

THE ROLE OF SHEIKH AHMAD KHATIB AL-MINANGKABAWI IN THE DYNAMICS OF HAJJ IN THE ARCHIPELAGO IN THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the profound role of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi (1860–1916) in the dynamics of the history and practice of Hajj in Indonesia through a historical perspective and literature analysis. As a great scholar from Minangkabau who was appointed as the Grand Imam of the Shafi'i School of Law at the Grand Mosque, he became a central reform agent who connected the intellectual heritage of the Hijaz with the Indonesian Hajj pilgrims in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. This study uses a descriptive qualitative research approach, with references to historical research and library research. The results of this study are: Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi's significant contribution lies in the reform of religious practices brought home by pilgrims, namely by opposing ta'assub mazhab and encouraging the purification of Hajj jurisprudence through an emphasis on the Qur'an and Sunnah. In addition, his strong criticism of traditionalism, especially the matrilineal inheritance system and the Naqsyabandiyah Order and the cadre formation of scholars (including the founders of Muhammadiyah and NU) fundamentally shaped the puritan and modernist identity of Islam in Indonesia. This research is expected to increase understanding of the Hajj as a channel for Islamic intellectual mobility.

Keywords: Sheikh Ahmad Khatib; Archipelago hajj; Islamic reform; Ulama cadre development.

INTRODUCTION

In the 19th century, the pilgrimage from the archipelago experienced complex dynamics. On the one hand, Hajj is a medium for the spread of Islamic teachings, the formation of social identity, and the strengthening of religious awareness (Feener, 2013). On the other hand, this trip faced great challenges due to the policies of the Dutch East Indies Government such as *Ordinance on the Supervision of Natives Travelling to Mecca* 1859 which strictly regulated the departure of pilgrims because it was considered to have the potential to arouse the spirit of resistance to colonialism (Laffan 2011); Steenbrink 1980). In the social context of the time, the title "Hajj" had a strong symbolic value (Vredenburg, 1962). Apart from being a sign of religious piety, the title is a symbol of social status, scientific prestige, and moral legitimacy in society (Mobini-Kesheh, 1999). Not infrequently, the pilgrims became the driving force for social change and even resistance to colonialism.

In the midst of this dynamic, the figure of an archipelago ulama emerged who played a central role in guiding pilgrims, building intellectual networks, and becoming religious references in Haramain. One of the most influential figures was Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, a great scholar from Minangkabau who later became the Imam and Khatib of the Grand Mosque (Istikomah, 2011). His presence in Makkah made him an important figure in connecting the intellectual tradition of the Hijaz with the Muslim community of the archipelago.

A number of previous studies have examined his contribution, especially in the field of jurisprudence and Islamic thought. Indrawati (2016) highlighting his role in straightening out inheritance law issues, criticism of the Naqsyabandiyah order, and the idea of reform in Minangkabau. Then (Wirman, 2019) emphasized the role of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib Al-

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Minangkabawi in producing students who would later become important figures in the Islamic movement in Southeast Asia, including the founders of two major organizations in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama.

Studies on the role of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib in the dynamics of the archipelago's hajj, especially in the context of the guidance of pilgrims, the formation of religious authorities, and his contribution to the transformation of hajj practices, are still very limited. In fact, his position as a prominent scholar in the Grand Mosque provides a strategic space to influence the religious understanding of Indonesian pilgrims, build a scientific network, and transmit Islamic scientific traditions to the archipelago.

Previous research on Sheikh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi was still limited to his contribution to the purification of Islamic theology and law in the archipelago. However, related to his strategic role as a connecting axis in Hajj guidance and scientific transmission in the archipelago, it has not received adequate attention. So this research is important to be carried out to fill the void of the study. This study aims to analyze historically the role of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi in the dynamics of the Nusantara hajj, including the scientific dimension, the practice of pilgrim guidance, and his contribution to the formation of the intellectual-religious network of the people of the archipelago. This research is expected to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the history of Indonesian hajj, the intellectual mobility of Indonesian scholars, and the role of Haramain in the development of Islam in Southeast Asia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with reference to historical research and library research (Samsu 2017: Syahrizal and Jailani 2023). The research covers four procedural stages: heuristic, criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Kusdiana & Info, 2024). At the heuristic stage, the researcher collected primary sources in the form of the original works of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi, colonial records about Hajj and his biography. In addition, secondary sources in the form of historical articles and theses related to the history of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi related to the Hajj policy in the transition of the 19th and 20th centuries are also used. The data collected then goes through a process of verifying or criticizing sources, both externally and internally to test physical authenticity and validate the credibility of the narrative in it. Furthermore, the data was also analyzed following a critical analysis procedure of content and history to examine recurring themes, compare opinions, and reconstruct how their thinking affected religious habits among Indonesian pilgrims. The entire series of these processes ends with historiography, which is the presentation of an analytical narrative about the subject's contribution to the dynamics of the archipelago's hajj.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Biography of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi

Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi was born in Gadang City, Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, on Monday, 6 Zulhijjah 1276 H/1860 AD. The paternal lineage shows that he is the son of Sheikh Abdul Latif, grandson of Sheikh Abdurrahman, great-grandson of Sheikh Abdullah, and the next generation of Sheikh Abdul Aziz. His father and all his ancestors were known as prominent scholars in the Minangkabau region. As for his mother's side, he is the son of Limbak Urai, a descendant of Tuanku Nan Rancak, one of the influential scholars from the Padri circles (Hamka, 1976).

Ahmad Khatib is a descendant of a Qadi Padri and comes from Kotagedang, an area known as the birthplace of many scholars and scholars, and has a number of important suraus. After completing his primary education, he continued his studies at the King's School in Bukittinggi. At the age of about eleven, he was taken by his father to Mecca and later settled there. While in Mecca, Ahmad Khatib received intensive religious education from a number of prominent scholars, including Sayyid Bakri Syatha, Sayyid Ahmad bin Zaini Dahlan, Sheikh Muhammad bin Sulaiman Hasbullah al-Makki, and Sheikh Saleh Kurdi (Azra, 2006).

Ahmad Khatib received formal education from the elementary school level to continue to the King's School or *Nursery school* around 1871 A.D. His religious understanding, including the ability to memorize the Qur'an, was fostered directly by his father, Sheikh Abdul Latif. In 1287 AH, Abdul Latif departed to perform the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca with his father, Sheikh Abdullah, and his brother, Abdul Ghani, one of the wealthy figures in their homeland. After the implementation of the Hajj, Ahmad Khatib did not return to West Sumatra with his family, but chose to settle in Mecca to deepen the discipline of Islamic knowledge and strengthen his memorization of the Qur'an through the guidance of scholars in the Grand Mosque (Azra, 2006).

Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi was one of the most influential scholars from West Sumatra in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. His role and contribution to the development of Islamic thought in the Malay-Indonesian world is very significant. Throughout his intellectual career, he held various important positions, including being the first scholar from the archipelago to be appointed by the Haramain authorities as imam and khatib at the Grand Mosque. He was also known to be active in various scholarly debates with his contemporaries, although the most prominent and prolonged polemics were related to the practice of the Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah order in Minangkabau (Ilyas, 2017).

Sheikh Ahmad Khatib had five siblings and sixteen half-siblings from three stepmothers and one biological mother. Most of his siblings died at an early age, while those who survived to adulthood included Ahmad Khatib, Aisyah, Hafsa, Kulsum, Latifah, and Uthman; all of them remained in Mecca until the end of their lives. From his father's line, he still has a kinship relationship with Inyiah H. Agus Salim, an Indonesian independence fighter, while from his mother's lineage he is related to H. Thaher Jalaluddin, a prominent philosopher in Malaysia. From a young age, his inclination towards science and the world of clerics has been prominent (Istikomah, 2011).

It was further explained that when his uncle prayed for him to occupy a government position in the future, he firmly rejected it and stated, "*God willing, I will be a person of knowledge (shaykh al-'aman).*" In childhood, he was required to study religious knowledge and memorize the Qur'an, starting with reading directly in front of his father. However, the socio-cultural situation and Dutch colonial pressure at that time caused the process of memorizing the Qur'an to be very challenging, as if facing heavy obstacles. He then continued his study of the Qur'an at *College* with his father until the age of 11 (1287 H). Given these difficulties, he was encouraged to continue his religious education and memorize the Qur'an in the city of Mecca (Istikomah, 2011).

Departing and Settling in Makkah

The intellectual journey of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi has formed an important foundation for the development of Islamic science in the archipelago. From an early age, he showed outstanding academic capacity, especially in memorizing the Qur'an and a deep understanding of Islamic disciplines (Sahid, 2018). In addition to taking intensive religious education, he also received formal education at Kweekschool which at that time was known as a modern educational institution. After completing his education, his father took him to perform the Hajj at the age of about eleven. This spiritual moment then became an important turning point, because after Hajj, Ahmad Khatib chose to settle in Mecca to deepen his religious knowledge, while his father returned to his homeland. In the early period of his studies at Haramain, he was known as a diligent, disciplined student, and possessed a high intellectual curiosity, so he was accepted and mentored by a number of prominent scholars (Daya, 1990).

Five years later, in 1876 AD/1292 H, Ahmad Khatib returned to the Minang realm at the request of his mother who longed for his presence (Wirman, 2017). His return period, although short, did not stop his intellectual activities. He continued the process of learning from Minangkabau scholars, including studying Tafsir Jalalain and matan al-Minhāj under the guidance of Tuanku Nan Mudo. His mother's decision not to allow him to return to Mecca initially made him settle for some time in his hometown. However, the sojourn actually expanded his intellectual network in West Sumatra and enriched his mastery of knowledge (Lapian, 2004).

The desire to return to study in Mecca has never been extinguished. Wirman (2017) noted that Ahmad Khatib's determination to continue his Islamic studies in Haramain was always present in his prayers. The opportunity came when Sheikh Uthman Syatta', Ahmad Khatib's teacher while in Mecca, stopped by his uncle's house in Padang. Ahmad Khatib used the meeting, which was considered a "golden opportunity", to ask for the teacher's help to explain to his parents about the importance of continuing his education in the Holy Land. After a long family deliberation, his parents finally gave permission, and in 1877 A.D./1294 AH he left for Mecca again. It was during this period that the process of forming Ahmad Khatib's ulema identity took place more intensively through interaction with the great scholars of the Hijaz (Azra, 2013).

In the next development, Ahmad Khatib not only played the role of a student of knowledge, but also as part of the intellectual community active in Mecca. Hanani & Yuliana (2025) He mentioned that during his stay in the holy city, he studied various disciplines, ranging from fiqh, usul fiqh, falak, hisab, to inheritance and algebra. The breadth of the study shows not only the depth of scientific insight, but also the multidisciplinary character that is an important characteristic of the archipelago scholars in Haramain (Azra, 2013). His dedication and discipline made Ahmad Khatib gain a special place in the academic environment of Mecca and become an important reference for Indonesian students who come to the Holy Land.

His scholarly authority was further recognized when he was appointed as an imam and khatib at the Grand Mosque in the Shafi'i school, and was trusted as a mufti for the Shafi'iyah community in Mecca (Federspiel, 2009). This strategic position made its influence extend not only in the local environment of Mecca, but also in the archipelago which at the end of the 19th century began to experience the dynamics of Islamic reform. Ahmad Khatib's position as a link between the Haramain scientific tradition and the Muslim community of the Indonesian archipelago made him one of the central figures in the history of Islamic scientific transmission in Southeast Asia.

Affirmations regarding his scientific authority were also conveyed by the Cult (2024), who said that his intelligence and perseverance led him to become the Grand Imam of the Grand Mosque in the Shafi'i madhhab. His existence as a favorite disciple of Sheikh Saleh Kurdi, who later became his father-in-law, strengthened Ahmad Khatib's position among the prominent scholars in Mecca. From the historical perspective of the Nusantara hajj, the appointment of a non-Arab scholar from Minangkabau as the Grand Imam of the Grand Mosque is a monumental achievement and is one of the important proofs of the intellectual contribution of Nusantara scholars at the center of the Islamic world.

The intellectual journey of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi not only illustrates the personal dynamics of a great scholar, but also reflects the transnational scientific network that connected Mecca and the archipelago in the 19th and early 20th centuries. His contribution shows how intellectual mobility, education in Haramain, and scientific authority in the Shafi'i school play an important role in the formation of Islamic discourse in modern Indonesia.

Teaching Indonesian Hajj Pilgrims

The contribution of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi in shaping the intellectual tradition of Islam in the archipelago occupies a very central position in the history of Indonesian ulema. As noted by Fahreza, Sheikh Ahmad Khatib played the role of one of the most important professors for students from the archipelago in Makkah and was widely known as a prominent scholar as well as the mufti of the Shafi'i school in the Grand Mosque (Indrawati, 2016). Among his students were great figures who would later become the founders of modern Islamic organizations, such as KH Ahmad Dahlan (Muhammadiyah), KH Hasyim Asy'ari (Nahdlatul Ulama), and Sheikh Abdul Karim Amrullah, the father of Buya Hamka. This position allowed Sheikh Ahmad Khatib not only to transmit Islamic sciences, but also to instill an ethos of struggle and critical awareness of Dutch colonialism. The anti-colonial attitude he instilled in students from Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula made his messages resonate strongly in the socio-political dynamics of the Islamic movement in the early 20th century (Laffan, 2011).

This anti-colonial attitude was reaffirmed in the testimony of Haji Agus Salim while giving a seminar at Cornell University on March 4, 1953. According to Salim's statement quoted by Multazam, Sheikh Ahmad Khatib views that the resistance to colonialism is part of *jihād fi sabilillah* that must be carried out by Muslims (Multazam, 2019). His students then took the idea home and played a significant role in the nationalist movement, both through armed struggle and through education, organization, and renewal discourse. Despite his permanent residence in the Hijaz, Sheikh Ahmad Khatib's intellectual and emotional relationship with Minangkabau and the archipelago was maintained through intensive meetings with pilgrims and students studying in Mecca (Samsudin & Muthmainah, 2021). Through this Hajj route, his thoughts and fatwas spread widely to various archipelago areas.

Sheikh Ahmad Khatib's anti-colonial thinking did not stop at oral transmission alone, but was also contained in his various writings. As Yuda noted, these writings provided a theological basis for the rise of the political consciousness of Muslims and even influenced the decision of Haji Agus Salim to relinquish the position of Dutch consul in order to fight for independence (Yuda & Aprison, 2025). When the colonial government tried to weaken Sarekat Islam, Sheikh Ahmad Khatib wrote a counter-work that actually strengthened the spirit of the people's struggle. His literacy excellence shows how the role of scholars in Haramain is not only limited to the reproduction of religious texts, but also builds a religious narrative that is political and emancipatory in nature (Riddell, 2001).

On the other hand, the role of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib in the renewal of Islamic thought is also evident in his efforts to build a scientific network involving students and pilgrims from various regions of the archipelago. Azyumardi Azra stated that Sheikh Ahmad Khatib used his authority as the imam and mufti of the Shafi'i school in the Grand Mosque to encourage reform in religious practice, especially related to the purification of teachings and the regulation of Hajj rituals (Azra, 2013). Jasmi added that Sheikh Ahmad Khatib also rejected the attitude of *madhhab* fanaticism (*ta'assub*) and invited the ummah to return to the Qur'an and Sunnah as the main source of Islamic teachings. This epistemological approach became the basis for the birth of the Islamic modernism movement in Indonesia which developed through figures such as Ahmad Dahlan and Hasyim Asy'ari (Aljunied, 2019).

In the context of the internal debate of Muslims, Sheikh Ahmad Khatib is also actively involved in criticism of local religious practices that are considered not in accordance with sharia principles. Bruinessen noted that through his treatise and fatwa, he opposed the traditional Minangkabau practice based on matrilineal inheritance and launched a criticism of the teachings of certain institutes such as Naqsyabandiyah, which he considered to contain theological deviations (Bruinessen, 1995). He has a different view of the inheritance system imposed in the Minangkabau tribe (Sahid, 2018). His views were then brought back by pilgrims to the archipelago and sparked an important debate between traditionalists and reformists. This criticism shows its central role in shaping a new orthodoxy in the Muslim community of the islands.

Snouck Hurgronje in his colonial records stated that Shaykh Ahmad Khatib's contribution was also seen in the teaching of rational sciences such as *falak*, *hisab*, and arithmetic, which then improved the accuracy of determining the direction of the qibla, prayer times, and the implementation of other worship in the archipelago (Hurgronje & Monahan, 1931). According to Snouck, the magnitude of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib's influence can be seen from the birth of a generation of scholars who have puritan, scriptural, and modernist characteristics that would later be attached to large organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. Thus, the role of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib not only shaped religious discourse in Makkah, but also created an important foundation for the transformation of Islamic thought and movements in Indonesia in the 20th century.

Sheikh Ahmad Khatib's Contribution to the Dynamics and Practice of Hajj in the Archipelago

As a figure of Nusantara scholars who took part in the heart of Islamic civilization, Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi occupies a very strategic position in the intellectual and religious dynamics of Indonesian Muslims. His influence is not only reflected in his work as a scientific authority in Haramain, but also through his contribution in shaping the understanding and religious practices of pilgrims from the archipelago. A number of scholars affirm that his position as a prominent scholar in the Grand Mosque at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries made him a central figure in the process of transmitting knowledge, renewing religious thought, and reformulating the practice of the Hajj pilgrimage for Indonesian Muslims. His thoughts and work have become an important foundation that connects the Hijaz scientific tradition with the development of Islam in the archipelago.

Azra Azyumardi said that Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi contributed significantly and influenced religious thinking about the dynamics of understanding and practicing Hajj among Muslims in the Indonesian archipelago. He served as a central reformer in the Islamic center of Mecca in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He used his high authority as the Grand Imam of the Shafi'i school in the Grand Mosque to perfect and reform religious practices, especially those practiced or brought back by pilgrims from Southeast Asia (Azra, 2013).

The Influence of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib on the Dynamics and Practice of Hajj in the Archipelago

Bruinessen stated that the influence of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib on the Indonesian hajj was based on his emphasis on the purification of fiqh practices and criticism of traditions that were not rooted in pure sharia. Although he served as the Imam of the Shafi'i School, he opposed *ta'assub* (blind fanaticism) against one school and instead encouraged scholars and pilgrims to return to the Qur'an and Sunnah as the main source of law (Jasmi, 2013), thus opening the door to the spirit of *ijtihad* and renewal in the Hajj ritual. In addition, he was also active in issuing fatwas and treatises, such as Izhar Zaghlil al-Kadzibin, to correct local innovations and practices that were considered syncretic—especially those related to the rituals of the Naqshbandiyah Order brought from the Indonesian Archipelago to the Holy Land (Bruinessen, 1995).

In addition, Snouck Hurgronje stated that Sheikh Ahmad Khatib's contribution in educating Indonesian scholars has transformed the hajj pilgrimage into the main channel of transmission of reformist ideology, which goes beyond just a spiritual journey. His role as a teacher for K.H. Ahmad Dahlan (founder of Muhammadiyah) and K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari (founder of Nahdlatul Ulama) shows that his thinking became the ideological root of the two largest religious movements in Indonesia (Jasmi, 2013). Furthermore, Sheikh Ahmad Khatib's strong criticism of traditional practices and tarekat triggered polemics between Old and Young, which then spread widely, especially in Minangkabau. This polemic directly influenced the perspective of pilgrims on religious practices and gave rise to purification movements that sought to purify the Hajj from non-sharia elements (Snouck Hurgronje, 1931).

CONCLUSION

Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi is a central and transformative figure in the history of Indonesian hajj. His unique position as the first Nusantara scholar to be appointed as the Grand Imam of the Shafi'i School in the Grand Mosque (Mecca) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries gave him high authority to build a scientific network and reform religious practices brought home by pilgrims from Southeast Asia. He emphatically used fatwas and treatises to purify the practice of hajj fiqh, oppose madhhab fanaticism (*ta'assub*), and emphasize the importance of returning to the Qur'an and Sunnah as the primary source of law. In addition, he contributed through the transmission of rational knowledge such as Falak and Hisab, which increased the objectivity and accuracy of worship practices in the archipelago.

Sheikh Ahmad Khatib's contribution gave birth to a puritanical and modernist religious identity that is the hallmark of Indonesian scholars. His vocal criticism of traditionalist practices that were considered deviant including the matrilineal inheritance system and his rejection of the Naqshbandiyah Order triggered the polemic of the Old vs. Young that spread widely in the

archipelago. Most significantly, his contribution to the regeneration of scholars has transformed Hajj into the main channel of transmission of reformist ideology. He was a teacher to key figures who later founded two of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia: K.H. Ahmad Dahlan (founder of Muhammadiyah) and K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari (founder of Nahdlatul Ulama). Thus, his thought laid the ideological roots for the Islamic reform movements that were essential for the national struggle and intellectual development in Indonesia.

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