

Islamization of the Malay Worldview: Sufi Metaphysical Writings

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Abstract: In his seminal essay, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago*, Syed Naquib al-Attas stated that “Islam came to the Archipelago couched in Sūfī metaphysics.” According to him, Malay intellectual history began with the Islamization of the worldview of the Malays which was primarily effectuated by Malay Sufi scholars. They accomplished this through oral transmission and written works of their teachings in Malay on the intellectual aspects of Islam and especially on metaphysics. The first metaphysical writings in Malay appeared during the sixteenth century in Aceh and they marked the beginning of not only a wider transmission of Islamic teachings but a more profound or ‘intensified’ understanding of the religion as well. This process of Islamization of the Malay worldview as propounded by al-Attas continued even after the seventeenth century which marked its third and last phase in which fundamental concepts related to the Islamic worldview continued to be expounded, defined and clarified. To attest to his theory that it was through Sufi metaphysics basically that the Malay worldview was Islamized, in this paper I have chosen to present and discuss an example of writing on metaphysics written in Malay during the eighteenth century by ‘Abd al-Şamad al-Palimbānī. In a section of his book entitled *Siyar al-sālikīn ilā ‘ibādat Rabb al-‘ālamīn* (Ways of the spiritual travelers to the Lord of the worlds) ‘Abd al-Şamad wrote to examine and clarify on an Islamic conception of the nature of Being and Reality for the benefit of his Malay readers.

Key words: Worldview • Malay • Islamization • Sufi metaphysics • Writings

INTRODUCTION

In his seminal essay, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago*, Syed Naquib al-Attas stated that Islam came to the Archipelago couched in Sufi metaphysics and it was through *taşawwuf* or Sufism that the intellectual and rationalistic religious spirit entered the minds of the Malays [1]. According to him, based on his study of the changing concepts of key terms in the Malay language during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Malay intellectual history began with the Islamization of the worldview of the Malays and it was primarily effectuated by Malay Sufi scholars. They accomplished this through oral transmission and written works of their teachings in Malay on the intellectual and rational aspects of Islam represented by ‘philosophical mysticism and metaphysics (*taşawwuf*) and rational theology (*kalām*)’. The first expository writings on Sufi metaphysics in

Malay appeared during the sixteenth century in Aceh and they marked the beginning of not only a wider transmission of Islamic teachings but a more profound or ‘intensified’ understanding of the religion as well. Fundamental concepts introduced according to the Islamic worldview were expounded, defined and clarified to enable the readers to understand clearly their meanings without the mental obstruction of concepts from the old worldview [1].

This process of Islamization of the Malay worldview as propounded by al-Attas continued even after the seventeenth century which marked its third and last phase in which the same fundamental concepts continued to be expounded, defined, ‘clarified’ and ‘corrected’ although the first two earlier phases, he contended, had been successful. The Sufi metaphysical writings were a reflection of the change of ideas in the worldview of the people of the Malay Archipelago centered on a different conception of Being from what they had known in the

past. The ‘correction’ the Sufi scholars undertook in their works was to ‘consolidate’ or to complete the transformation to the Islamic worldview from the previous one on the fundamental question of the nature of Being [1].

To support his theory that it was through Sufi metaphysics basically that the Malay worldview was Islamized, in this paper I have chosen to present and discuss an example of writing on metaphysics written in Malay during the eighteenth century by ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī. In a section of his book entitled *Siyar al-sālikīn ilā ‘ibādat Rabb al-‘ālamīn* (Ways of the spiritual travelers to the Lord of the worlds) ‘Abd al-Ṣamad wrote to examine and clarify on an Islamic conception of the nature of Being and Reality for the benefit of his Malay readers.

The Malay Worldview Before Islam: According to al-Attas, the Malays were more aesthetic than philosophical by nature. Before the coming of Islam, the Malays were more interested in the aesthetic aspects of Hinduism and neglected its metaphysical and philosophical elements [1, 2]. They either did not understand fully Hindu metaphysics or they ignored it to prefer ideas acceptable to their own worldview which was still steeped in animism. Their lack of interest in the intellectual and philosophical elements of Hinduism was concluded from the dearth of translations of the more metaphysical Upanishads or original writings of Hindu doctrines from the Vedānta despite centuries of Indian-Hindu influence. What were chosen to be translated, first into old Javanese or Kawi and subsequently into Malay, were portions of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Bhāratayuddha* that are epical, romantic or mythological in character [2]. For example, the Malay versions of the *Bhāratayuddha*, was the *Hikayat Perang Pandawa Jaya* and the story of Bhauma, son of Bhumi the Earth, was *Hikayat Sang Boma* [3]. Apparently, such Hindu-Malay literature was emphasized to meet the interest and demand in the court of the ruling elite group. Whatever few intellectual writings existed, such as the most famous work written by Prapanca of Majapahit namely, the *Nāgara Kertāgama*, was criticized by the court and religious establishment and hence remained insignificant in Javanese civilization [1].

Al-Attas contended that elements of philosophy in Hinduism was transformed into art or filtered to the community through the medium of art as found for example, in the *wayangs* [1]. In relation to Buddhism, despite Sumatra being an important center of Buddhism and Buddhist learning from the tenth to the eleventh

century there were no known Malay translations of works on Buddhist theology or philosophy. Instead, the Javanese-Malay genius was exhibited and manifested again in the aesthetic, as symbolized by the temple complex of Borobudur in Java, considered to be one of the greatest artistic achievements of Malay civilization [1,2].

Sufi Metaphysical Writings in Malay: Islam, a religion in which knowledge is given supreme importance and status, imbued the rational and intellectual spirit into the Malay psyche. As earlier stated “Islam came to the Archipelago couched in Sufi metaphysics” and efforts at clarifying this metaphysics which involved the fundamental question of the nature of Being to the general population in a language they understood are attributed to the works of two Sufi scholars namely, Hamzah al-Faṣṣūrī (d. ca. 1016/1607) and Shams al-Dīn al-Sumaṭrānī (d. 1040/1630). Al-Faṣṣūrī was the first Sufi scholar to have given expositions on Sufi metaphysics in Malay and in this endeavor of writing philosophical or doctrinal Sufism in Malay systematically; he was closely followed by his student Shams al-Dīn al-Sumaṭrānī. Malay became a scientific and rationalistic language as a result of it being used in the philosophical discourses of the Sufi scholars, pioneered by these two masters and its vocabulary and technical terminology were enriched in the process [1].

The scholars’ focus on answering and clarifying the question of the nature of Being in their writings reflected the Malays’ concern in their minds to know and understand the relationship between God, man and the world from the ‘new’ Islamic perspective governed by the central concept of the oneness or unity of God (*tawḥīd*). They needed to recognize clearly the metaphysical connection between the reality of the oneness of God and the apparent multiplicity of things that they perceive and experience in the world. In their effort to define and explain this essential relationship, the Malay scholars drew upon the teachings of earlier Muslim thinkers from the Sufi tradition, especially al-Shaykh al-akbar, the ‘Greatest Master’ Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) and his commentators for example, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428) and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī (d. 898/1492), who all dealt extensively with the metaphysical question of Being. Hence, their writings in Malay were based on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysical framework of Being (*wujūd*) as expounded and elaborated upon by his commentators of the central doctrine of transcendent unity of Being (*wahdat al-wujūd*) and other related doctrines such as, the five Divine Presences (*al-hadarāt al-ilāhiyyat al-khams*) and the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) [2,42].

As exemplified by the expositions and commentaries of al-Fanṣūrī and al-Sumaṭrānī, for example the former's *Sharāb al-‘āshiqīn*, *Asrār al-‘arīfīn* and *al-Muntahī* and the latter's *al-Nūr al-daqa‘iq* and *Mirā‘t al-mu‘minīn*, the metaphysical teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī became very influential among the Malays during this period. These exponents of the Ibn al-‘Arabī School in the Malay Archipelago in the seventeenth century, referred to as the Wujūdiyyah, gathered many followers and they grew in strength and popularity. However, there was opposition to this group and its teachings which was led by Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1068/1658) who upheld the existentialist position himself. He referred to his group as the ‘true existentialists’ or ‘existentialists who affirm unity’ (Wujūdiyyah Muwahhīdah) but referred to the group whose major exponents were al-Fanṣūrī and al-Sumaṭrānī as the ‘false or deviating existentialists’ (Wujūdiyyah Mulhīdah). The controversy between the two groups was reflected in polemical writings written by for example, al-Rānīrī entitled *Tibyān fī ma‘rifat al-adyān* and *Hujjat al-ṣiddīq li daf‘i al-zindīq*, but it was the latter Wujūdiyyah who had their works burnt and suffered persecution as a result of al-Rānīrī's condemnation of them as heretics and infidels. His main attack against them was that their metaphysical teachings on Being and Reality were pantheistic and that their particular doctrine on Being amounted to saying that God is identical and continuous with the world in substance which would be considered as heresy (*zindīq*) in Islam [4,5].

Many scholars, for example ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf al-Sinkīlī (d. 1105/1693), Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Maqaṣsārī (d. 1110/1699), ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī (d. ca. 1254/1839), Muḥammad Nafīs al-Banjārī and Dāwūd ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Faṭānī (1265/1847), who wrote on *taṣawwuf* after the Wujūdiyyah controversy continued to define, explain and clarify on the doctrines of *wahdat al-wujūd* and the levels of being in their works so that errors in understanding and interpreting the doctrines among the people do not occur. For example, al-Attas claimed that the Malay scholars who came after the Wujūdiyyah and who wrote on the doctrines did not understand correctly and misinterpreted the metaphysical teachings as expounded by their original thinkers [4]. The effect the intense polemical situation had on later Malay scholars especially of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was also to encourage a more reconciliatory position and less hostile attitude against the proponents of the Wujūdiyyah [6]. Abd al-Ra‘ūf for example, in his treatise *Daqa‘iq al-ḥurūf* clarified some important technical terms used in the two doctrines, gave proofs from the Qur‘ān and *ḥadīth* to support his arguments and used a subtle approach in stating his

disagreement with al-Rānīrī's charge of heresy (*kufṛ*) against the followers of al-Fanṣūrī and al-Sumaṭrānī [7]. This reconciliatory stance was followed up by scholars such as ‘Abd al-Ṣamad and al-Faṭānī who took the step further of examining and clarifying the metaphysical doctrines within the framework of al-Ghazzālī's normative perspective and teachings on *taṣawwuf*. They achieved this in part by translating and commenting al-Ghazzālī's works on *taṣawwuf* into Malay for example, *Siyar al-sālikīn* and *ḥidāyat al-sālikīn* written by ‘Abd al-Ṣamad and *minhāj al-‘ābidīn* by al-Faṭānī and disseminated his teachings in the process [6].

‘Abd al-Ṣamad's explication on the nature of Being and Reality in the doctrine of the seven levels of being (*martabat tujuh*) which I have chosen to discuss was written during the eighteenth century and hence represented one of the writings which attempted to explain and clarify Ibn al-‘Arabī's metaphysical doctrines in the light of al-Ghazzālī's teachings on spiritual psychology (*‘ilm al-naḥs*) and ethics (*akhlāq*) as contained in his basic works on *taṣawwuf* such as, *bidāyat al-ḥidāyah*, *minhāj al-‘ābidīn and iḥyā‘ ‘ulūm al-dīn*. The doctrine of the seven levels of being, a modification of Ibn al-‘Arabī's doctrine of the five Divine Presences, was introduced by Indian Sufi scholar Muhammad Fadl Allāh al-Burhānpūrī (d. 1029/1620) to Malay scholars through his short but popular treatise *al-Tuḥfah al-mursalāh ilā al-Nabī*. This doctrine, first explicated into Malay by al-Sumaṭrānī, became very popular among the people of the Malay Archipelago [8-11,.,]

In the next section, I will discuss ‘Abd al-Ṣamad's explication of the doctrine in a section of his book entitled *Siyar al-sālikīn ilā ‘ibādat Rabb al-‘ālamīn* [12] (Ways of the spiritual travelers to the Lord of the worlds). This work, although the author stated is a translation of al-Ghazzālī's *Mukhtaṣar iḥyā‘ ‘ulūm al-dīn* [13] an abridgement of the *iḥyā‘ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, is much larger than its original Arabic since ‘Abd al-Ṣamad made many additions which include his own commentaries as well as those from other Sufi scholars [14,15,].

‘Abd Al-Ṣamad Al-palimbānī's Explication of the Doctrine of the Seven Levels of Being: ‘Abd al-Ṣamad included this metaphysical but not unrelated doctrine in the section on the “Explication of the Reality of Divine Unity (*al-tawḥīd*) as the Foundation of Trust in God (*al-tawakkul*)” in the thirty-fifth chapter of the *Mukhtaṣar al-iḥyā‘* [13]. Here he explained the principles of the doctrine of the seven levels of Being within the framework of al-Ghazzālī's teachings on Divine Unity. In al-Ghazzālī's discussion of this

chapter in the *Iḥyā'*, he explained that the foundation of trust in God is faith in Divine Unity whose meaning is articulated in the testimony of faith utterances: “There is no God but Him” (*Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt*, 37: 35); “There is no sharer with Him,” (*Sūrat al-An‘ām*, 6: 163); “To Him belong sovereignty and praise; and He is the One who possesses power over all things” (*Sūrat al-Taghābun*, 64: 1). The one whose heart is controlled by these assertions, articulated by God Himself, belongs the faith which is the root of trust in God. This faith is operative by the very force of these assertions which produces a property indispensable to the heart and by which it is controlled. Al-Ghazzālī wrote this faith is made up of four stages. The first stage is one of hypocrisy; there is verbal profession of Divine unity, “there is no god but God,” but the heart is either heedless or denies it; the second stage is one of simple faith (*i’tiqād*) in which there is belief in the meaning of the testimony in the heart and it is to be found in the generality of Muslims; the third stage represents those who are drawing near to God (*muqarrabūn*) whose testimony of faith are inwardly illuminated by means of the light of Truth (*nūr al-ḥaq*). This takes place when they see many things but sees them to be emanating in their multiplicity from one Source. This stage is the one on which trust in Divine Unity and consequently trust in God is established [16]. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad commented that the Sufis consider this stage as the ‘unity of acts’ (*tawḥīd al-af‘āl*) which includes also the ‘unity of names’ (*tawḥīd al-asmā*) and ‘unity of attributes’ (*tawḥīd al-ṣifāt*) and they named this stage as the ‘unity of the elites’ (*tawḥīd al-khawāṣṣ*). ‘Abd al-Ṣamad qualified that this is the level of Divine unity which travelers or wayfarers discuss and it can be achieved by following the spiritual path or *ṣarīqah* [12]. The wayfarer arrives at this station because the truth and reality of faith has permeated him inwardly. Finally, the fourth stage represents the witnessing of the righteous ones (*al-ṣiddīqīn*) and it is the farthest reach of faith in Divine unity. For those who have arrived at this stage, al-Ghazzālī asserted:

The fourth stage is that of those who see only unity (*wāḥid*) when they regard existence (*wujūd*), which is the witness of righteous ones and those whom Sufis call annihilated by faith in the divine unity (*al-fanā’ fī al-tawḥīd*). For in the measure that they see only unity they do not see themselves at all. And given that they do not regard themselves, taken up as they are into faith in divine unity, they have indeed been released from themselves to become totally absorbed in faith in this divine unity: that is, delivered from consideration of themselves and of creatures [13,16].

‘Abd al-Ṣamad commented that this is the stage of unity of the super-elites (*tawḥīd khawāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*) and this stage of faith of unity is what is really meant by the affirmations, “There is no God but Allāh” and “There is no existent except Allāh”. At this profoundest level it means nothing exists except God who is the Real and the Absolute Being, as what is meant by the *hadīth*: “God is and nothing is with Him.” (*kāna Allāh wa lā shay’a ma’ahu*) [17]. This final level of Divine unity is the concern of the verifiers (*muḥaqqiqīn*) and gnostics (*‘arīfīn*) among the Sufis. It is the stage in which direct knowledge of the one true Reality (*al-ḥaqq*) is attained. It is at this point, ‘Abd al-Ṣamad strategically inserted the doctrine of the seven levels of Being whereby he stated that this highest form of knowledge (*ma‘rifah*) represents knowledge of the oneness or unity of Being (*wahdat al-wujūd*) in which Being of God as Necessary Existence (*wājib al-wujūd*), as One (*esa*), with no partner (*sekutu*) and with anything similar from the created (*baharu*) is known by seven levels (*tujuh martabat*) [12].

For Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers, al-Burhānpūrī included, the fundamental principle governing their view of reality, hence of their metaphysics, is the oneness or unity of God’s Being and the consequent oneness of everything that exists. They view being or existence (*wujūd*) as belonging to God alone; only God truly *is*. Since God is the only Being, all other things therefore exist derivatively through His Being or exist in an illusionary manner. To the extent that things do exist, their existence is God’s own Being which is One. However, since there cannot be two real existents, all existents are theophanies or manifestations (*yuhūr*) of the one Being. Since Being is one reality, all things are one to the extent that they partake of existence [12].

The doctrine of the five Divine Presences and seven levels of Being explain the manner in which the one Being of God manifests Itself, or the modes in which God exhibits His own reality outwardly and which we see as a multitude of different kinds of things. Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers divide the things (*al-ashy ā’*; sing. *shay’*)—also called entities (*al-a’yān*; sing. *‘ayn*), realities (*al-ḥaqā’iq*; sing. *ḥaqīqah*) and quiddities (*al-māhiyyāt*, sing. *māhiyyah*)—from different points of view. When referring to this general category of existence which encompasses innumerable specific things through which God manifests Himself outwardly and hence, may be ‘found’ [17] and known, they call it a ‘Presence’ (*ḥalrah*). Although they consider ‘levels of existence’ (*marātib al-wujūd*) to be infinite, they reduce them to general categories of Divine Presences. The same holds true for the term ‘world’ (*‘ālam*) which are considered as signs

(*‘alāmāt*) [18] through which God may be known. Hence, insofar as each existent is a sign of God within which the one Being displays Itself outwardly, then each existent is actually a world and they are infinite in number. Generally, the term ‘presence’ carries the same meaning as ‘level’ (*martabah*) and ‘world’ (*‘ālam*) and hence, is used interchangeably [18]. According to this perspective, in the final analysis, there is only one Presence known as the Divine Presence (*al-haġrat al-ilāhīyyah*). It comprehends everything that exists and It is defined as the Essence (*dhāt*), Attributes (*ṣifāt*)—also called Names (*asmā’*)—and Acts (*af‘āl*) of Allāh. The Essence is God in Himself without regard to His creatures. The Names and Attributes are the relationships that can be discerned between the Essence and everything ‘other than He.’ The Acts constitute all the creatures in the cosmos together with everything that appears from them. Hence, Divine Presence designates God on the one hand and the cosmos, in as much as it can be said to be the locus (*maġhar*) of God’s activity, on the other. ‘Allāh’ is known as the ‘all-comprehensive’ (*jāmi’*) name of God, since it alone designates God as He is in Himself in the widest possible sense, excluding nothing of Its Reality. Other names such as Creator, Generous, Forgiving etc. designate Him under certain specific aspects of His Reality [17].

These ontological levels conceived by Sufis, including the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī, have their basis in the Qur’ān which refers to two fundamental levels namely, the visible or seen (*al-shahādah*) and the invisible or unseen (*al-ghayb*). They also describe this dichotomy in existence as ‘God and the world,’ the world (*al-‘ālam*) being ‘what is other than God’ (*mā siwā Allāh*). From the dichotomy between God and the world, there is a third fundamental level of existence. It is a reality which stands between the two realities of the visible and unseen and it comprehends both. This third reality is ‘man’ (*insān*) [19] which is referred to as an isthmus (*barzakh*). A *barzakh* is defined as something that stands between and separates two other things, yet combines the attributes of both. According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, man is a *barzakh* since he is a creature and hence, is of the world and he is created ‘upon God’s form’ (*‘alā ṣūratihī*) and therefore, is of the Divine. He is both a servant (*‘abd*) and vicegerent (*khalīfah*). From this viewpoint, man is considered all-comprehensive (*jāmi’*) since he encompasses everything from both sides of existence i.e. of God and the world. A qualification has to be made however. This definition of man as the all-comprehensive

isthmus can only be applied to the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) who truly actualizes and lives this reality and not to ordinary man who has not realized his potentialities [18].

As mentioned earlier, the three fundamental ontological levels or Divine Presences namely God, the world and man, are all ‘entifications’ of Being. Entification (*ta‘ayyun*) means the state of being an entity or a thing (*shay’*) i.e. that which we can conceive of and speak about. Each of the Presence is a particular entification and delimitation (*taqyīd*) which has been assumed by Being as such, which is Nonentified (*ghayr muta‘ayyan*) and Nondelimited (*muḥlaq*). In other words, anything that exists is a particular mode within which the One Being displays or discloses Itself. However, Being is not *any* thing that exists but It is ‘thing in every respect.’ It is all things even though It is not delimited or defined by the particular attributes of any one them. For whatever *is*, by that very fact, is a self-manifestation of Being. This Nondelimited Being is also called the Essence (*al-dhāt*) or several other names such as, the Unseen He-ness (*ghayb al-huwiyyah*) or the Absolute Unseen (*ghayb al-muḥlaq*). It is not God as we usually conceive of Him since our conception of God is always in terms of certain attributes or qualities. Therefore, human beings understand God as He becomes entified in relation to them, not as He is in Himself. Human beings cannot have knowledge of Him in Himself, in His absolute Nonentification [18].

There are no set schemes of the Divine Presences that all Sufis follow and even among Ibn al-‘Arabī’s most important and influential commentators who expound on the doctrine of the Five Divine Presences their interpretations and descriptions differ. Naturally, over the centuries, other scholars modified the views of these exponents and added their own interpretations of which al-Burhānpūrī’s version is one of them. These differences which stem mainly from the particular perspective or terminology employed relate mainly to descriptions of the ineffable Essence and Its immediate concomitants. As Chittick, a leading contemporary expositor of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysical doctrines, succinctly puts it: “By Its very Unknowability God’s inmost nature seems to preclude any sharp and fast definition” [18].

According to ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, who explicates the level of being one by one, the first level is named Nonmanifest (*lā-yuhūr*) [14] and it is the level of God’s Essence (*dhāt Allāh*) which is nonentified or nondetermined into anything beside Itself. It’s Essence exists by Itself and this level is also called the Absolute

Unseen (*ghayb al-muṣṭaq*) since at this level the Being of God is absent (*ghā'ib*) [17] from the human mind (*'aql*) and the senses (*pancaindera*). In other words, the condition of the Being of God at this level i.e. Nondelimited Being can neither be conceived (*ditaṣawwurkan*) by the mind, nor perceived by the senses namely, sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. Neither can it be known through contemplation (*fikiran bicara hati*). Direct knowledge (*kenal*) is attained with remembrance (*dhikr*) and annihilation (*fanā'*) from everything else other than God and even from one's self until the station of subsistence (*baqā'*) in God is reached [12]. This level is similar to the one identified by al-Ghazzālī as the fourth stage of faith in Divine Unity which 'Abd al-Ṣamad referred to also as the level of Exclusive Unity (*al-ahadiyyah*) and the station it attains is the realization of "nothing exists except God" (*lā mawjūda illā Allāh*).

The other six levels, in contradistinction to the first one, are considered as levels of manifestation (*yuhūr*). Beginning with the second level of *al-wahdah*, Being is manifested as the reality of Muhammad (*ḥaqīqah Muḥammadiyyah*) [17] and it is Its first entification. The third level is *al-wāḥidiyyah* manifested as the reality of man (*ḥaqīqah insāniyyah*) and is that of the second entification. These three levels namely, *al-ahadiyyah*, *al-wahdah* and *al-wāḥidiyyah* are necessary (*wājib*) and eternal (*qadīm*) [9]. These three levels or Presences refer to God Himself [18] and it is here that differences occur in terms of the number of levels ascribed in the various schemes. In this scheme, al-Burhānpūrī included the Divine Essence as a Presence i.e. Exclusive-Unity and divided the Presence of Knowledge or Presence of the Inward i.e. Inclusive-Unity where entification begins, into two levels namely *al-wahdah* and *al-wāḥidiyyah* [18]. The level of Inclusive-Unity is the origin of the Names and Attributes and therefore it is described and known by them. The level of *al-wahdah* represents God's knowledge of things under the aspect of unity or generality (*ijmāl*) while at the level of *al-wāḥidiyyah* the entities or essences of all things are manifest under the aspect of multiplicity or specificity (*tafṣīlī*) [12, 14].

The four levels that come after the three namely, the world of spirits (*'ālam al-arwāh*), the world of image-exemplars (*'ālam al-mithāl*), the world of corporeal bodies (*'ālam al-aqsām*) and the level of man (*martabat al-insān*) [18], are manifest externally (*telah yāhir pada khārij*) or they have external existence. These levels are possible (*mumkin*) and created (*ḥādīth*). All things in the created

worlds have existence (*wujūd*) in three loci (*tempat*) [18]. First, they exist in the level of first entification or *wahdah*. They are immutably fixed (*thābit*) in God's Knowledge under the aspect of unity or generality (*al-ijmāl*) without differentiation [12]. This level signifies God's knowledge of all things or all the infinite possibilities of entification possessed by Nonentified Being. On the basis of this knowledge He bestows existence upon the known things. In other words, Being manifests Itself outwardly by actualizing Its own latent potentialities of entification. God's knowledge is uncreated and immutable just as He is uncreated and immutable. He knows all things from "eternity-without-beginning" (*al-azal*) to "eternity-without-end" (*al-abad*) [18]. Existence at this level is also called potential existence (*wujūd ṣulūḥī*) [14], determined existence (*wujūd taqdīrī*) and the Divine states (*wujūd shu'ūn*) as in the Qur'ān, (*Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, 55: 29): "Each day He is upon some task (*sha'n*)." This verse means that God is bringing into existence creatures at every instant (*pada tiap-tiap hari Ia di dalam membuat perbuatannya*) but existence at this level is determined existence (*wujūd taqdīrī*), fixed in God's knowledge and it does not have external existence yet and therefore it is non-existent (*'adam*) externally [12,14]. This is because creation is of two types: first, creation of determination (*taqdīr*) and second, creation of 'existence-giving' (*ijād*). Creation of determination is prior to the Divine command of engendering, "Be! (*kun*)." It is connected to the designation of the moment in which the entity of the possible thing becomes manifest. That which is coextensive with the Command is the creation of 'existence-giving' which gives the possible thing existence and it depends upon the prior determination. This existence as determined is based on the Qur'ānic doctrine that everything in creation is measured out (*qadar*) by God.

Secondly, they exist as determined existence at the level of second entification or *wāḥidiyyah*, fixed in God's knowledge in a differentiated mode (*tafṣīlī*). Existence at this level is called the fixed entities (*a'yān thābitah*) [20]. These fixed entities are determined and immutable in God's knowledge in a particularized manner but they are not yet manifest externally. As objects of God's knowledge (*ma'lūmāt*) they are found 'with' God but they are not yet existent in the cosmos which makes them nonexistent things (*ma'dūmāt*). Because of this, it is commonly mentioned that "the fixed entities do not smell the fragrance of external existence and what are manifested externally are the properties (*segala*

hukumnya; aḥkām) and traces or effects (*segala bekas; āthār*)” [12]. The configurations and forms left by these properties and traces are the creatures which exist in the cosmos. These existent things, although they exist in the cosmos they never cease to be nonexistent objects of God’s knowledge [17, 20].

Thirdly, they exist externally (*pada khārij*) or outwardly (*pada yāhir*) and they are called complete or realized existence (*wujūd tanjīzī*) [14]. This level is also referred to as the external entities (*a’yān khārijīyyah*), the created world (*‘ālam yang ḥadīth*), the possible created (*mumkin yang ḥadīth*) or creature (*makhluq*) as in the *ḥadīth qudsī*: “I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known, so I created creation that I might be known” [12, 17] The Hidden Treasure refers to the possibilities of outward manifestation prefigured by the Divine Names. Since “God encompasses all things in knowledge” (*Sūrat al-ḥāqā, 65: 12*), the Hidden Treasure corresponds to all things as known by Him before their creation [20].

The worlds which exist externally consist of four. First, is the spiritual world (*‘ālam al-arwāḥ*). It is also called light of Muhammad (*nūr Muḥammad*) as in the *ḥadīth*: “The first thing that God created was my light from His light,” and this is the origin of the spirit of all creatures, human beings as well as others [21]. At this level, the beings or existents are luminous and subtle and subsist in proximity to God but they are nevertheless separate from Him. Second, is the imaginal world (*‘ālam al-mithāl*). This world represents the division of the spirit (*perceraian rūḥ*) which is originally one. When the spirit is multiple, encompassing in it differentiated forms (*rupa yang berbeza*) it is called the world of image-exemplars. At this level, the entities are still luminous but to a lesser degree. They are no longer simple and noncomposite but are compounded of parts [18]. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad says the Sufis employ the similitude of the ‘sea’ for the spiritual world and the ‘waves in the sea’ for the imaginal world. Just like the sea which is one and like the waves whose forms are differentiated but their origin (*aṣl*) and reality (*ḥaqīqah*) are one, not multiple. Similarly, the principle and reality of all spirits are one, not multiple. What are multiple are the forms of the imaginal world but their principle and reality remain a unity without multiplicity. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad elaborates that the spiritual and imaginal worlds cannot be perceived with the five senses but knowledge of these worlds can be attained with the ‘eye of the heart’ (*mata hati*) or faculty of illuminative vision. Perception is possible with the ‘light of faith in the heart’ (*nur imān yang di dalam hati*) since these two worlds are

also made of light and light cannot be perceived except with light. Both the spiritual and imaginal worlds form the world of the dominion (*‘ālam al-malakūt*) or invisible world (*‘ālam al-ghayb*). It is with knowledge of the spiritual world that knowledge of the three eternal worlds are attained and consequently with knowledge of these three said worlds one arrives at true and final knowledge of God (*ma’rifah Allāh Ta’ālā dengan ma’rifah yang sebenar-benarnya dan dengan ma’rifah yang putus*). According to the Malay master, only with knowledge at this exalted level can one attain complete trust in God (*tawakkul*). Third, is the physical world or world of corporeal bodies which is also called world of the kingdom (*‘ālam al-mulk*) and visible world (*‘ālam al-shahādah*) and it can be perceived with the five senses [12].

Fourth, is the world of man (*‘alam al-insān*) i.e. the human being (*manusia*) who is the best in creation from other creatures as God says in the Qur’ān (*Sūrat al-ḥīn, 95:4*), “And We created man in the best of forms,” and he was created by God most honorable among His creation based on the verse, “We have honored the sons of Adam” (*Sūrat al-isrā’, 17: 70*). ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, with the authority of the Hujjat al-Islām, asserted that when man’s knowledge of all the above mentioned levels is perfect (*sempurna*) he is called the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*). This level belongs to the prophets (*anbiyā’*) and the saints (*awliyā’*). The foremost in this group of human beings who has comprehensive knowledge of the cosmos is the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) followed by the other prophets and then all the saints according to their different stations [12]. The Perfect Man encompasses all the six levels of existence while ordinary man also embraces these levels, at least in the sense that they are clearly reflected within him. His reality or his Divine level is his fixed entity. His spirit corresponds to the world of spirits, his soul to the imaginal world and his body to the corporeal world. Then as a unity he reflects the Perfect Man [18].

In the foregoing explication, we see how ‘Abd al-Ṣamad managed to integrate the doctrine of the seven levels of Being within the framework of al-Ghazzālī known to be the excellent model of an orthodox Sufi and who share with the Malays the same legal school of al-Shāfi‘ī and theological position of al-Asha‘rī and hence, pointing to the him as the Muslim to emulate in religious knowledge and practice. It was possible for ‘Abd al-Ṣamad to accommodate Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysical doctrines within al-Ghazzālī’s spiritual and theological

frameworks because the perspectives of the two masters are essentially one and the same since they are derived from the tradition of sapiential knowledge (*ma'rifah*) in Islam. The differences between them are only a matter of vantage point and terminology. In his reconciliation of the teachings of the two great Sufi masters in his writing, 'Abd al-Şamad had also vindicated his predecessors of the Wujūdiyyah School such as, Hamzah al-Fanşūrī and Shams al-Dīn al-Sumaţrānī from the charges of heretical teachings directed at them by al-Rānīrī.

CONCLUSION

The importance of 'Abd al-Şamad, similar to all the Sufi scholars before him, lies in his contribution to the Islamization of the Malay worldview through writings on the concept of Being. With his explication and interpretation of the doctrine of the seven levels of Being he clarified and consolidated one of the fundamental teachings which form the Islamic worldview since it relates to understanding the relationship between God, man and the world within the central doctrine of *tawhīd* in Islam. The events that occurred in Malay Islamic intellectual history which culminated in the persecution of the Wujūdiyyah and the subsequent reconciliation efforts, through oral and written literature, could be viewed as necessary stages in the continuous process of Islamization of the Malay worldview wherein important metaphysical doctrines in Islam were defined, clarified and reviewed following the intellectual needs and demands of its society.

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17. In one of his explanations of this hadith Ibn al-'Arabi stated: " God is described by Being, while 'nothing is with Him': No possible thing is described by existence. Rather, I say that the Real is Being/existence itself. This is the meaning of the saying of the Messenger of God, "God is and nothing is with Him." He says: God is an Existent Being but nothing of the cosmos is existent." See Chittick, W.C. 1989. The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al- Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination, Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 131-32. Wujud is rendered in English as 'finding' besides 'existence' or 'being.'
18. Al-Qaysari, (d. 751/1350), a famous exponent of Ibn al-Arabi's metaphysics, says that the word "alamah,' similar to "alam,' is derived from the same root meaning 'knowledge' ('ilm). Chittick, W.C. 1982. "The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qunawi to al-Qaysari," The Muslim World vol. LXXII, no. 1, January, pp: 109.
19. Here, the word 'man', translated from the Arabic term 'insan' is used in its non-gendered sense and hence, equivalent in meaning with 'human being.'
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21. Based on this hadith, the Sufis uphold that the Prophet in his inner reality i.e. the Muhammadan Light is the Logos, the archetype of the whole of creation, containing within himself the 'idea' of the cosmos. See, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1968), Science and Civilization in Islam, Lahore: Suhail Academy, pp: 340.