

The Role of Sufi Values in Indonesian Music as a Medium for Islamic Da'wah

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Abstract

This article discusses the influence of Sufism on Indonesian music and its role in the spread of Islam within Indonesian society. Initially, Indonesia was primarily associated with traditional religions like Buddhism and Hinduism until Sufism, introduced by Yemeni traders, helped facilitate the acceptance of Islam. Sufism and Islam became intertwined, significantly shaping Indonesian identity. Key figures, such as the Nine Saints, propagated Islamic values through various means, including music, which serves as a universal art form transcending sects. This integration led to a significant transformation in Indonesian music, incorporating Islamic themes that resonate during religious occasions like Eid and Ramadan. The current research aims to further explore the specific impact of Sufism on Indonesian music, using a combination of deductive and analytical methods, differing from the previous studies' methodologies. This comprehensive approach seeks to elucidate the nuanced relationship between Sufism and the musical landscape in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Sufism, Indonesian Music, Islamic Da'wa*

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas pengaruh Sufi pada musik Indonesia dan perannya dalam penyebaran Islam di Indonesia. Awalnya, Indonesia terutama dikaitkan dengan agama-agama tradisional seperti Buddha dan Hindu hingga Sufi, yang diperkenalkan oleh pedagang Yaman, membantu memfasilitasi penerimaan Islam. Sufi dan Islam menjadi saling terkait, yang secara signifikan membentuk identitas Indonesia. Tokoh-tokoh utama, seperti Sembilan Wali, menyebarluaskan nilai-nilai Islam melalui berbagai cara, termasuk musik, yang berfungsi sebagai bentuk seni universal yang melampaui sekte. Integrasi ini menyebabkan transformasi signifikan dalam musik Indonesia, menggabungkan tema-tema Islam yang bergema selama acara-acara keagamaan seperti Idul Fitri dan Ramadhan. Penelitian saat ini bertujuan untuk lebih jauh mengeksplorasi dampak khusus Sufi pada musik Indonesia, menggunakan kombinasi metode deduktif dan analitis, yang berbeda dari metodologi penelitian sebelumnya. Pendekatan komprehensif ini berusaha untuk menjelaskan hubungan bermuansa antara Sufi dan lanskap musik di Indonesia.

Keywords: *Sufisme, Musik Indonesia, Dakwah Islam*

Introduction

Islam began to gain recognition and acceptance among Indonesian society after they had been firmly attached to their traditional religions (Buddhism and Hinduism), largely through Sufism brought by traders from Yemen. For Indonesian Muslims, Sufism and Islam are inseparable; they represent a unified identity. Islamic advocates, such as the famous Nine Saints in Indonesia, spread Sufi and Islamic principles and values through

various means, including music. Music, being a neutral art form, is not confined to any specific sect or religion.

Over time, Islam became a predominant religion embraced by much of Indonesian society as the call to Islam succeeded. Consequently, Islamic principles and values spread throughout Indonesian life, affecting social, cultural, and artistic dimensions. One art form integral to Indonesian society is music. The spread of Islam significantly influenced Indonesian music, leading to an increase in songs featuring lyrics about Islamic principles and values.

The influence of Sufism on music manifests in various songs related to numerous occasions, such as Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Ramadan fasting, and many other events. This research aims to explore the impact of Sufism on Indonesian music, clarifying how this Sufi music affects Indonesian society. The central focus of this article is to show how Sufism influences the musical style in Indonesia and its impact on Indonesian society.

Several studies have found interesting things in the relationship between the world of music and Sufism in Indonesia. *First Study*, "Music as a Means of Islamic Outreach: Analyzing the Discourse in Textual Studies and the Context of Religious Hymns by the 'Wali' Group." By: Aidil Wira Sakti. A thesis for a Bachelor's degree at the State Islamic University of Alauddin in Makassar, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, Islamic Communication Department.¹ This study addresses Islamic outreach through Sufi music performed by the "Wali" group, analyzing their hymns in relation to the context of outreach in Indonesia. This research uses Inductive Method For gathering information about hymns from the "Wali" group and their role in promoting Islamic outreach and Analytical Method: For analyzing the verses of the hymns from the "Wali" group that embody Sufi principles and values.

This research has revealed that the hymns from the "Wali" group contain elements of preaching, effectively using language that is easy for listeners to understand, thereby facilitating comprehension and acceptance of the message through music. And then the teachings present in many of the "Wali" group's songs are consistently related to the connection between humans as servants of God, covering themes like death, the Day of Judgment, repentance, and the necessity of study, deeply embedding these concepts in the minds of Indonesian listeners.

Second Study, "From Sufism to Islamic Music: The History of the Transformation of Music in Islamic Civilization." By: Fikri Surya Pratama from the State Islamic University Imam Bonjol in Padang, published in the journal *Culture: A Scientific Journal of Islamic Civilization*.² This study explores the relationship between Sufism and Islamic music, focusing on the historical transformation of Sufi principles into music, particularly in Indonesia. The researcher employed a historical method to uncover the history of musical transformation in Islamic civilization, using Sufi music in Indonesia as a case study.

¹ Aidil Wira Sakti, "Musik Sebagai Media Dakwah (Analisis Wacana Kajian Tekstual Dan Konteks Situasi Lagu-Lagu Religi Wali Band)" (UIN Alauddin Makassar, 2019).

² Fikri Surya Pratama, "Dari Sufistik Ke POP Religi: Sjarah Transformasi Musik Dalam Peradaban Islam," *Al-Tsaqafa: Jurnal Ilmiah Peradaban Islam* 20, no. 1 (2023): 1–13.

This research has revealed that the history of music in Islamic civilization has various regulations, with some considered forbidden by certain Muslims and permissible by others, as long as they do not contain elements of indecency. Music in Islamic civilization serves as a means to attain closeness to God, especially among Sufi practitioners. Over time, Sufi music has expanded beyond just Sufi practitioners, with Muslims using music to convey religious teachings and remind people of God.

After reviewing the previous studies, the researcher found several agreements and differences in the research topics, methodologies, and findings. The first study focuses on music as a means of outreach through the "Wali" group, agreeing with the current research in that it relates to music and Islam. However, the current study specifically centers on the impact of Sufism on Indonesian music. The second study focuses on the historical transformation of Sufi principles into music but does not discuss the prominent effects of these Sufi principles on music, especially in Indonesia.

Differences in the use of methodology also affect the findings of these studies. The first study utilized two methodologies: the inductive and analytical methods, while the second study employed a single historical method. The current research uses both deductive and analytical deductive methods. The findings should differ from the previous studies due to the differing topics and methodologies. The first study's results center on the "Wali" group's hymns as a means of Islamic outreach, while the second study focuses on the historical transformation of Islamic music in Indonesia. Thus, the current research's findings, centered on the impact of Sufism on Indonesian music, differ from those of the previous studies.

Method

Therefore, the approach to be used is qualitative. This approach emphasizes a deeper understanding (in-depth analysis) of an object. It also incorporates two methodologies to determine the influence of Sufism in Indonesian music in this study. *First*, the Analytical Deductive Method, which involves analyzing theories, forming hypotheses, and gathering data to reach conclusions.³ This method will be used to analyze some Indonesian music and assess the strong influence of Sufism. *Second*, the Deductive Method, which involves explanation, observation, reflection, and analysis, moving from the general to the specific.⁴ With this method, the results of the first method's analysis are aligned with various factors that can demonstrate the role of Sufi values in music as a medium for Islamic outreach in Indonesia.

Thus, this research aims to achieve two primary objectives. *First*, to uncover the influence of Sufi and Islamic principles on Indonesian music, especially how Islamic advocates transformed Sufi music into a medium for Islamic outreach and the dissemination of Sufi principles and values. *Second*, to

³ Ghazi Inayah, *Manhajiyah I'dad Al-Bahts Wa Al-Rasail Al-Jami'iyyah* (Oman: Dar al-Manahij, 2014), 36.

⁴ Muhammad Sarhan 'Ali Al-Mahmudiy, *Manahij Al-Bahts Al-Ilmiy* (Damaskus: Dar al-Kutub, 2019), 74.

understand the overall impact of Sufi-influenced music on Indonesian society, as its influence extends beyond Indonesian Muslims to include non-Muslim communities as well.

The significance of this research lies in enriching our understanding of the influence of Sufism on music in Indonesia and how Sufi music can serve as a means to spread Islamic principles and values, as well as convey religious teachings through the art of music. Additionally, this study aims to reveal the impact of Sufi music on the entire Indonesian society, regardless of their religious affiliations, as this music resonates with the Indonesian community as a whole.

The Impact of Sufism on Indonesian Music

Music art and Sufism

Art is the expression of beautiful feelings within a person, conveyed through mediums that can be sensed by the listener's senses (sound art), visual observers (painting), or through movement (dance, drama). Music can be divided into two categories: instrumental music and vocal music. Instrumental music is performed using instruments such as wind, string, and percussion instruments. Each instrument has a distinct tone, while vocal music is expressed through the human voice without instrumental accompaniment. The beauty of sound is manifested in the rhythm of high-low tones, loud-soft dynamics, and the tempo of verses and songs performed.⁵

Music as an art form involves instruments and rhythms produced by these instruments. It discusses aspects such as playing instruments, notation, and studying various music genres. This type of music can exist independently as instrumental art (without singing) or be combined with vocal art. As previously mentioned, instrumental art is performed using musical instruments, while vocal art is expressed through the singing of poetry via vocal means (only sound) without instruments.⁶

Music in Islam can be viewed from various perspectives, including historical heritage, performance art, or even as a means of spiritual devotion. There is no explicit prohibition against music in the Quran, though certain prophetic traditions warn against it and musical instruments.⁷ Music is an aesthetic expression that is continuous with human life. In the Islamic perspective, Al-Faruqy considered that the entity of tawhid must be made elan vital in it, so that music is also part of the treasury of Islamic tradition.⁸ Thus, music has played a significant role in Islamic history, emerging as a vital artistic form, especially as a means of approaching God.

⁵ S Zuhur, *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East* (American University in Cairo Press, 1998), 8, <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=Sd5g1ohkocAC>.

⁶ A A Baghdadi and I Asman, *Seni Dalam Pandangan Islam: Seni Vocal, Musik & Tari* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1998), 13, <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=EjinGwAACAAJ>.

⁷ Ali Jihad Racy, *Musik Dalam Ensiklopedia Oxford Dunia Islam Modern*, ed. John L. Esposito, IV (Bandung: Mizan, 2001), 121.

⁸ Shobrun Jamil, "Musik Dalam Pandangan Islam (Studi Pemikiran Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi)," *Musikolastika* 4, no. 1 (2022): 26–36.

From the Sufi perspective, musical instruments are equated with pleasant and rhythmic sounds. These sounds can be classified into three types: sounds produced by objects (like flutes, guitars, and bells), sounds produced by humans, and sounds made by animals (like bird songs). Al-Ghazali argued that the prohibition of musical instruments like flutes and guitars is not about the instruments themselves, but rather about other factors that necessitate their prohibition. He identified three reasons that could make them impermissible: firstly, they may lead to drinking alcohol; secondly, they may remind one of past pleasures associated with alcohol; and thirdly, they are often used by the immoral.⁹

Therefore, there are several things that need to be considered according to Sufi figures. For example, Žu an-Nun al-Miṣri sees music as a spiritual activity aimed at experiencing a touch from Allah; this touch can awaken a yearning in the heart towards Allah. This cannot be achieved by those who listen to music with desire, as they are considered among the misguided (zindiq).¹⁰ Music is something that has an influence on human life, both positively and negatively. Both of these influences are determined by how we respond to the music we experience and listen to every day. If the elements of music are filled with Sufi values, it will be easy for listeners to find the path of goodness and the path that is pleasing to God.¹¹

The History of Islamic Music in the Nusantara Archipelago (Indonesia)

Similar to developments in the Middle East, the evolution of Islamic music during the classical Islamic period in Nusantara reflects a process of cultural interaction. This process denotes a gradual acceptance of foreign cultures into local culture, resulting in a cooperative outcome between the two. The definition of cultural interaction in the Islamic culture of the archipelago highlights the uniqueness of Islam in the region (Islam Nusantara).¹²

Art, including music, was one method of disseminating Islam in the archipelago during that time, exemplified by the efforts of the Nine Saints to spread Islam in Java. The Islamic music created by the Nine Saints features lyrical themes of unity and Sufism. Scholars from the Middle East have elucidated the relationship between music as a spiritual medium and outreach in Sufi communities.¹³ Al-Farabi noted that singing is a fundamental component of music, structured through organized rhythms within a specific system.¹⁴

The influence of Sufism on music in Indonesia can be seen in the music produced by the Nine Saints, which aims to evoke feelings of emotion in drawing closer to God Almighty. Islamic music should not be accompanied by dance movements or the use of immoral lyrics. The chanting of lyrical themes in Islamic music in the Nusantara

⁹ Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din* (Syiria: Dar al-Salam, 2003), Jilid 2, 335.

¹⁰ Gazalba Sidi, "Asas Kebudayaan Islam," *Bulan Bintang*, Djakarta, 1978, 307.

¹¹ Hamdah Hafidah, "Perkembangan Musik Sebagai Media Dakwah Bagi Generasi Zillenial," *Hikmah* 17, no. 2 (2023): 309–22.

¹² Abdul Karim, *Islam Nusantara* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Book Publisher, 2007), 117.

¹³ Yuntarti Istiqomalia, "Komunikasi Dakwah Walisongo Berlandaskan Budaya Kepada Masyarakat Jawa Pra-Islam," *Indonesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no. 3 (2024): 1491–1506.

¹⁴ Amin Nasir, "Hubungan Tasawuf Dengan Musik Spiritual (aS-Sama'): Meneropong Kedalaman Sejarah, Sebagai Fenomena Mistisisme Spiritual," *Esoterik: Jurnal Akhlak Dan Tasawuf* 2, no. 2 (2016): 527–46.

archipelago is similar to the performance of Sufi music, beautifully reciting poetry that speaks of the oneness of God, praises the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and invokes blessings upon the *auliya'* of God.¹⁵

The success of the Islamic call through this Sufi musical culture stems from a peaceful process of Islamization, characterized by cultural interaction and integration with a people who previously adhered to Hinduism and Buddhism.¹⁶ Local Javanese culture has been preserved while shedding elements that bore traces of Hindu-Buddhism. This includes traditional dances and music embellished with Islamic elements during religious activities, such as Gamelan music in the Grebeg Maulud rituals and the Sekaten ceremonies (a culture in Solo and Yogyakarta, blending Javanese and Islamic traditions).¹⁷

Another example of the cultural fusion between Javanese local culture and Sufi values in the outreach of the Nine Saints can be found in the song "Tombo Ati" by Sunan Bonang. This song conveys a message about five qualities through which a servant can achieve spiritual peace.¹⁸

*Tombo Ati iku limo perkarane
Kaping pisan moco Qur'an sak maknane
Kaping pindo sholat wengi lakonono
Kaping telu wong kang sholeh kumpulono
Kaping papat kudu weteng ingkang luwe
Kaping limo zikir wengi ingkang suwe
Salah sawijine sopo bisa anglakoni
Insya Allah, Gusti Allah ngijabahi*

The Heart's Medicine: Five Qualities

1. Recitation of the Quran and its meanings
2. Night prayers for worship
3. Association with the righteous
4. Fasting to empty the stomach
5. Long remembrance (*dzikir*) in the depths of the night

The form of da'wah through music carried out by the Wali Songo still has a lasting impact to this day. In addition to Solo, there is also the tradition of *karawitan* in several areas of East Java, where 'gending-gending' are performed using various traditional Javanese musical instruments. The songs sung often contain elements of teachings about

¹⁵ Carl W Ernst, *Ajaran Dan Amaliah Tasawuf* (Pustaka Sufi, 2003), 254.

¹⁶ Ahmad Ihsan Syarifuddin and Armiya Nur Lailatul Izzah, "Transformasi Dinamika Sastra Dan Seni Dalam Masyarakat Muslim Indonesia," *Al-Mabsut: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Sosial* 15, no. 2 (2021): 143–53.

¹⁷ Ahmad Mulyana, "Sekaten Tradition: The Ritual Ceremony in Yogyakarta as Acculturation Reality of Javanese Culture in Indonesia," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies*, IV (2), 2017, 50–61.

¹⁸ Fatchullah Zarkasi, "Educative Values of Peace Mind Mysticism of Sunan Bonang In the View of Islam," *International Journal of Emerging Issues in Early Childhood Education* 1, no. 2 (2019): 128–41.

divinity, prophethood, and even more frequently discuss social norms. Therefore, music can be one of the factors contributing to the success of da'wah.¹⁹

To this day, Islamic music, or Sufi music, continues to grow in Indonesia. There are more songs containing Islamic themes, but they are often wrapped in Western instruments and musical styles. The urgent need for Islamic music now is not only as a means of calling to faith but also for commercial purposes. Thus, after the arrival of the West in Indonesia and even after Indonesia's independence, religious music companies and religious bands/solo artists emerged.

Islamic music styles, such as anthems and poetry, began to be influenced by commonly used Western musical instruments, like the guitar, bass, piano, violin, keyboard, and drums. Thus, a new genre of music was born named Pop Qashidah.²⁰ This fusion allows for the expression of spiritual messages in a way that resonates with younger audiences, making it a popular medium for Islamic da'wah. As a result, Pop Qashidah not only preserves the essence of Islamic teachings but also engages listeners through familiar sounds, encouraging a deeper connection to faith and culture.²¹

The influence of Sufism on Indonesian music can be seen today, with numerous Sufi songs present at various occasions. Pop music groups compete to present Sufi music, as Muslims in Indonesia wish to hear this type of music. This is undoubtedly connected to the significant influence of Sufi music in Indonesian music. Some bands, like WALI, continue to produce Sufi songs, such as "Tobat Maksiat," "Ayo Sholawat," and "Jaar Barokah," among others.²² Following them is the band GIGI, which consistently produces Islamic Sufi songs, like "Salam," "Kaseb Al-Falah," and "Bikhir Ism Allah."²³

Sufi Islamic music, which has spread and developed in Indonesia, has become a form of cultural consumption for the entire Indonesian population. Music is a universal language. It is not only Muslims who listen to Sufi Islamic songs; many non-Muslims do as well, especially with the rise of Islamic pop music groups. Therefore, we cannot deny that this Sufi Islamic music has a significant impact on its listeners. Among the benefits produced by this Sufi Islamic music are:

First, the education and dissemination of Islamic values. This is exemplified by Sunan Bonang's song "Tombo Ati." Another example includes songs about the pillars of Islam, which can greatly help Muslim children become familiar with their faith.

¹⁹ Ahmad Shobiri Muslim and Saiful Mujab, "Dakwah Islam Dalam Masyarakat Abangan: Analisis Sejarah Dan Sosial Di Desa Sidomulyo, Kecamatan Bakung, Kabupaten Blitar," Indonesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences 3, no. 3 (2022): 419–34.

²⁰ Ai Shidqi Farchah Fauziyyah and Mardani Mardani, "Genre Baru Kasidah Sufistik Di Indonesia 2001-2010," Historia Madania: Jurnal Ilmu Sejarah 4, no. 2 (2020): 373–88.

²¹ Z. Hadi, R., & Zainuddin, "The Impact of Western Music on Islamic Music in Indonesia: A Case Study of Pop Qashidah," International Journal of Islamic Studies 5, no. 1 (2020): 45–55.

²² Sakti, "Musik Sebagai Media Dakwah (Analisis Wacana Kajian Tekstual Dan Konteks Situasi Lagu-Lagu Religi Wali Band)."

²³ Acep Aripudin and M Roiz Ridwan, "Materi Dakwah Pada Grup Ban Non-Religi (Analisis Pesan Dakwah Dalam Lirik Lagu Grub Band GIGI)," Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies 4, no. 13 (2009): 493–512.

Second, the call to goodness and drawing closer to God Almighty. Many pop groups use their songs as a means to promote good, encourage repentance, and also to invoke the remembrance of God, such as the song "Tobat Maksiat" by the band WALI.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the impact of Sufism on Indonesian music is profound, shaping not only the musical landscape but also enhancing the spiritual and cultural fabric of Indonesian society. The integration of Sufi principles into various music genres, particularly through the efforts of the Wali Songo, has allowed for the dissemination of Islamic values in a way that resonates deeply with the community. As music remains a vital medium for Islamic da'wah, it fosters a sense of belonging and understanding among listeners, bridging the gap between tradition and modernity.

Moreover, as Indonesian music continues to evolve, the fusion of Sufi values with contemporary musical styles, such as Pop Qashidah, underscores the adaptability of Islamic teachings in a modern context. This evolution not only engages younger audiences but also invites non-Muslims to appreciate the beauty of Sufi-inspired music. Ultimately, the enduring legacy of Sufism in Indonesian music exemplifies the powerful role of art in spiritual expression and community cohesion, making it a vital component of the Islamic cultural narrative in Indonesia.

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