AS-SAMA’ DHIKR DANCE: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON THE VIEWS OF ISLAMIC SCHOLARS

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ABSTRACT

In Tasawwuf, there is the way to God known as tariqa. Through tariqa, it can serve as a guide to performing ibadah. The main foundation of tariqa is the practice of dhikr. Through dhikr, a sufi’s tariqa can purify his heart and draw himself closer to Allah s.w.t. Therefore, there are many ways through which sufi’s tariqa can practice dhikr in the remembrance of Allah SWT. For instance, Melevi tariqa incorporates dance element into their dhikr which is known as As-Sama’. Thus, the practice of As-Sama’ dhikr dance in the Melevi tariqa has caused numerous misunderstandings, debates and arguments that jeopardize the peace of Muslim societies. Hence, this study aims to investigate the opinions of Islamic scholars about As-Sama’ dhikr dance. This study used qualitative methods by adopting content analysis research design and descriptive analysis. The findings of this study revealed that many scholars have argued about the practice of As-Sama’ dhikr dance in the Melevi tariqa have led to the extreme ghuluw acts, the hereditary invented and their practitioners are too blind to the teachings of that tariqa.

Key words: Dance, Dhikr, As-Sama’, Melevi Tariqa, Islamic Scholars.


1. INTRODUCTION

In seeking worldly and religious knowledge especially with regard to Ibadah, a large number of Muslim in the society are still confused in order to understand and practice it well. This has resulted in many misunderstandings, in particular, when it comes to the practice of dhikr that incorporates dance element as evinced in Melevi tariqa. Nevertheless, there is an awareness as well as understanding of the fact that the issue under discussion is actually a matter of
dispute (khilaf) that arises from the various opinions among earlier and contemporary scholars, however it remains a very important issue in uniting the understanding of Muslims towards it and form a unity among the people of Islam. Hence, this study aims to give an explanation of the religious issue in light of the views of eminent scholars and authoritative academicians.

2. THE DEFINITION OF AS-SAMA’ DHIKR DANCE

Dance in general is one of art and traditional activities. They have various forms such as tango dances, twist, breakdance, whirling dance performed by a tariqa and many more. The dances actually contain some movement that can reveal a beauty. Then, the beauty of the dance has made it an enjoyable entertainment of one’s life. Edi Sedyawati (1986) and (Norashibah Hj Besar et al (2018) defines the dance with various meaning and he explains that the dance is a beautiful and rhythmic movement whether part or all of body of an individual or group which are accompanied by a particular expression or certain idea. Therefore, the main medium of dance is the movement and it is related to the art activities that can convey the meaning and certain order so that it benefits the human beings.

Next, the meaning of dhikr in terms of literal which originates from the Arabic word ذكز ذكر ذكزا وذكر and its plural ذكورا وأذكار has meant to remember something or to pronounce the name of Allah s.w.t after forgetting or praying to Him (Majma’ al-Lughat al-’Arabiyyah 2004). Meanwhile, the meaning of dhikr in terms of terminology according to Badrul Amin (2014) is to recall and pronounce the word ṭoyyibah such as ‘asmā’ul ḥusnā, istighfar, tasbīḥ, tahmīd, tahlīl, salawat and other du’ā with the intention to please God. Therefore, dhikr is used as a way to establish a relationship with Allah s.w.t.

Furthermore, in order to establish a relationship with Allah s.w.t, dhikr become the main foundation of a tariqa. However, there are many methods employed by a tariqa in order to persuade in the remembrance of Allah s.w.t. Mevlevi tariqa in particular, uses the method of dance accompanied by music in their dhikr, which is known as As-Sama’. Cowan (1980) describes the word of As-Sama’ which is actually in Arabic with the same sound sama’, sam’ dan sami’a have brought meaning to hear. This term also known as the use of music by the sufi members in searching God (Glasse 1996). Meanwhile, Abdul Aziz (2014) cited Abdul Muhaya’s explanation that As-Sama’ is a listening activity of poetry, song, dhikr and so forth which comes from the Quran and accompanied by music in group. He also has described that psychologically the inner feelings experienced by the sufi members are actually more likely to praise what is loved through songs, poems and so on. When they hear the melodies of love that can move their bodies and seep into their hearts until they reach into the ecstatic state. Thus, As-Sama’ dhikr dance is the practice of worship for Mevlevi tariqa. In a tariqa, dhikr, besides becoming a symbol of the tariqa’s identity, plays an important role to inculcate the practitioner’s soul with the awareness of the existence of Allah s.w.t, His Might, and all His Perfections (Khalili al-Bamar 1996). Hence, Mevlevi tariqa especially use dance as the means (wasīlah) to attain ethereal life or spirituality through body movements and poems in praising of Allah s.w.t. This is a sign that they remember Allah s.w.t all the time.

3. UNFAVOURABLE VIEWS OF ISLAMIC SCHOLARS AGAINST DHIKR DANCE

There are many opinions on the position of dhikr dance whether it is allowed or not. For fiqh scholars, this dhikr dance is certainly seen by them as something deviant and cannot be done by a Muslim. Therefore, those who reject or disagree with the issue of dhikr dance have stated
that the practice does not accord with Islamic Sharia since it is assumed only as part of a tariqa’s cultural traditions especially the Mevlevi tariqa. This is because the practices that follow Islamic Sharia would include only all the things that have been prescribed by Allah s.w.t and taught by the Messenger of Allah s.a.w. Furthermore, there is a fiqh method that has been stated by Şoleḥ al-‘Uthaimīn (2009) that the occurrence of a practice of worship is necessary to the valid argument. Thus, he asserted that it is prohibited to worship Allah s.w.t by performing an Ibadah except when there is the evidence in Sharia justifying that the act has been ordered by Allah s.w.t. Then, he further added that it is not permissible to create or initiate a new act of Ibadah for the sake of worshipping Allah s.w.t. This act can be seen from what the followers of Mevlevi tariqa have included dance element, known as As-Sama’, in their dhikr with the aim of getting closer to Allah s.w.t. This is regarded as a new Ibadah comprising of newly discovered rituals like whirling and accompanied to the music which is being treated like an amusement that would lure them into the state of negligence and intoxication called ecstasy. The issue was also argued by al-Hanafi (1990) who quoted Ibn Qudāmah al-Hanabilah, saying that he also forbade the use of flute, dance and listening to music as practiced by the followers of the tariqa previously mentioned as a method of dhikr which is obviously ignoble and imprudent.

Salih Fawzan (1994) emphasized that any action is not based on evidence in Sharia is indeed heresy (bidaah), as what has been practiced by the Mevlevi tariqa. The method of dhikr used in the tariqa is an innovation because it goes against Islamic Sharia in terms of its content, ways and time in which it is performed. Then, as-Shāṭibī (2001) also emphasized that heresy (bidaah) is a way or ritual created and innovated in the religion similar to Sharia for exaggeration in worshipping Allah s.w.t. Thus, Atiyyah & Izzat ’Alī (1980) explained that the dance practiced by Mevlevi tariqa, in particular, could be categorized as bidaah idāfiyyah in Ibadah. This is because their practice of dhikr is believed as an Ibadah prescribed to the Mevlevi tariqa practitioners but is carried out in such a way that is against Islamic Sharia for instance, performing dhikr while whirling in addition to playing music. This is called exaggeration in Ibadah which deviates from the Sunnah of Rasulullah s.a.w even though it in fact traces its roots back to the Sunnah, its application is nonetheless, heresy (bidaah). Therefore, As-Shāṭibī (2001) concluded that bidaah idāfiyyah, on the one hand, is an action which has its origin in the Sunnah, but on the other, is an innovation, bidaah. It means that this action is a blend between innovation and Sharia. This category has led to the emergence of conflicts in Muslim societies since there has been no proof that explains in detail about such act of Ibadah.

In relation to that, As-Sama’ dhikr dance in Mevlevi tariqa can also said to lead to ghuluw (extremism) in their Ibadah. This is due to the fact that they perform such Ibadah to attain ecstasy (wajd state) or exaggerated elation to the extent that they get intoxicated while dancing claiming their love for Allah s.w.t (Hisyam Kabbani 2007). This clearly shown that they practice such an act due to good intention not with standing the wrong application. Their utmost intention is actually to get closer to Allah s.w.t but the way or method by which the action is performed is excessive resulting in intoxication (Şoleḥ al-‘Uthaimīn 1998).

Meanwhile, the state of ghuluw can cause a person to follow blindly a tradition of a group of people and a deviant teacher (sheikh) which would be against Islamic Sharia. This is what happens in Mevlevi tariqa that has adopted dance as a means to invoke Allah s.w.t’s name which is obviously part of the tradition of the group and is against Sharia. Therefore someone who follows the teaching of that tariqa is considered ghuluw because of blind following (Mas’oed Abidin 2005).
Moreover, the Muslim community has concurred that it is not obligatory to be loyal to somebody else in all matters except to Rasulullah s.a.w. Hence, whoever becomes too obsessed or fanatical about an Imam or Sheikh, and deserts all others, is like someone who is obsessed with a Companion and neglects the others. These are called ‘ahlul ahwa’ (who parted from Sharia) (‘Abī ‘Izz 1985). Thus in this study, it is manifested that Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī who was the founder of the Mevlevi tariqa, paid great honour to his spiritual teacher who he called “the Sun” who illuminated and enlightened his life. This serves as an evidence that proves Rūmī’s obsession with his teacher to the extent that he imitated his teacher’s spiritual teaching. Indeed, it is compulsory for all creations to follow and be loyal to the infallible man, Rasulullah s.a.w, who spoke not based on lust, but instead, on the revelation given to him.

Besides that, the discussion on the issue of dhikr while dancing the Sufi-like dance in tariqa that known as As-Sama’ also has attracted the attention of various major Islamic schools of thought such as the Hanafi’s schools of thought. Hanafi’s schools of thought has been rejected the dhikr dance as quoted by al-Halabī (1990) also as mentioned by al-Bazazi about the existence of evidence that prohibits ar-Raqs (الرقص) or dance, it should indicate an order, if it involves entertainment like daff (drum) and shabābah (flute) or shaking. However if it involves only ar-Raqs (الرقص) or dance, the scholars have different laws with regard to it. For instance Ibn ‘Ābidīn (1979) asserted that if As-Sama’ appears similar to ar-Raqs (الرقص) or dance, the scholars have different laws with regard to it. Niẓām (2000) agreed that singing, qawl and dancing practiced by earlier and contemporary Sufis, are haram (unlawful).

On a different note, Ibn al-Jawzī (1989) quoting al-Wafā Ibn al-‘Āqil, stated that dancing is a way of walking with arrogance and self-complacency. Thus, he concluded the issue by putting forth his opinion that Sufi dance is a blameworthy act that can disregard the value of one’s intellect and integrity besides eliminating courteousness and humility.

Meanwhile, the scholar, ‘Izz al-Dīn (1990) also put forth a similar view by indicating that those who dance like that are considered as mentally disabled, actors and liars. He also questioned the Sufi-like dance by which the followers are dancing to the music and poem recitation, whereas their souls vanished when they attain the intoxication state, the ecstasy. He further explained, whoever can feel the greatness and might of Allah s.w.t will not even thought of practicing any form of dance unless those who are brainless and ignorant. This will not happen to an intelligent person. Moreover, Sharia has never taught it since it is not mentioned in the Quran and the Sunnah, let alone the Prophet s.a.w and his companions did not do it. The practice is thus done by those who are ignorant and confused about the reality of something and hence, they mix it up with their lust. Even though some of them are convinced that such practice is the manifestation of their utmost intention which is to get closer to Allah s.w.t, in reality, the practice is viewed as a blameworthy act and indeed a form of foolishness.

4. FAVOURABLE VIEWS OF ISLAMIC SCHOLARS TOWARDS DHIKR DANCE

For the Sufi and certain tariqa members, this dance is believed to be one of the methods of dhikr which is permissible because they support their argument by referring to the general verses or evidence from the Quran, Surah Ali ’Imrān, 190-191:
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Meaning: Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding. Who remember Allah s.w.t while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], "Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire (The Quran, Surah Ali ʽImrān 3: 190-191).

Meanwhile, the Sufis practicing the dhikr also refer to the hadith quoted by Imam Ahmad, Rasulullah s.a.w said: .

Anas r.a. reported: The Abyssinians were dancing in front of the Messenger of Allah s.a.w, peace and blessings be upon him, and they were saying, “Muhammad is a righteous servant.” The Messenger of Allah s.w.t said, “What are they saying?” They said, “Muhammad is a righteous servant.” When the Messenger s.a.w saw them in such condition, he did not prohibit them, and allow them to carry on (Al-Sa’ati, Ṣaḥīḥ Imām Aḥmad, Kitāb al-Lahwī wal-La’āb, Bab Mā Jā’a fī La’iba al-Habshah wa al-Raqṣuhum, 228).

Both aforementioned evidences have been referred to by the Sufis to diversify the ways and methods used in their Ibadah. This shows that the above Quranic verses clearly tells us that there are various states in which dhikr can be done, namely while sitting, standing and lying down. There is even a hadith of the Prophet s.a.w which is a sign of the necessity of bodily movements while performing the devotional act.

For a favorable view of dhikr dance is taken from Abdul Qadir (1970) who argued that bodily movements while doing dhikr is a good thing and is therefore permissible in Sharia. This is because Sharia law, as widely known, is derived from the saying (qawli), action (fi’li) and declaration (taqrīr) of the Prophet s.a.w. Thus when the Prophet s.a.w permitted an act and did not forbid it, the action was thus understood as permissible. On the other hand, if it is something blameworthy, the Prophet s.a.w would definitely prohibit it because he would not let any sinful actions and wrongdoings to be done by his ummah. This is why Allah s.w.t sent His Prophets and Messengers to explain the right and wrong as prescribed by Sharia.

Besides, Abdul Qadir (2007) elaborated that bodily movement is possible while praising the Prophet s.a.w. Shaking or moving the body while doing dhikr, according to him, is not considered as unlawful dance, but instead is permissible because it can enliven and activate the body to carry on the dhikr activity. It even can help the heart to feel the presence of Allah s.w.t.

Furthermore, Imam al-Ghazālī (1998), Zidni Nuran et al (2017) and Norashibah Hj Besar et al (2018) also opined that listening to songs and music while dancing is mubah (permissible). This is because there were a few of Rasulullah’s s.a.w Companions who did the action of hajal themselves, which means, standing on tiptoes when they were happy. One of the Companions was ‘Ali bin ’Abī Ẓālib who used to dance on tiptoes while listening to the Prophet’s s.a.w saying:

Meaning: You are my kind, and I am yours (Ṣaḥīḥ Tirmizī, Kitāb al-Manāqib, Bāb Faḍā’il ‘Alī bin ’Abī Ẓālib 3716). .

Based on this occurrence, Imam al-Ghazālī (1998) deduced that dancing is permissible when celebrating good events like Eid, wedding, the return of somebody to his hometown, aqiqah, childbirth, circumcision and so forth. All the festivals are permissible in Sharia as they intend to express happiness. Thus, he once again emphasized that raqs (الرقص) or dance is a means to express happiness and zeal.

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In addition, the difference in the terms used to denote dance has caused debates among the scholars. For instance, based on what is stated by Ibn Manzūr (2012), the meaning of dance could be indicated by the term، إهتشاس. In Arabic language, the term means a swing or shake and thus it is not considered unlawful. This is because it involves body movement in a small quantity which is not excessive and with a good intention. It is therefore permissible in Sharia. For example, swaying one’s head back and forth, or right and left while doing dhikr is not a problem and is permissible because it is not categorized as dancing (Hamdan Hassan 1990). According to Imam ar-Ramlī (1984) from the Shāfi‘iyyah’s schools of thought agreed that anything which is not categorized as dance is not unlawful or objectionable because a dance involves only movements. Moreover, the movement done by lifting up one’s foot, and then shaking it, or jumping around, is allowed as it is a sign that they are happy with the blessings given by Allah s.w.t (al-Qalyūbī 1980).

Hence, this study recapitulates that the justification put forth by the Sufis taken from the Quran and the Sunnah with regard to dhikr dance can be accepted only if the movement involved minimal gestures such as lifting one’s foot, shaking one’s head, standing up, sitting, lying down and so forth. If the dhikr involves too many gestures, it is thus considered as prohibited dance. In reality, those who are doing dhikr and moving their body simultaneously actually intend to activate their body to become motivated and pay full attention to the dhikr. Nonetheless, implementing dance method in doing dhikr is permissible for the sake of celebrating glad tidings. It also relies on what is meant by the heart, whether positive or negative. If it is the former, than it is allowed. Otherwise, it is prohibited.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the discussion, a detailed explanation of the issue with regard to the law of dhikr dance as practiced by Mevlevi tariqa, has been presented. Therefore many speculations were made by those with favourable and unfavourable views among some Islamic scholars. This study has put the views of Islamic scholars and the four Islamic schools of thought in explaining the issue of such Ibadah. The Sufis of the tariqa carry out a practice with a good intention to get closer to Allah s.w.t, nonetheless, the way or method in which the practice is done is excessive and causes intoxication. Such an act also brings about innovations in religion. Moreover, those who practice it are actually influenced by the obsession with their syeikh, and this results in blindly following the teaching of the syeikh. Besides, the practice of dhikr dance in a tariqa is subject to disagreement between which is unlawful and permissible, not which is afḍal (better) and less good. The practice becomes unlawful when the dance is accompanied by the playing of unlawful musical instruments, and involves slow swaying and so forth. Whereas when the dance involves only minimal bodily movements, the practice is thus permissible in Sharia. Therefore, it is clear that some Islamic scholars believe about the issue of dhikr dance in Mevlevi tariqa does not accord with Islamic Sharia, but only part of their cultural tradition. Nonetheless, if only a minimal amount of movement involved in dhikr which does not resemble dancing, then the practice is acceptable based on Islamic Sharia.

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