

NUR AL-DIN AL-RANIRI'S SELECTED COMMENTARIES ON OTHER RELIGIONS IN THE 17TH CENTURY MALAY WORLD

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Abstract

This article analyzes selected commentaries of Nur al-Din al-Raniri (d. 1658) to the discourse on religions other than Islam in the Malay world. Such discourse was not common during the early period of Islam in the region. Malay Muslim scholars at that time were focusing more on other discipline of knowledge in Islam. Despite the scarcity of such discourses, it was not totally abandoned. This article employs textual analysis. It analyzes three works by al-Raniri on religious discourses focusing on religions other than Islam namely *Tibyan fi Ma'rifat al-Adyan*, *Asrar al-Insan fi Ma'rifat al-Ruh wa al-Rahman* and *Bustan al-Salatin*. Textual analysis on these texts are made to understand the priority he had at that time in making such discourses. Apart from textual analysis, this article also highlights al-Raniri's strong connection with the Malay world despite not a Malay himself. Efforts made by al-Raniri in writing on religions other than Islam in his works proved that such discourse did exist during the early period of Islam in the Malay world. In fact, it was a continuation of similar discourse by other Muslim scholars world wide at that time.

Keywords: Islam, Malay World, Malay texts, religion, discourse

Introduction

Nur al-Din ibn 'Ali ibn Hasan-Ji ibn Muhammad Hamid al-Shafi'i al-Ash'ari al-'Aydarusi al-Raniri (d. 1658) was a well-respected Muslim scholar in the Malay Archipelago. He was one of the most influential Muslim scholars during the golden period of Islam in the Malay Archipelago, between the sixteenth and seventeenth century.¹ During his short stint as a scholar and religious authority in Aceh, he authored works on various discipline of knowledge such as Islamic Theology ('*aqidah*), Islamic Spirituality (*tasawwuf*), Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Islamic History (*sirah*).

Interestingly, al-Raniri also contributed to the discourse of religions other than Islam. Eventhough the subject on comparative religion was not popular subject among ulama in the Malay world at that time, al-Raniri pioneered such discourses directly and indirectly in at least three of his works namely *Tibyan fi Ma'rifat al-Adyan* (The Explanation of Faiths), *Asrar al-Insan fi Ma'rifat al-Ruh wa al-Rahman* (The Secrets of Man [Revealed Through] the Cognition of Spirit and the Merciful One) and *Bustan al-Salatin* (Garden of the Sultans).

Brief Biography

This 17th century Muslim scholar in the Malay Archipelago is also popularly known as al-Raniri. The term is actually refers to the name of his hometown, Ranir in India. Although he came from the other part of the Muslim world, al-Raniri's contributions, particularly to the process of Islamization in the Malay Archipelago had made him well-known by the communities in this region. Most writers even consider him as a Malay Muslim scholar, rather than an Indian or Arab scholar. His educational and spiritual quest intensified when he travelled to Arabia sometimes around 1600. Arabia particularly the South Arabia or Hadramawt, was a centre of Islamic scholarship and heritage at that time. The Sayyids of Hadramawt were known as knowledgeable people and the propagators of mystical practices in Islam.

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¹ According to Osman Bakar, this is due to the intensification of missionary activities lead by the Sufis. See Osman Bakar (1991), "Sufism in the Malay-Indonesian World," in S. H. Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality – Manifestations*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, p. 259.

In fact, most historical data have shown to us that they were actively involved in missionary activities around the world.² Al-Raniri's religious background can be traced through his own account in several writings.³ He belongs to the Shafi'i School of Islamic Jurisprudence, which is the prominent school in the Malay Archipelago. While Al-Asha'riyyah is his school of theology. Again this school is also prominent among the Malays until today. Thus, al-Raniri's school of thought in Islam was not different from the rest of the Malay communities. In fact, this had contributed much to his mission in the Malay Archipelago and made things easy for him to propagate his ideas and thoughts.

Al-Raniri was also very much involved with Sufism even before his arrival in Aceh. He was known to be the follower and later on became a leader of a Sufi Order namely the Rifa'iyyah, in particular, in the Malay Archipelago.⁴

His Contributions to the Malay Archipelago

Al-Raniri's contributions to the Malay Archipelago and also to Islamic teachings in general, are significant. He assumed the highest religious position in Aceh as the Shaykh of Islam. The appointment was made by the Sultan of Aceh himself at that time, Sultan Iskandar Thani (1636-1641). After the death of the Sultan, the throne was succeeded by his queen, Sultanah Taj al-'Alam Safiyyat al-Din Shah (1641-1675). Al-Raniri also won favour of a new ruler and retained his position at the court until his abrupt departure from Aceh in 1644.

Al-Raniri's scholarly works particularly his writings are in various disciplines of knowledge. He had mastered various branches of the Islamic knowledge such as *Fiqh*, *Hadith*, Theology, History, Sufism, and Comparative Religion. Most of the themes in his writings are from these disciplines with a special emphasis on the field of theology and Sufism. There are at least three different periods taken by al-Raniri to write his scholarly works. It includes the period before he arrived in Aceh (before 1636), the period he was in Aceh (1636-1644) and the period after he left Aceh and return to his homeland (1644 onwards).

In this article, al-Raniri's works namely *Tibyan fi Ma'rifat al-Adyan* (The Explanation of Faiths), *Asrar al-Insan fi Ma'rifat al-Ruh wa al-Rahman* (The Secrets of Man [Revealed Through] the Cognition of Spirit and the Merciful One) and *Bustan al-Salatin* (Garden of the Sultans) will be the subject of discussions. This is because it is through these works that al-Raniri explains many aspects of religions other than Islam such as Magism, Judaism and Christianity.

***Tibyan fi Ma'rifat al-Adyan* (The Explanation of Faiths)**

The *Tibyan* was written by Nur al-Din al-Raniri between 1641 and 1644, under the command of the Queen of Aceh at that time, Seri Sultan Taj 'Alam Sultanah Safiyyat al-Din Shah (1641 -1675). Al-Raniri's explains:

Kemudian daripada wafat Marhum Daru 'l-Salam, maka menitahkan daku Sultanah yang maha besar dan khaqan, yang maha mulia, ialah yang mendirikan agama Allah dan memelihara syariat Rasulullah, iaitu Seri Sultan Tajul-'Alam Safyatu l-Din Shah berdawlat zillu 'l-Lahu fi 'l-'Alam ibnatu (al-Sultan) Iskandar Muda Johan Berdawlat ibnu 'l-Sultan 'Ala'u 'l-Din 'Ali Ri'ayat Shah ibnu 'l-Sultan Firman Shah ibnu 'l-Sultan Muzaffar Shah ibnu 'l-Sultan 'Inayat Shah. An I'llifa kitaban jami'an fi tabyini 'l-madhabi wa'l-adyan liyahfaza ahli 'l-iman 'aqa'idahum min ahli 'l-zayghi wa'l-butlan. Bahwa menta'lifkan aku akan suatu kitab yang jami pada menyatakan segala madhab dan ugama supaya dipelihara segala mereka itu yang beriman akan I'tiqadnya daripada tergelincir dan tersalah (Tibyan, 6)

² S. M. N. Al-'Attas (1986), *A Commentary on the Hujjat Al-Siddiq of Nur Al-Din Al-Raniri*, Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Culture Malaysia, pp. 3-4; Azyumardi Azra (1995), *Jaringan 'Ulama' Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII dan XVIII*, Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, pp. 171-172.

³ See for example in his book *Hujjat al-Siddiq li daf' al-Zindiq* (written between 1638-1641), p. 2 and *Jawahir al-'Ulum fi Kashfal-Ma'lum* (written between 1642-1644), p. 146.

⁴ Osman Bakar (1991), "Sufism in the Malay-Indonesian World," p. 260

For the purpose of this analysis, we use Voorhoeve's facsimile compilation of the *Tibyan*.⁵ His edition of the *Tibyan* is the only complete copy published. In addition, two Romanized versions of the *Tibyan* by Engku Mohd. Anuar⁶ and Mohd Rushdan Mohd Jailani⁷ will also be used to assist in our understanding if we encounter any difficult word(s) found in Voorhoeve's facsimile edition of the *Tibyan*. Steenbrink's work in discussing several early Malay texts, including the *Tibyan*, is also useful in this analysis.⁸

There is no other text written by early Muslim ulama in the Malay world that we know up to now in as much detail as *Tibyan* in terms of its discussion on religions other than Islam. Furthermore, al-Raniri also included a discussion of the Islamic sects that existed throughout the world in this text. Although the reason for al-Raniri writing this text is simply to refute the teachings of the *Wujudiyah*⁹ movement in the Malay world at that time, he extended his writings by highlighting all other practices and beliefs, which he considers as not Islamic, and tries to associate them with the *Wujudiyah*. This is to give a clear message to his readers that the *Wujudiyah* is a deviant teaching and Muslims in the Malay world should reject this teaching entirely. At the same time, this text could also have been written in such a way in order to warn the courts of the dangers brought to the local people by foreign traders who might be the followers of these religions and sects.

Generally, al-Raniri wrote the *Tibyan* by following the general scheme of al-Shahrastani in his work *Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal*.¹⁰ Steenbrink also highlights the difference between these two texts, especially on the position of the Brahman. Al-Raniri includes the Brahmans as people of the Book, while al-Shahrastani does not accept it. According to Steenbrink, this is probably a practical solution to the problem of the Muslim minority of Gujarat, the birthplace of al-Raniri.¹¹ Meanwhile, the *Tibyan* also relies heavily on Abu Shakur al-Salami's *Kitab al-Tamhid fi Bayan al-Tawhid* (The Book of The Preface in Explaining the Creed) as its major source.¹²

The *Tibyan* is divided into two parts. In the first part, after a brief introduction about himself and the background of the book, al-Raniri highlights the existence of main religions in the world such as Hinduism (Brahmanism), Magism, Judaism and Christianity.¹³ The enumerations given by al-Raniri about these three religions are not supported by references. This could be done purposely by al-Raniri, since the real objective of the writing of the *Tibyan* is not on these religions, but to refute the *Wujudiyah* of Hamzah Fansuri. Thus, he might have been thinking that these references were unnecessary, and may distract the attention of his readers from the real purpose of the *Tibyan*. References might also be irrelevant to this kind of text, because it is not an academic exercise. Rather it is a religious opinion of al-Raniri against the practice of the *Wujudiyah* teachings presented to the Sultanah.

The second part of this book discusses the existence of sectarian groups in Islam. He divides the sects in Islam into six main groups, namely the *Jabriyyah*, the *Qadariyyah*, the *Tashbiyyah*, the *Ta'til*, the *Kharijiyyah* and the *Rafidiyyah*.

Maka adalah madhab merekaitu antara madhab Jabriyyah dan Qadariyyah dan antara madhab Tashbiyyah dan Ta'til dan antara madhab Khariji dan Rafidi (Tibyan, 42)

Kata mu'allif ghafara 'l-Lahu lahu, hai Talib, maka inilah I'tiqad dan madhab tujuh-puluh dua kaum yang disebutkan segala 'ulama ahlu 'l-sunnah wa 'l-jama'ah dalam kitab merekaitu. (Tibyan, 84)

⁵ P. Voorhoeve (1955), *Twee Maleise Geschriften van Nuruddin ar-Raniri*, Leiden: Brill.

⁶ Engku Mohd Anuar (1965), *Versi Rumi Tibyan fi Ma'rifati 'l-Adyan*, Final Year Project for the Bachelor Degree in Malay Studies, University of Malaya.

⁷ Mohd Rushdan Mohd Jailani (2003), *An Annotated Translation and Transliteration of Tibyan fi Ma'rifat al-Adyan*, Master Thesis, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC).

⁸ K. A. Steenbrink (1988), *Kitab Suci atau Kertas Toilet: Nuruddin Ar-Raniri dan Agama Kristen*, Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press.

⁹ The *Wujudiyah* school, founded by Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240 CE), had suggested that there was only one absolute being, namely Allah. In so far as the other beings are concerned, they were only the theophanies (*tajalliyat*, *ta'ayyun*) of the absolute being.

¹⁰ Steenbrink (1988), *Kitab Suci atau Kertas Toilet*, p. 198.

¹¹ Steenbrink (1988), *Kitab Suci atau Kertas Toilet*, p. 198.

¹² Steenbrink (1988), *Kitab Suci atau Kertas Toilet*, p. 198.

¹³ Steenbrink (1988), *Kitab Suci atau Kertas Toilet*, pp. 43-48.

The last section of the second chapter carries the main focus of this book. It is about al-Raniri's refutation of the *Wujudiyah* movement. It begins with a list of thirteen deviating Sufi movements, including the *Wujudiyah* itself, which is also known as *Ittihadiyyah*.

Shahdan adalah kaum yang bersufi-sufi dirinya itu amat sesat lagi dalalah, hashah 'l-Lah, sekali-kali tiada patut dinamai akan dia dengan nama sufi, terutama dikata dinamai akan dia dengan nama kafir atau fasiq. Maka adalah banyak merekaitu tiga-belas kaum (Tibyan, 86)

Al-Raniri uses all of his knowledge of Sufism to refute the teachings of *Wujudiyah*. He considers this movement as deviating from the teachings of Islam, and urges Muslims to practice true Sufism, which is in line with the teachings of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*.

Shahdan harus berparang segala ahlu 'l-bid'ah apabila zahir pada merekaitu perkata'an yang mengwajibkan kufur, maka harus membunuh merekaitu jika tiada merekaitu tawbat. Maka jika mereka tawbat dan masok Islam diterima tawbat merekaitu. Kata setengah 'ulama bahwa tawbat sekalian bid'ah itu diterima melainkan tawbat kaum Ibajiyah dan Ghalibiyyah dan Shay'iyah iaitu daripada kaum Rafidi dan kaum Qaramitah dan kaum Zanaqah, Wujudiyah dan Falasifah. Maka dibunuh sekalian merekaitu tiada mengi'tiqadkan akan yang menjadikan dia seperti sabda Nabi salla l'lahu 'alayhi wasallam: Man baddala dinahu faqtuluhu; ya'ni barang-siapa mengubahkan ugamanya, maka hendaklah kamu bunuh akan dia. (Tibyan, 123-24)

Here, al-Raniri has issued a fatwa allowing the death sentence to those who committed apostasy. However, those who repented, their lives will be spared the sentence. Al-Raniri also highlighted views from ulama whom he did not mention specifically by name in this text, that repentance will only be accepted from those who had committed apostasy, except the followers of *Ibadiyyah*, *Ghalibiyyah* and *Shay'iyah* who originated from sects such as *Rafidiyya*, *Qaramitah*, *Zanaqah*, *Wujudiyah* and *Falasiyah*. Without elaborating further on the reasons why the repentance of followers of these sects is not acceptable, he quotes the Prophet, saying '*man baddala dinahu faqtuluhu*' which means 'whomsoever changed their religions, kill him'.

In short, al-Raniri adopts a direct approach to condemn *Wujudiyah* by listing all the beliefs and practices that are not in conformity with Islam as he defines it and associates them with the contents of the teachings of *Wujudiyah*. For the purpose of this analysis, the *Tibyan* serves several purposes. Firstly, it tells us about the religious development in the Islamic heartlands of Arabia, which has been brought to the Malay world. Contemporary debates and polemics at that time, especially among ulamas and followers of the *Sunni* and philosophical Sufism in Arabia and the Indian subcontinent, have influenced al-Raniri in his writing of the *Tibyan*.¹⁴ Al-Raniri was probably asked by the ruler at that time to provide his expert opinions on such debates and polemics. The command from the Aceh ruler at that time for him to write on this issue was timely for him. He now has at his disposal a valuable tool i.e. the *Tibyan* itself to justify to the ruler and the people of Aceh his actions, from the time of the ruler's father, the previous Sultan Iskandar Thani, to combat what he termed the deviating teachings and practices of the *Wujudiyah* movement in the Malay world.¹⁵

Secondly, in doing so, al-Raniri also demonstrates his attitude towards other religions, namely Brahmanism, Magism, Judaism and Christianity. However, these religions except Brahmanism and Christianity are hardly known by the Malays at that time. The Brahmins were there in the archipelago and they represented the essential component in the religious edifice of the early kingdoms in South East Asia, prior to the spread of Islam in the region as has been discussed before.

The Malays might have come across Christians since 1508, and more so since the fall of Malacca in 1511. They were soldiers and Portuguese traders who came to the Malay world for business. Historically, there were traces of the presence of Christians in South East Asia as early as 7th century.¹⁶

¹⁴ W. C. Chittick (2002), "Wahdat al-Shuhud," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam (Vol. XI)*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 37-39.

¹⁵ A. Daudy (1978), *Syeikh Nuruddin Ar-Raniry (Sejarah, Karya dan Sanggahan terhadap Wujudiyah di Aceh)*, Jakarta: Penerbit Bulan Bintang, pp. 14-15.

¹⁶ R. B. H. Goh (2005), *Christianity in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p.1

However, the presence of Christians in the Malay world were recorded only after the conquest of Malacca by the Portuguese in 1511. It was after this date that more Christians came to the Malay world, primarily for trade. Other than that, no historical records show that these religions really existed in the Malay world. The only way they got to know these religions is from the Qur'an and stories of travellers. Some of them, especially Malay students in Arabia, might also have encountered the followers of this religion in Arabia.

***Asrar al-Insan fi Ma'rifat al-Ruh wa al-Rahman* (The Secrets of Man [Revealed Through] the Cognition of Spirit and the Merciful One)**

In a more specialized theological text, al-Raniri highlights his concern on matters related to the question of spirit (*ruh*). This text was written by al-Raniri under the royal command of Sultan Iskandar Thani, but was completed during the reign of the next ruler, Sultanah Safiya al-Din.¹⁷ For this analysis, we will be using the text which was studied by Tudjimah for her doctorate thesis.¹⁸ Steenbrink's romanized version of the text for folio 77a until 80a, which will be the focus of this analysis, is also part of our main reference here.¹⁹

In this text, al-Raniri focuses on several well-known fundamental differences between Islam and Christian beliefs, on the attributes of Prophet Isa such as the spirit of Isa: he is the light (*nur*), he is God's Word (*kalima minhu*) and he is the Messiah (*al-Masih*).²⁰ Al-Raniri starts his discussion on the Christian's belief of the spirit of Jesus by highlighting what Qur'an says on this matter that those who claimed God is Jesus, the son of Mary have indeed committed a blasphemous act in Islam. He writes:

Dan demikian lagi dianugerahi Haq ta'ala akan Nabiullah 'Isa berbagai-bagai daripada anugerahnya, hingga dikata segala kafir, bahawa ia Haq ta'ala, seperti firman Allah ta'ala 'laqad kafara alladzina qalu inna'llaha al masihu ibna Maryam' sesungguhnya telah kafirlah segala merekaitu yang mengata bahwasanya Haq ta'ala itulah Isa ibnu Maryam (Qur'an 5:17)(Asrar al-Insan, 175)

Later, he elaborates on why the Christians are considered disbelievers based on the above Quranic verse by highlighting four attributes of Prophet Isa, from the Islamic point of view and how these differed from the Christian's beliefs.²¹ He then draws a comparison on the nature of creation of Prophet Isa, who is born without a biological father with Prophet Adam.

Inilah isyarat firman Allah taala 'Inna mathala 'Isa 'inda'llahi kamathali Adam (bahwasanya mithal 'Isa pada Allah taala seperti mithal Adam), ya'ni kejadian 'Isa itu seperti kejadian Adam. 'Khalaqahu min turabin thumma qala lahu kun fayaku' (dijadikan ia daripada tanah, maka firmanNya akan dia tatkala ta'luq ruh pada kalbu Jadilah engkau, maka iapun jadilah). Maka sebab disamakan Haq ta'ala kejadian Nabiullah 'Isa dengan Nabiullah Adam itu, kerana iapun jadi dengan kalimah jua, tiada dengan wasithah bapa. (Asrar al-Insan, 178)

Prophet Adam is known as the first man or the father of all human being who was born without a father. However, his was still considered as a human being without any divine element given to him to uplift his status. On the other hand, Prophet Isa who has similar birth history with Prophet Adam was handed over with such privilege by the Christians. They believe that he was the Son of God. Al-Raniri argues that this belief is one of the fundamental beliefs in Christianity and this is why the Quran says that the Christians are the disbelievers because of their belief in the divinity of Prophet Isa.

Indeed, *Asrar al-Insan* is a pure Islamic theological text, written by al-Raniri to discuss relevant issues on the spirit (*ruh*). By relying on sources from Persia and Arabia to compose this text such as from al-Hallaj (d. 922), al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240), and 'Abdul al-Razzak al-Kashani (d. 1329),²² this clearly reflects his effort to take part on the ongoing theological discussions in the Muslim world

¹⁷ Tudjimah (1960), *Asrar al-Insan fi Ma'rifat al-Ruh wa al-Rahman*, Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas, pp. 25, 210.

¹⁸ Tudjimah (1960), *Asrar al-Insan fi Ma'rifat al-Ruh wa al-Rahman*, pp. 25, 210.

¹⁹ Steenbrink (1988), *Kitab Suci*, pp. 23-29.

²⁰ Steenbrink (1988), *Kitab Suci*, pp. 23-29.

²¹ Steenbrink (1988), *Kitab Suci*, pp. 7-10.

²² Tudjimah (1960), *Asrar al-Insan*, p. 210.

at that time. Looking at the contents of this text, they are not so much used by al-Raniri as a tool to attack his opponents, followers of the *Wujudiyah* movement in the Malay world unlike the *Tibyan*. This is because the teachings of *Wujudiyah* do not so much dwell on such theological concepts. Rather, the focus is on the understanding of the nature of God itself, and not others, such as *ruh* as discussed above.

There are several other possible reasons for al-Raniri writing this text apart from a direct command from the ruler of Aceh Sultan Iskandar Thani. One reason mentioned by Tudjimah is for al-Raniri to share his views on the understanding of concept of spirit (*ruh*) based on the teachings of Islam, because there was an ongoing dispute among ulamas all over the world at that time in understanding this issue.²³ Theological issues such as this one which has no detailed explanation in the Qur'an have often become the subject of disputes among ulamas. The Qur'an has a brief yet precise explanation on this matter. For instance, the Qur'an states: "They ask thee concerning The Spirit (of inspiration). Say: 'The Spirit (cometh) by command of my Lord: Of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you, (O men!)" (Quran 17: 85).

Abdullah Yusuf Ali in his commentaries on this verse, especially on the issue of spirit (*ruh*) says that this is one of those high spiritual mysteries which cannot be explained in the terms of everyday human experience.²⁴ He continued by saying that our worldly knowledge is limited to fully understand the total sum of true spiritual knowledge.²⁵ In other words, there are things happening in this world which human knowledge has a very limited capacity to understand and one of them is this issue of spirit. Men can try to find the answer to this mystery but with such limited knowledge possessed by them they will never be able to understand it in its fullest meaning. That is why without a clear injunction from the Qur'an, ulamas try to elaborate on this issue based on their knowledge which is supported by other relevant verses from the Qur'an and sometimes from the *Hadith*.

There is also a possibility that al-Raniri wrote this text in response to the emergence of Christians in Aceh at that time. The conquest of Malacca by the Portuguese had resulted in the rise of Aceh as a predominantly Muslim trading and cultural centre taking over the role previously held by the Malacca Sultanate. The popularity of Aceh also attracted western Christian traders to come and do business there. For example, the relationship between the Acehnese Sultanate and the Dutch traders began in 1599.²⁶ One may note a huge gap between the period of the coming of the Portuguese and the Dutch to the Malay world which is separated by almost ninety years gap. There is a possibility that, it was due to their lack of sailing technology and no knowledge of the route to Asia of the latter.²⁷

Thus, it is obvious that the Christians were in Aceh at that time. Based on this situation, the possibility that al-Raniri wrote *Asrar al-Insan* in a refutation of the beliefs of the Christians who were present in Aceh at that time cannot be ruled out. The text is written in such a way as to warn Malay Muslims about the negative influence of Christianity on them. Al-Raniri would have been aware that some Muslims might be making comparisons between Islam and Christianity. The fact that these two 'Abrahamic' religions shared some commonalities, and the commercial advantage held by Christian traders with their bigger ships and international economic power might, he may have feared, attract people to leave Islam and convert to Christianity.

Bustan al-Salatin (Garden of the Sultans)

This is another contribution of al-Raniri to the Malay world. He had written this text of seven volumes in Malay while he was in Aceh under the command of Sultan Iskandar Thani.²⁸ Although there are seven volumes, volume two in particular is relevant to this study because it discussed al-Raniri's views of other religions such as Magism, Judaism and Christianity.²⁹ He did so while explaining the history

²³ Tudjimah (1960), *Asrar al-Insan*, p. 210; Calverley (1993), "Nafs," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam (Vol. VII)*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 881-883.

²⁴ Abdullah Yusuf Ali (2004), *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland: Amana Publications, p. 698.

²⁵ Abdullah Yusuf Ali (2004), *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, p. 698.

²⁶ D. G. E. Hall (1964), *A History of South-East Asia*, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., p. 270.

²⁷ M. C. Ricklefs (1981), *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, p. 24.

²⁸ T. Iskandar (1995), *Kesusasteraan Klasik Melayu Sepanjang Abad*, Brunei: Jabatan Kesusasteraan Melayu, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, p. 419.

²⁹ Jelani Harun (ed.) (2004), *Bustan al-Salatin (Bab Pertama dan Kedua) Karangan Nuruddin Ar-Raniri*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, p. 99.

of prophets from Adam to Muhammad. For this analysis we will be using Jelani Harun's edition of the *Bustan* which consists of volume one and two.³⁰ In his book, Jelani also gave the background of the *Bustan*. According to him, the *Bustan* can be categorized into the world history genre based on Islamic historiography.³¹ Furthermore the contents of this text were arranged in such a way similar with the works of other Muslim historians such as al-Baihaqi, al-Baidawi, al-Qashani and many more.³²

Firstly, al-Raniri highlights the origin of the fire worshipping by the followers of Magism. According to him, the Magians started to worship fire after Kiyamurti lit a candle besides the grave of his only son, Saya, who was been killed by an evil spirit known as Afrit.

Hatta maka Kiyaurmurti sampailah kepada tempat itu, maka dilihat anaknya sudah terbunuh. Kata yang empunya tarikh, bahawa kematian Saya itu tatkala ia dalam sujud, maka datang jin ifrit menghempaskan suatu (benda) ke atas kepalanya, maka ia pun matilah. Dan ada ia beranak seorang laki-laki. Setelah itu maka Kiyaurmurti pun menggali tanah maka dimasukkan mayat anaknya itu ke dalam. Maka di sisi kubur itu dinyalakan api. Sebab itulah segala Majusi itu menyembah api." (Bustan, 136-7).

His act of lighting the candle was imitated by his followers, and turned it into ritual of fire worshipping. Al-Raniri did not further elaborate on this.

Secondly, the enumeration of Judaism is very brief. Al-Raniri did not mention any specific theological issues about this religion such as the fundamental beliefs of Judaism. He merely provides a list of prophets such as Prophet Ishaq (Isaac), Ya'qub (Jacob), Yusuf (Joseph) Musa (Moses), Harun (Aaron), Daud (David), Sulaiman (Solomon), Uzair (Ezra) and Zakariyya (Zacharias). There is also mention of the translation of the *Taurat* (Old Testament) from Hebrew to Greek, which was agreed upon by seventy-two Jewish scholars at that time.

Dan pada masa itulah turut dipindahkan segala ulama daripada bahasa Ibrani kepada bahasa Yunan, iaitulah naskhah Taurat yang sah dari kerana bahawasanya telah ittifikat atas naskhah itu tujuh puluh dua ulama daripada mereka itu (Bustan, 131)

Thirdly, al-Raniri's brief explanation of Christianity began with the story of Prophet Yahya (John the Baptist). According to him, Prophet Yahya was executed at the request of the daughter of Herodias for his refusal to allow her to marry her own uncle.

Dan adalah pada masa itu Nabi Allah Isa mengharamkan nikah anak saudaranya perempuan. Kalakian, ada seorang Hirudas, iaitu hakim Bani Israel daripada kaum Yunayan dan seorang anak saudaranya perempuan, maka hendak dinikahi akan dia. Maka ditegah Nabi Allah Yahya akan dia daripada mengerjakan yang demikian itu. Maka dibawa ibu perempuan itu akan Hirudas (supaya) membunuh Nabi Allah Yahya, maka tiada dikabulnya. Kemudian dari itu, maka datang pula ia serta dengan sangat minta keduanya. Hatta maka dikabulkannyalah kata perempuan itu, lalu disuruh tangkap akan Nabi Allah Yahya. Maka ditangkap oranglah kedua perempuan akan dia lalu dibawa mereka itu kepadanya, maka disuruhnya sembelih di hadap(an) kedua perempuan itu. Maka adalah Nabi Allah Yahya alaihissalam terbunuh dahulu daripada diangkat Allah Taala Nabi Allah Isa alaihissalam ke langit hampir jua masanya. (Bustan, 132-3).

Then he mentions the story of the Prophet Isa and his mother, Maryam. Al-Raniri stated that Jesus was sent back to his mother for a while after he was taken away by God. This was to allow Prophet Isa to console his sick mother, Mary that he was not killed by the Jews but in fact was taken away by God.

Setelah itu maka diturunkan Allah Nabi Allah Isa kepada bondanya serta katanya, "Hai ibuku, bahawa hamba telah diangkat Allah Taala ke langit dan adalah hamba dalam kesentosaan." (Bustan, 133).

³⁰ Jelani Harun (ed.) (2004), *Bustan al-Salatin*, p. 99.

³¹ Jelani Harun (ed.) (2004), *Bustan al-Salatin*, xx.

³² Jelani Harun (ed.) (2004), *Bustan al-Salatin*, xx.

Immediately after this, he was taken back to God, and then his mother passed away.

Generally, al-Raniri seems to follow the same method he did before in the *Tibyan* in discussing the religions of the world. However, he did not discuss anything regarding Brahminism. This may be because it is irrelevant to include Brahminism while discussing the prophets in Islam, and the religions brought by them since Brahminism is not part of the Abrahamic religions.

This is the second time al-Raniri had included the discussion of Magism in his text. Here, he discussed the origin of fire-worshipping by the Magians. It seems that al-Raniri was very keen to elaborate more on this religion, although Magism is not among the Abrahamic religions. There must be something special about this religion or the followers of this religion which made him want to include them in two different texts.

The only reason which we can think of is by looking at his own living experience with the followers of Magism at his birthplace, Gujarat. Gujarat was an important international port in the the Indian subcontinent in the 16th century. As a result, many foreign traders were trading there, such as the Turks, Egyptians, Arabs, Persian and those who were from Central Asia.³³ This view is echoed further by Jelani, who emphasised that al-Raniri's early life in Gujarat was indeed influenced heavily by Persian tradition as a result of the presence of a significant number of Persians living there.³⁴ Not only traders, there were also several Persian historians such as Ali Muhammad Khan, Shah Abu Turab and Sikandar Muhammad who have produced texts on world history lived there.³⁵ This could be a strong explanation as to why al-Raniri felt so important in including Magians especially in the *Bustan*, where it seems to be irrelevant. He knew followers of this religion very well. His familiarity with Magians and its followers may be the reason why he felt comfortable writing more about Magism in the *Bustan*, as well as in the *Tibyan*, in order to share his knowledge about this religion with the people in the Malay world at that time.

Conclusion

Indeed, al-Raniri pioneered the writings on other religions in the Malay world. Apart from dedicating an entire text in the *Tibyan* on other religions, he also included the discourse on these religions in his other texts. His previous multi-religious life experiences in the Indian sub-continent could have influenced him to write about these religions even when he was living in the Malay archipelago. There could be certain needs which al-Raniri might have thought of to explain about these religions for the benefit of the Malay communities at that time.

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³³ Tudjimah (1960), *Asrarul-Insan*, pp. 1-2.

³⁴ Jelani Harun (ed.) (2004), *Bustan al-Salatin*, p. Xxvi.

³⁵ Jelani Harun (ed.) (2004), *Bustan al-Salatin*, p. xxvi.

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