

NAHDLATUL ULAMA SCHOLAR IN MANDAILING LAND: A Biography of Shaykh Ali Hasan Ahmad ad-Dary

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Abstract: Nahdlatul Ulama Scholar in Mandailing Land: A Biography of Shaykh Ali Hasan Ahmad ad-Dary. This study examines the biography and movements of Shaykh Ali Hasan Ahmad ad-Dary, popularly known as Tuan Hasan. This study is important because the study conducted by researchers thus far has portrayed the figure of the ulama from Mandailing as a split-minded person because their studies are too specific. This study shows that Shaykh Ali Hasan is an ulama affiliated with the Nahdlatul Ulama organization and an expert in many fields of Islamic sciences. Up to the present time, studies of Shaykh Ali Hasan exclusively focus on his ideas in the realm of hadith and sufism. This study is the result of a literature study where data is obtained from document review activities. Shaykh Ali Hasan's works and a number of research findings and important studies are used as references to be analyzed by the content analysis method. This study shows that he presents a distinctive figure in the field of Islamic sciences and is active in the world of movement in the archipelago. It is this double faceted roles that makes him different from most scholars who are less active in the world of movement. This study is expected to become the main reference in Islamic studies in Mandailing.

Keywords: NU, Mandailingnese, ulama, hadith, sufism, Islamic law

Introduction

Islamic studies outside of Java have indeed been done by many experts who pursue Islamic studies in Indonesia. However, many dimensions of Islam in some parts of Indonesia have not been touched significantly and thus many local leaders have not been introduced to the international community. Indeed, several figures in Indonesia have been widely known, two of whom are KH. Hasyim Asy'ari¹ and KH. Ahmad Dahlan² who founded Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah respectively.

In the context of North Sumatra, the biographies of several figures have been written, including Shaykh Mustafa Husein,³ Shaykh Kadirun Yahya,⁴ Shaykh Abdul Wahab Rokan,⁵ Shaykh Abdul Halim Hasan⁶ and Shaykh Hasan Maksum.⁷ However, a number of other local ulamas are still neglected, and even if they have been studied, they have not been treated in depth and by no means exhaustive. One of such less studied ulamas is Shaykh Ali Hasan Ahmad ad-Dary of Mandailing, North Sumatra, Indonesia.

This study examines the biography and movements of Shaykh Ali Hasan Ahmad ad-Dary, an NU ulama in Mandailing, North Sumatra. In particular, this study will reveal intellectual biographies and movements in the fields of religion, education and politics. He is one of the important figures in the archipelago, especially in North Sumatra. In addition to spending his youth in Haramain, in his homeland he developed Islamic studies by publishing dozens of works, establishing a number of Islamic educational institutions, and even involving himself in practical politics. He is a scholar who is proficient in combining two fields that are often disputed, namely between academic and politic. Several studies have been carried out regarding this figure, but the existing studies have not demonstrated the universality of science and its movements, because they only examine the

role of these figures in the fields of education, hadith and *tarekat*.⁸

In reviewing the focus of the problem, the data of this study was obtained from document review. The primary source in this study is the works produced by Shaykh Ali Hasan Ahmad ad-Dary. The secondary sources are written papers produced by researchers who have previously studied this figure. The data obtained was analyzed by the content analysis method. This study is expected to become the complement to the studies that have been carried out before, and enrich the reference made available in foreign language related to Islam in Mandailing.

His Genealogy and Life

Shaykh Ali Hasan Ahmad ad-Dary was the son of Shaykh Ahmad Zein bin Siak Mudo Hasibuan and Siti Amas Nasution bint Jamompang. His father was a Tuan Guru from Pintu Padang Julu, and in 1846 he migrated to study religion to a number of scholars, until finally continuing his studies to Mecca and studying with Shaykh Abdul Qadir Sabir al-Mandili and Shaykh Abdul Jabbar.⁹ His mother, Siti Amas, was the second wife of Shaykh Ahmad Zein, a woman originally from the village of Lumban Dolok. From her, Shaykh Ahmad Zein was blessed with two children, Ali Hasan Ahmad and Jalaluddin Sayuti Hasibuan.

Shaykh Ali Hasan was born in Pintu Padang Julu on February 9, 1915 corresponding with 24th of Rabiul Awwal 1333 according to Islamic calendar. He was raised by his mother for four years, then his father and mother divorced. Finally, he was raised by his mother in Lumban Dolok, and here he began to get a religious education where he learned the basics of the Qur'an. From the family lineage, Ali Hasan is a descendant of ulama,

where his father, Syeikh Ahmad Zein studied under a number of scholars in Mecca such as Shaykh Abu Bakar Tambusai, Shaykh Mukhtar Bogor, and Shaykh ‘Umar Sumbawa.¹⁰

Upon his return from Mecca, Shaykh Ali Hasan married Syarifah Nasution bint Shaykh Muhammad Nur in 1938. In 1941, his wife died and they had been blessed with one child named Faizah Hasibuan. Later, he was remarried to Malianur Nasution binti H. Abdullah. Upon a divorce from his second wife, he married Ramlah binti Abdul Latif Hasibuan and they were blessed with five children, namely Fauziah, Salmawati, Ramadhan, Mahfuz Budi and Masykur. Shaykh Ali Hasan passed away on June 26, 1998 in Medan, aged 83.

Education: From Mandailing to Haramain

Since his childhood, Ali Hasan had began studying in Lumbak Dolok, Siabu District, now part of Mandailing Natal District, North Sumatra, Indonesia. He studied under Haji Muhammad Kasim and Haji Hussein. He also got the basics of religion in Islamic schools around Padangsidempuan Grand Mosque, and obtained the basics of general knowledge at the Public School in Siabu. Then, he studied the religious sciences in the Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School which was founded by Shaykh Mustafa Husein.¹¹

In the residency of Tapanuli at the time, the Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School was known as a boarding school which had given birth to many prominent scholars in North Sumatra. The founder, Shaykh Mustafa Husein is an ulama affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama who obtained the religious sciences in Mecca where he studied to a number of important scholars such as Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Mandili and Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Mandiling, both of whom were teachers of Shaykh Hasan Maksum.

In this pesantren, he studied with Shaykh Abdul Halim Khatib, commonly known as *Tuan Naposo*. While at the pesantren, he mastered Arabic well which later became the provision for Ali Hasan to study in Mecca. In addition to Arabic, he studied Islamic law (shariah), Islamic theology, sufism, and history by examining the religious classical text book which is well known in the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah* school, among which is *Safinah al-Najâh*, *Riyâdh al-Badî'ah*, *Sullam al-Taufiq*, *Qathr al-Ghairs*, *Tijân al-Durârî* and *Kifâyah al-'Awâm*.¹²

After completing his studies at Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School, Ali Hasan decided to continue his studies in Mecca at the age of 13. In addition to Mecca as a scientific center in the Islamic world, several Ali Hasan teachers such as Shaykh Mustafa Husein and Shaykh Abdul Halim Khatib had studied there. Of course, the teacher's educational background also became a separate note for him to later follow in the footsteps of his teachers to continue their education to Mecca and study with prominent scholars there. In 1927, he left for Mecca and after arriving there he stayed at the house of Shaykh Syafiah Rawa in the Masjid al-Haram area. Then, he moved to Shaykh 'Abdullah 'Ali al-Mandili's house, and for a long time he studied at the Sholatiya Madrasa. Some North Sumatra scholars have studied at these Islamic educational institutions such as Tuan Abdullah Kayu Laut, Ismail Banda (founder of Al Washliyah¹³) and Hamdan Abbas (once the Chairperson of the North Sumatra MUI). He also lived in house of 'Abdul Rahmat al-Mandili.¹⁴ While still studying at the Qismul 'Aly level at the Sholatiya Madrasah, Ali Hasan decided to move to Dâr al-'Ulûm Madrasa. This madrasa was led by Sayyid Muhsin al-Musawa from Palembang and Shaykh Zubeir Ismail from Perak.¹⁵

While studying in Mecca, Ali Hasan studied with a number of scholars in various fields. He studied with Shaykh Mukhtar

Bogor to study the books of *Bujairimi* and *Riyâdh al-Shâlihîn*. He studied fiqh under Shaykh Ja'far Banjar, Shaykh Muhammad Fathani, Shaykh Mahmud Bukhari, Shaykh Tajuddin Ridwan, and Shaykh Abdul Jabbar. He studied Arabic with Shaykh Zaharuddin Asahan, Shaykh 'Abbas al-Maliki, Shaykh Ahmad Mahir, Shaykh Jamal al-Maliki, Sayyid' Alawi al-Maliki, Sayyid Amin al-Katbi, and Shaykh Thahir al-Mandili. In the field of jurisprudence, he examined *I'ânah al-Thâlibîn* and *Bidâyah al-Mujtahid*. He also studied Islamic history with Shaykh Ahmad al-'Araby and he examined *Itmâm al-Wafâ'*. Then, Ali Hasan pursued the hadith study and hadith knowledge, where he studied with Shaykh Ahmad Harosani, Shaykh 'Umar Hamdan al-Mahrasy, Shaykh Husein 'Abd al-Ghani, Shaykh Janan Thaib Minangkabau, Shaykh Hamid al-Faqih al-Mishri, Shaykh Hasan Muhammad al-Masyath, Shaykh Abu Samh, Shaykh Ahmad Turkey, Shaykh 'Abd al-Razaq 'Ali Hamzah al-Mishri, and Shaykh Ahmad Rowwas. In this field, for example, he studied several books such as *Jâmi 'al-Tirmidzi*, *Bulûgh al-Marâm*, *Shahîh al-Bukhârî* and *Shahîh Muslim*.

Ali Hasan also often visited the religious classical textbook study group and circles in the houses of scholars in Mecca. For example, he studied under Syekh Sulaiman Ambon, Shaykh Abu Bakar Siregar, Shaykh Abdul Hamid, Shaykh Zaharuddin Asahan, Shaykh Abdullah bin Nuh, Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Mandili, Shaykh 'Umar Bajuneid, Shaykh Khalifah and Shaykh Husein 'Abd al-Ghani. Among the books discussed are *Taqrib al-Maqshud*, *al-Hisab*, *Tafsîr Jalâlain*, *Syarh al-Hikam*, and *Tsamarah al-Wasilah*. To the ulama, the learned Islamic scientific community, he studied the fields of theology, jurisprudence and ushul fiqh, *qawâ'id fiqhiyah*, Islamic astronomy, logic, Quranic exegesis, Arabic (*nahw* and *sharf*), hadith and prophetic tradition criticism, and sufism. The vastness of the subjects he learned from prominent ulama in Mecca was finally able to deliver Ali Hasan to become

a scholar who was recognized for his expertise and breadth of knowledge. Later, when he became a teacher and lecturer in Islamic sciences in Mandailing land, he presented himself as an educator who was profound and knowledgeable, and the works produced were not focused on certain disciplines, but in almost all Islamic sciences. This shows that Ali Hasan dismissed the idea of specialization of science in the field of religion, because scholars are considered to have mastered all Islamic disciplines.

Academic Works

Shaykh Ali Hasan invested his early life studying Islamic sciences for ten years. He studied and mastered many religious classical textbooks in Sunni schools tradition, especially the Shafi'iyah school in the field of Jurisprudence and Ash'ariyah in the field of theology. He mastered the field of theology, Islamic law, Quranic exegesis, hadith, history, and the science of hadith. Shaykh Ali Hasan's expertise was evident from the works he produced when he dedicated himself in his hometown.

During the span of his lifetime as ulama, Shaykh Ali Hasan wrote 10 books in the field of jurisprudence, 4 books in the field of interpretation, 2 books in the field of Arabic, 2 books in the field of morality, 6 books in the field of Sufism, and 13 books in the field of hadith. In the field of Islamic fiqh and legal theory, his *ouvre* include *Arkân al-Islâm*, *Bunga Deposito dalam Islam*, *Problematika dalam Islam*, *Cahaya Kubur*, *Permasalahan Tabungan Susu dalam Fiqih Islam*, *Seluk Beluk Puasa*, *Bingkisan*, *Tadjud Ahlussunnah Waljamaah*, *Kaedah Hukum Fikih*, and *Amtsilah Kulli Mas'alah 'ala al-Tuhfah al-Tsaniyah*.

In the field of Quranic studies and Quranic exegese Shaykh Ali Hasan wrote *Perbendaharaan Ilmu Tafsir*, *Tafsir Mutiara*

Alquran, al-Kaukab al-Munir, and Fiqh al-Qur'an. In the field of Arabic languages include *Metodik Khusus Bahasa Arab* and *al-Muhâdatsah al-'Asriyyah.* In the field of Islamic theology and ethics include *Arkân al-Îmân* and *Makârim al-Akhlâq.* In the field of sufism he wrote *Tuntunan Berzikir, Do'a Syurga, al-Hizb al-Mustafawy, Kaifiyyah Membaca Surah Yasin 41, Kaifiyah Yasin 7, and Thariqah Khidhr 'Alaih al-Salam.* In the field of hadis and the science of hadis, he wrote *Ilmu Hadis Praktis, al-Ikmâl fi Marâtib al-Rijâl, al-Fawâ'id al-Mihâm fi Ahâdits al-Ahkâm min Bulûgh al-Marâm, Bughyah al-Thalabah fi Tarâjim Muhadditsi al-Shahabah, Namâdhidh al-Kutub al-Sittah, 20 Hadith volume 1, 20 Hadith volume 2, Ahâdits al-Fiqhiyah Qism al-Mu'âmalât, Ahâdits Fiqhiyah Qism al-Munâkahât, Ahâdits al-Ahkâm: Qism al-Zakah wa al-Sawm wa al-Hajj, Ahâdits al-Ahkâm: Qism al-Jinâyât wa al-Hudûd, Ahâdits al-Ahkâm: Qism al-Mawârist wa al-Washâyâ, and Hadits-hadits Hukum Bahagian Mu'amalat.* In addition to the above mentioned works Shaykh Ali Hasan also produce a number of articles most of which were published by Mahfuz Budi in Padangsidempuan while some others by Bandung and even Malaysian publishers. Researches by many a famous writers unveil that Shaykh Ali Hasan left us 44 books in various field of Islamic studies.

His Academic Dimension and Socio-Political Movement

From the life of Shaykh Ali Hasan, it was seen that he was a scholar who dedicated himself in the fields of education, government bureaucracy, even politics. It can be concluded that he was a scholar-educator, ulama-bureaucrat, and political-ulama. From the first aspect, he was a ulama who considered the importance of education in the midst of the problem of the younger generation of religious education in Indonesia. After returning from Mecca, he dedicated himself as a teacher at

Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School in 1938. Three years later, he returned to Huta Baringin (Siabu, Madina), and founded the mosque and Madrasa Ma'had Ishlahiddin where he taught until 1950, until finally he moved to Medan. In 1960, he and ulama leaders in Padangsidempuan initiated the establishment of an Islamic College in Padangsidempuan, and he was trusted as its first leader. However, this college did not last long, and finally closed.

In 1962, Shaykh Ali Hasan initiated the establishment of the Nahdlatul Ulama College Foundation (PERTINU). The campus opened the Sharia Faculty (1962), Tarbiyah Faculty (1963) and the Ushuluddin Faculty (1965). Then, the status of the campus was changed to Nahdlatul Ulama University of North Sumatra (UNUSU), and he was elected as the first Chancellor. For his services, the UNUSU Tarbiyah Faculty became the Imam Bonjol Padang IAIN Branch and he was chosen as its first leader (1968-1973). He succeeded in initiating the transfer of the campus status from private into state-owned. Then, the Ushuluddin Faculty of UNUSU changed its status to the Imam Bonjol Branch of the Ushuluddin Faculty. Later, in 1973, the two faculties became the embryo of the establishment of State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Sumatera Utara in Medan which is now State Islamic University (UIN) Sumatera Utara Medan. It could be said that Shaykh Ali Hasan contributed greatly to the advancement of Islamic education in North Sumatra. It is not wrong if the government gave the professor a glass to him in the field of Hadith in 1976, given his role in the development of hadith in the archipelago, and his services in developing Islamic education in North Sumatra.

In the realm of bureaucracy, in 1950, Shaykh Ali Hasan was appointed as a civil servant at the Sharia Court of East Sumatra (now North Sumatra). This position was accepted at

the encouragement of a number of figures such as Abdurrahman Syihab,¹⁶ Ali Hanafiah Lubis and Mangaraja Ihutan Lubis. Then, he served as the Head of Mosque Section at the Office of Religious Affairs in Deli Serdang Regency until 1954. Therefore, since 1950 he had moved to Medan, and finally returned to Padangsidempuan to assume the role of Head of the Office of Religious Affairs in South Tapanuli Regency, and then develop Nahdlatul Ulama.

As an ulama, Shaykh Ali Hasan was not ignorant of the socio-political changes that occurred in Indonesia. While in Mecca, he was active in socio-religious organizations by managing the Mecca branch of Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah with Isma'il Banda.¹⁷ He even became a member of the Committee Demanding Indonesian Independence. After returning to Padangsidempuan, he also co-founded the Al Ittihadiyah Islamiyah Indonesia led by Shaykh Mustafa Husein. Like his teacher, he prefers to join the Nahdlatul Ulama. He was trusted as the Chairperson of the Panyabungan Branch NU (1947-1950). At the time NU was still joining the Masyumi Party, he was trusted as the Chairperson of the Panyabungan branch of the Masyumi.

Then, Shaykh Ali Hasan continued to dedicate himself in developing NU in North Sumatra, even in Indonesia, by serving as Deputy Consul of NU for South Tapanuli, Chairperson of NU for Medan, Naib Rois Syuriah of NU for South Tapanuli (1955-1981), Rois Syuriah of NU for South Tapanuli (1981-1982), Rois Syuriah of NU for North Sumatra (1984-1985), Mustasyar of NU for North Sumatra (1984-1985) and Mustasyar of PBNU (1989-1994). He has also been a member of the NU Khittah section of the NU Ulama Conference in Situbondo (1983), Ahlul Halli Wal 'Aqdi at the NU Conference in Situbondo (1984), and A'wan Syuriah of PBNU (1984-1989). Thus, Shaykh Ali Hasan is an NU ulama who is recognized not only in

North Sumatra, but also in Indonesia. When NU changed from a social organization to a political party, Shaykh Ali Hasan had become a member of NU, so of course he has since become a NU politician until finally NU became a social organization.

Conclusion

Based on the above study, at least three things become evident. First, Syaikh Ali Hasan Ahmad ad-Dary is a type of heredity ulama where he is the son of a Mandailing scholar who studied in Mecca. He even studied with Mecca ulama in various fields of Islamic knowledge, that he consequently followed in the footsteps of his teachers in Mandailing who had spent a lot of time studying religion in Mecca. Second, his uniqueness reflects in his stand of rejecting specialization in science in the field of religious knowledge. During the span of his life, he studied various Islamic disciplines by referring to various classical textbooks or what is popularly known as *kitab kuning* in the Sunni tradition. Accordingly, when he became a teacher, he produced many works in different disciplines, especially in the scope of theology, Islamic law, Qur'anic exegeses and Prophetic tradition or hadith, Sufism and morality. Third, he is a type of ulama who not only engages in education and science, but also in the socio-political field. At this junction, it is not an exaggeration to label him as a political scholar, since he is well-versed and expert in many fields, and at the same time he is not ignorant of socio-political development in Indonesia.

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¹²Salmawati and Mahfuz, *Syeikh Ali Hasan Ahmad*, p. 4.

¹³See Ja'far, *Tradisi Intelektual Al Washliyah: Biografi Ulama Kharismatik dan Tradisi Keulamaan* (Medan: Perdana Publishing, 2015).

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 5; Basyral Hamidy Harahap, *Madina yang Madani* (Panyabungan: Pemda Kabupaten Madina, 2004), p. 302.

¹⁵Salmawati and Mahfuz, *Syeikh Ali Hasan Ahmad*, p. 5.

¹⁶See Ja'far, *Biografi Ketua Umum Pengurus Besar Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah 1930-2015* (Medan: Perdana Publishing, 2015).

¹⁷In East Sumatra, some Islamic organization founded by local ulamas, such as Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah in 1930 and Al Ittihadiyah in 1935. For more information, see Ja'far (ed.), *Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah: Potret Histori, Edukasi dan Filosofi* (Medan: Perdana Publishing, 2011); Ja'far, *Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah: Cita-cita Keislaman dan Keindonesiaan* (Banda Aceh: PeNA, 2018); and Dja'far Siddik and Ja'far, *Al-Ittihadiyah: Delapan Dasawarsa Menerangi Nusantara* (Medan: Perdana Publishing, 2017).