation of *syariat* in the frame orthodox Sunni-Islam. The supervision or control of the *syariat* was in the hand

of *Dewan Wali*, a group of 'ulama enjoying the patron of the Sultan. In most sources, this *Dewan Wali* was identified with *wali sanga* in the way that will make us surprised when we know that, as already mentioned before, for Javanese people *wali sanga* are the true mystics whose mystical views are not too different from Siti Jenar's.¹¹

The *syaria*-based Sultanate could hardly tolerate any heterodox version of Islam to flourish, as it would have various impacts, religious as well as socio-political ones. Seen as having close relationship with potential rebels, Siti Jenar also became a serious threat if given freedom to speak and teach. Moreover, his teachings had really made many misunderstanding pupils create public disorder in many places in Demak.

Reasons for giving him penalty of death are given in the sources, both implicitly and explicitly. Apart from the political one, he was mainly charged of *miyak warana* (drawing back the screen), meaning that he had revealed secret doctrine openly to people, and of disregarding of Islamic laws (Schurman, p. 42). In addition to that he was also charged of disobedience to the ruler (*mbalela*) due to his refusal to meet his call and of persistency to teach heterodox sufistic teachings vulgarly despite repeated warning by the *walis*.

Different versions of the story give different details concerning how and when he came to his death. In some versions, such as in *Suluk Walisanga* and *Serat Seh Siti Jenar* of Sasrawijaya, though he had been indeed given death penalty, it was Siti Jenar himself who chose to end his life after giving ample explanation of his secret teachings to the asking *walis*. He used his spiritual power to end his life by concentrating his mind, closing all the

11. One should see mystical doctrines of *wali sanga* in different books to which I often refer in this paper, such as by Rinkes or P.J. Zoetmulder and Schuurman.

ways of the breathe and then putting out the secret of the life until he came to his death in front of the visiting *walis* and his pupils. This unique way of coming to death surprised all the audiences, including the *walis* themselves. For Solikhin, this version is the most possible (Solikhin 2004:138).

After being sure of his death, tells the *serat* of Sasrawijaya, the 'ulama brought the corpse of Siti Jenar to the mosque of Demak, the centre of *Dewan Waly* of Demak. In the night, there was fragrant smell inside the mosque, which was supposed to come from the inside of the container where Siti Jenar's corpse was put. Some *walis* then took initiative to open the container, and suddenly there was light coming from the corpse, such that all the lamps in the mosque ought to be put out. Most of the present *walis* suddenly came to the corpse and knelt before the dead (Mulkhan 1985:121). However, Sunan Magribi, who didn't kneel, said that the event ought to be kept secret among people in order that people would not see Siti Jenar as the true sufi close to God, since it would make more people follow his teachings which had caused public disorder in many places in Demak, including the negligence of *syariah* by his pupils. The venerable member of *Walisanga* then asked Sunan Kudus to find an ugly dog in the area, kill it, and replace the corpse of Siti Jenar with the dog's corpse; the corpse of Siti Jenar himself would be buried below the pulpit of the Demak mosque in that night. The day after that, the Sultan of Demak and the people gathered to see the corpse of Siti Jenar, who had gained such a popularity in the kingdom. When they were told that the heretic *waly* had turned into a dog they believed the lie; they were sure that God will condemn the heretic even in this world. So, people would believe that *syariah* is very important, Islam could not be lost, and the

authority of the majority of 'ulama would be fully respected (Mulkhan 1985:123). The corpse of the dog then was hung in the public place for days.

In the *Babad Demak* and *Babad Tanah Jawa*, Siti Jenar was said to be executed by Sunan Giri. After that, his corpse was brought to the mosque of Demak. Knowing that in the night the soul of Siti Jenar was still felt went around, indicating that Siti Jenar didn't really want to die, the *walis* thrust the corpse several times, but the thrust didn't have any impact to the body of the martyr sufi. They tried again and again until the blood came from the corpse, first red blood, than white blood, and then the corpse disappeared suddenly (Solikhin 2004:139). In some versions, which are not popular, the blood is said to talk 'Ana al-haqq' (Solikhin 2004:140). As mentioned above, there are different opinions when the death of Siti Jenar took place. Some said 1524 AD, 1506, and also 1517 AD.

In my opinion, if we see from different versions, the real personality of Siti Jenar is not only made more obscure by the differences, but also it is made clear that there are different views of people towards him. Some see him as heretic, while some see him as true waly of God. If there is secret, it would be represented in two questions: why the differences emerge and why all the sources are serious in their assertion that there was really a *waly* named Siti Jenar in the past.

SITI JENAR AND AL-HALLAJ

There are many scholars who believe that the story of Siti Jenar is only a version of the story of al-Hallaj. They see a lot of striking similarities between both famous *sufis*, both in the doctrine and in the career of their life. A Dutch scholar, Dr. G. W. J. Drewes is one among the scholars. In

his perspective, the story of Siti Jenar is a Javanese version of the story of al-Hallaj. It is very usual, said Drewes, to find many foreign elements in Javanese classical literatures. In both stories, Drewes sees at least three same points. First, there is expression *ana al-haqq*. Secondly, there is the story of talking blood. And the last, we find in both the story of replacing corpse of the sentenced *waly* with that of another creature (Drewes 1927:98).

In the same work of Drewes we are given another story about Sunan Panggung, who was an adherent of Siti Jenar living in almost the same period (in Demak Sultanate). Drewes said that the story of Sunan Panggung itself “*geheel en al een doublet is van Siti Jenar*” (Drewes 1927:101). Thus, it is one more proof that Javanese literatures usually take elements of previous stories, especially of foreign origin.

A different opinion is adduced by P. J. Zoetmulder, also a famous Dutch scholar in Indonesian Islam, especially in Javanese mysticism. He doesn't agree with Drewes, saying that there are indeed some parallels in both stories, but there is such a little similarity between their doctrines that we can't draw any valid conclusion to say their teachings are identical (Zoetmulder 1995:307). One great and fundamental difference between the two personalities is that al-Hallaj is always presented as an ecstatic lost in God in love, whereas little or nothing of this about Siti Jenar. The latter presents himself above all as a 'free-thinker' mystic who pays no heed to the king and seems to have no care of the *syariat* (Zoetmulder 1995:308). In the case of al-Hallaj, we find a *sufi* who is still much concerned with religious laws, though he is more interested in their inner meanings (al-Hindy 1998: 9).¹²

12. Al-Hallaj was only charged of holding opinion that *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mekka) could be substituted by certain pious acts, but Siti Jenar

Between Drewes and Zoetmulder, I tend to take the position of the latter scholar, since in different versions of the story of Siti Jenar we find different details. There are no talking blood and expression of *ana al-haqq* in many versions of the story of Siti Jenar, like in the version of Ki Sasrawijaya (one of the most famous versions), and the story of replacing the corpse of the *waly* with dog's corpse is only found in Middle Javanese manuscripts, not in Banten and Cirebon ones (Solikhin 2004:152). In addition to that, Siti Jenar is not known as teaching *hulul* or *ittihad* or talking about love of God and even we don't know his writings giving some hints that he taught the doctrine of al-Hallaj.¹³

Nevertheless, similarities between the story of Siti Jenar and that of al-Hallaj should not be left without paying much attention. From the sources, we can find striking similarity in the strength of the nuance of the politics in both stories. Al-Hallaj is seen as an active sufi, not only in preaching Moslems but also in converting many non-moslems in different regions (al-Hindy 1998:14). This is also found in the description of the life of Siti Jenar, who converted both Javanese elite (the most famous is Ki Kebokenanga, grandson of the last king of Majapahit kingdom) and common people to Islam. Al-Hallaj was a sufi who wanted to reform his society because he believes *tasawwuf* is not only limited to relationship between *mutashawwif* and his God, not an exclusively individual effort, but it is *jihad* against the darkness in one's own self and also in society (al-Hindy 1998:9). Of the charge addressed to al-Hallaj that he had close relationship with potential rebels aspiring to throw 'Abbaside dynasty, this we can find also in the story of Siti Jenar.

was charged of total negligence of the *syariah*.

13. We don't know whether Siti Jenar wrote any book either, which is different from al-Hallaj who is a productive writer.

Many authors of al-Hallaj and Siti Jenar believe the main cause of their condemnation to death is based on political motive of some 'ulama and the ruler, not on their esoteric or even seemingly heterodox teachings. In the history of Islam there were many Sufis who hold more or less the same doctrine with al-Hallaj but escaped condemnation to death, like 'Ibnu 'Arabi and Abu Yazid Busthamy.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Having gone into the life and teachings of Siti Jenar, we have some idea what is secret in his personality and teachings. He is now still a mysterious personality for many people, written works of whom are not known. Nevertheless, we can't simply assume that Siti Jenar was the foremost representation of *der einheimischen gegen den Islam gerichteten Mystik* (Schuurman 1933:40-41), since as we have seen in his doctrines the difficulties to trace the real Javanese ideas. It is not too wrong to say that there are elements of Vedanta philosophy in his ideas, as seen in words he used (like *tirtamaya*, *nirmaya*, *suksmantaya*), but his ideas look even closer to al-Jili than to any foreign mysticism. If we accept parts of the account Solikhin has given in his book that Siti Jenar had studied in Middle East and knew very well Islamic mysticism of the great philosophical Sufis, it is better to see him as a *waly* of Islam, not *waly* of Javanese (indigenous) mysticism.

The greatest difference between typical Islamic mysticism and predominantly indigenous mysticism is indeed in the degree of their acceptance of *syariah*. In the case of Siti Jenar we see some suspicion of some Sufis themselves towards another sufi who had revealed highly secret doctrine openly, the impact of which is that people no longer saw the need to obey *syariah*.

In his interesting article, *Noord-Sumatraansche Invloeden op de Javaansche Mystiek*, Kraemer turns our attention to influences of Hamzah Fansuri's mysticism in Java. No doubt, Hamzah Fansuri is still known until today as the most famous exponent of *wujudiyah* in the history of Sufism in Indonesia, but Snouck Hugronye said that for people in Aceh (and elsewhere in Indonesia) he stands for the exponent of heterodox mystics (Kraemer n.d:29). In many aspects, mysticism of the sufi of Aceh is strikingly similar with Siti Jenar. His mystical formulae which is *Allahu nafsuna wa wujuduna wanahnu nafsubu wa wujuduhu* (Allah is our self and our existence and we are His self and His existence) (Kraemer n.d:33) seems to be not different from *manunggaling-kawula-gusti* of Siti Jenar. Kraemer said that Hamzah Fansuri was a darwisy mystics, an adventurer sufi, who had visited many places, including Middle East, Malay peninsula, Siam (Thailand) and Java. He visited Java several times and stayed for certain period in Banten, Kudus and other regions (Kraemer n.d:30-31). That his writings are known in Java is a fact, and that he used Javanese terminology in his works also known, like using symbol of *wayang* (traditional Javanese arts) and *dalang* and his mentioning name of Sunan Bonang (Kraemer n.d:31). If we look closely we will have impression that *wujudiyah* in Java is a dominant feature of Javanese mysticism (the *manunggaling-kawula-gusti* expression is enormously popular there) and it is somewhat 'javanised' in the sense that it becomes typical of Javanese culture and that it has been transformed into the inseparable element of mystical life in Java. To say that the authors of the *Serat Siti Jenar* and others who write on Javanese mysticism (such as Ranggawarsita) have been influenced by *wujudiyah* of Hamzah Fansuri in one or another way is very possible, but as far as I know the name of the Sumatran sufi is only rarely

mentioned by them. The influence perhaps remains in the background. Nevertheless, the popularity of Siti Jenar who lived in 16-th century in circles of followers of mysticism in Java might be strengthened by the influences of Hamzah Fansuri who lived in 17-th century and visited Java several times.

We see also in the case of Siti Jenar that politics played a significant role as it did before with al-Hallaj. It was not an accident that both Siti Jenar and al-Hallaj who were considered to have close relationship with potential rebels also exercised some criticism of the social and political situation of the time. It couldn't be assured whether they were really close with potential rebels, but anyhow their teachings were seen as having many impacts to the people and could have great influence.

With Siti Jenar, we have a unique personality in the history of Sufism. In the history of Islam in Indonesia, Siti Jenar is the most extreme in his views concerning *syariah*. *Syariah* for him is not only unimportant, but all religious rituals are nonsense and useless; well, this view is as given in the sources on him, as addressed to him. The *walis* of his time having orthodox views on *syariah*, despite being Sufis but, saw that this was closely related to the fact that Siti Jenar was 'vulgar' in disclosing top secrets of esoteric doctrines which should have been given only to the selected few. Once the secret is revealed, people who can't understand tend to neglect *syariah* in their lives, making themselves away from being true Moslems.

In the sources on Siti Jenar we have also seen that Siti Jenar and his best pupils exercise severe criticism, to the point of insult, towards the religious authority and the students of Islamic knowledge (*santri*). They all are called ignorant, deceived as well as deceitful. How should we understand this criticism which many people would say inappropriate of such sensitive Eastern

people, even of ones who claim to possess high knowledge in spiritual matters? It is true that possessing a secret others don't have, even more when the secret relates to very important matters, gives its possessors some degree of power over others (Tefft 1980:321), but the spontaneity of expression sometimes looks like arrogance. Siti Jenar and his pupils used sarcasm, in my opinion, in order to attract attention immediately and to say openly and briefly without single intention to hurt others' people feeling. It was hoped that by severe words, other people would be more easily 'awakened' than by usual and nicer way; with Siti Jenar's way, the people would know themselves and others better, that they were deceived and negligent of the truth. The sarcasm, in the case of al-Hallaj, can be also attributed to their being powerless in front of worldly authority, in the sense that they have not enough (political or physical) power to defend themselves against some kind of injustice inflicted upon them by the religious and political authorities of their time.

Upon reading primary sources on Siti Jenar, it is better not to take every thing they say literally, since Javanese people are well-known for the sharpness of their deepest feeling or *rasa*. The more important for them are the meaning behind the words and the *rasa* they bring if the words have become experienced. Thus, the words are only as introduction. Considering the case of Siti Jenar, it might be true that some followers of him still adhere strongly to the *syariah* as defended by authors like Muhamad Solikhin,¹⁴ and it might also be true that some of them see

14. He said that Siti Jenar taught two kinds of shalat, *shalat tarek* and *saalat daim*, the former is exactly the formal *shalat* in Islam, five times a day, but also with the attention to inner meanings; *saalat daim* is literally "continous *saalat*", the integral and uninterrupted *saalat*, remembrance of God wherever and whenever, the combination of the *dzikir* of body, mind and *qalb* (heart) (Solikhin 2004:193). *Salat daim* is a popular term in Indonesia.

no necessity to obey *syariah* as charged by others. In both attitudes, the inner aspects are still held to be more important. What is clear is that there are still people in Java who claim to follow Siti Jenar's teachings as preserved in tradition from generations to generations and contained in works like *Kitab Primbon Atassadhur Adammakna* (Solikhin 2004:298). However, the looseness of attitude towards *syariah* with almost the same reason is also a wide phenomenon among some Moslems in Sumatra or other parts of Indonesia who said that there is no need to do salat, zakat and *shawm* in Ramadhan, because the core of all rituals is remembrance of God; so, if one remembers God whenever and wherever, this is enough. It is also partly related to the mystical philosophy of some mystical order (*thariqah*), such as *syattâriah*, who adhere to *wujûdiyyah*, though *syattâriah* is quite orthodox in its views towards *syariah* itself. Understanding of some pupils has made the doctrine popularized in such a way that *syaria* is of not a priority any more for people who actually don't understand the matter.

Compared to other parts of Islamic civilization, Sufism in Indonesia is rather poor in mystical literature but very rich in practices. There are only few of the great Sufis of Indonesia whose written works on mysticism are known. There are many more Sufis (or *syaikhs* of *thariqah*) who write about other topics other than Sufism, like on *fiqh* and '*ilmu kalâm* (Islamic theology). This phenomenon is very different from the actual tradition of spiritual practices of Sufism. There are now still many *thariqahs* flourishing in Java, Sumatra, and other islands and have large following of all social classes. More often than not, the *syaikhs* or *gurus* of the *thariqah* have deep understanding in the spiritual doctrines which would not be accessible *via* books, because one

should come and learn directly from them and be willing to be guided in spiritual practices to go through mystical experience to get at and feel what they mean. In my opinion, it is also the same in the case of Siti Jenar,¹⁵ The written sources seem to make easy and simple the doctrine of Siti Jenar and even said that the mystical teachings of Siti Jenar are clear and open to everyone; while in fact, they are not. There are still many secrets in them; at least, for many people who have read about him and many more others who don't.

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15. It is interesting to note that Siti Jenar is said to have founded one *thariqah shufiyyah*, called *akmalīyyah*, followers of which still exist in small circles in Nganjuk, Malang, Kediri and some other regions in Java. Concerning the *thariqah*, there are several manuscripts in Oriental collections of Leiden Universiteit Bibliotheek which deal with the doctrine of this *akmalīyyah*.

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