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## Esoteric Symbolism of The Letter Alif in Sosrokartono's Calligraphy and al-Jilli's Insan Kamil Concept

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the symbolic meaning of the letter Alif and the esotericism teaching in it, as reflected in Sosrokartono's calligraphy and Insan al-Kamil's concept of Al-Jilli. The purpose of this study is to present the philosophical similarities and differences between the Middle Eastern Sufis and the Indonesian Sufis, which are found in different mediums. The study used library research and hermeneutical approach. The data were analysed using text interpretation from Jorge Garcia and esoteric symbolism from Ferdinand de Saussure. The findings of this study include: first, the letter Alif in the calligraphy holds the meaning of philosophical sufism that aligns with the concept of Insan Al-Kamil by Abdul Karim Al-Jilli. Second, the letter Alif for both Sosrokartono and Al-Jilli holds three dimensional meanings; oneness, strength, and wisdom. This research enriches the repertoire of philosophical Sufism by presenting the meaning of material objects in the form of calligraphy art.

**Keywords:** Alif, Al-Jilli, Sosrokartono, Calligraphy, Insan al-Kamil

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mengkaji makna simbolik huruf Alif dan ajaran esoterisme yang terkandung di dalamnya, sebagaimana terdapat dalam karya kaligrafi Sosrokartono dan konsep Insan al-Kamil dari Al-Jilli. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengungkap aspek persamaan dan perbedaan filosofis kaum sufi Timur Tengah dan Nusantara, yang tertuang dalam medium berbeda. Jenis penelitian adalah penelitian Pustaka. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah pendekatan hermeneutis. Data dianalisa menggunakan teori interpretasi teks dari Jorge Gracia dan simbolisme-esoterisme dari Ferdinand de Saussure. Penelitian ini menemukan; pertama, huruf Alif dalam kaligrafi menyimpan makna sufistik-falsafi yang mempertemukan gagasannya dengan konsepsi Insan-Al-Kamil dari Abdul Karim Al-Jilli. Kedua, Alif bagi Sosrokartono dan Al-Jilli mengandung tiga dimensi makna; keesaan,

kekuatan, dan kema'rifatan. Penelitian ini turut memperkaya khazanah tasawuf falsafi dengan menghadirkan tafsir atas objek material berupa seni kaligrafi.

**Kata kunci:** Alif, Al-Jilli, Sosrokartono, Kaligrafi, Insan al-Kamil.

## Introduction

The debate around classical concepts and metaphors as a developed, decorative rhetoric, and as an individual-linguistic unit, which can be studied separately from the text, context and world of literary works, has grown rapidly. This debate also challenges the overly extreme postmodern reductive view of language, which perceives metaphor as an instrument of self-avoidance, suppression and distortion of truth. Postmodernism views metaphor as a linguistic configuration that can change, expand, twist and describe language to explain the aspects of ontological, heuristic and human's cognitive function. Alia Sohail Khan argues that metaphor in literature contains serious topics discussing the relationship between language and life. A.S. Khan exemplifies the metaphor of the letter Alif in Sufistic discourse, which contains a deep meaning. The discourse on Alif letter is enfolded in a poem by a Punjabi Sufi poet, Bulleh Shah Sahib. In this poem, the letter Alif acts as a metaphor that receives additional symbolic meaning and other extralinguistic realities. This symbolic meaning and extra-linguistic reality contradicts the meaning of Alif as a letter in both Persian and Arabic alphabets (Khan 2012, 55-75).

In the local Islamic tradition, Java in particular, the esotericism Alif has already been developed. One of the development is done by an ancient manuscript (manuscript), entitled Bayan al-Alif. This manuscript is the latest collection of the National Library of Indonesia, Jakarta with collection number NB 228 I, written on a specific paper called *Dluwang*. This manuscript is a single manuscript and was reviewed in 2009 with the number Tas/03/PNRI/2009. This Arabic manuscript explains the

philosophical meaning of the letter Alif in Sufistic studies including the Tajalli concept behind the letter Alif and the literal meaning found in the lafadz Allah (Fadlan 2012, 8). This study on Bayan al-Alif was also carried out by Ali Muhdi, adding new information that the author of the Bayan Al-Alif manuscript was Sheikh Kasan Tafsir, Krapyak Lor, Yogyakarta. The meaning of Alif in Bayan al-Alif's description discusses the concept of monotheism and tajalli (Muhdi 2019, 16-17).

The Alif letter itself, in addition to the Hijaiyah letter, is also referred to as the Muqaththa'ah letter in the study of the Koran. As a Muqaththa'ah letter, the Alif letter is the letter that is repeated the most compared to other muqaththa'ah letters, so that *the mufassir* of the Koran call it a mysterious letter (Rohman 2017, 25-43). However, in the case of the sermon text of Ali bin Abi Talib's friend, there was not a single letter of Alif, according to linguists, as a form of beauty in speech. The beauty of the sermon without Alif can be seen from the theories of *Jinas*, Poetry, and *Iqtibas*, as well as the beauty of meaning in the form of *Thibaq* and *Muqabalah* (Ningtyas 2016, 6-7).

Unlike Raden Mas Panji Sosrokartono, the older brother of R.A Kartini, who introduced the meaning of the letter Alif through a work of calligraphy, Alif Sostrokartono introduced the letters that cannot be separated from his intellectual capacity, as a scientist who masters 25 world languages and 10 regional languages of Indonesia. Alif Sostrokartono's letters are the embodiment of his thoughts, which contain many teachings of moral philosophy. Two national figures, Soekarno and Tan Malaka, admitted that they had learned many things from Sosrokartono. The core of Sosrokartono's moral teaching is the harmonious relationship between humans and God, as well as humans and God's creatures. A virtuous human is the one who always fulfills his obligations, namely to love, to be devoted, and to serve God.

The forms of love and devotion of humans to the God are carried out in the form of love, help, and serve those fellow human beings who are in need (*leladi mring sesami*). This valuable moral teaching was consistently practiced by Sosrokartono himself. He believed that every human being in his spiritual relationship to God must be in line with their relationship for fellow humans and the environment. This can be seen in the teachings that emphasize the obligation to love and serve God through the behavior of *leladi mring sesami* as the basis of all actions. Then, other main ethics, seen in the teachings of the ideal human figure which is reflected in the conception of *alif* and has great benefits for others which is reflected in the symbol of the title of Sosrokartono's name, namely *Mandor Klungsu* and *Djoko Pring*.

Meanwhile, ethical theology lies in setting the goal of every behavior, namely the realization of inner peace and the completion of living a perfect life . There are several main teachings of Sosrokartono, the first is *Ngawulo Marang Kawulane Gusti* (Serving God by serving His creatures). This principle is Sosrokartono's vision of life (*ancasing gesang*). Sosrokartono's second teaching is *Catur Murti*. This second teaching of Sosrokartono includes the union of the four main symptoms of the soul in the form of thoughts, feelings, words and deeds. He adheres to this principle in carrying out social activities and humanitarian work. Third, *sugih tanpo bondo* (affluent without means), the principle of "sugih tanpo bondo" for Sosrokartono is rich in the heart, or specifically rich in knowledge and character. Fourth, *Nglurug Tanpo Bala*, this principle can be interpreted as fighting without relying on the help of others. In other words, *ngelurug without bolo* refers to being independent; dare to bear the heavy burden and bitterness of life alone.

Sosrokartono's concept of life is in line with the concept of *Insan Kamil*, one of the teachings of *Abdl Karim al-Jilli's* philosophical Sufism. Philosophical Sufism is considered by some scholars as a deviation from

the Koran and hadith, because there is the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*, which is the basis of the insan kamil (perfect human) theory. The climax of the Insan Kamil theory is the one that was initiated by Abd al-Karim al-Jili. Abd Al-Karim Al-Jilli in *al-Insan al-Kamil fi Ma'rifah al-Awail wa al-Awakhir* provided new ideas based on Sufistic-oriented traditions. Al-Jili's way of responding to the criticism of the scholars who opposed philosophical Sufism was to record and use the Prophet's hadith as the basis for building the concept of Insan Kamil. In general, the hadiths that he used were valid in terms of the hadith methodology as they were all accepted by the hadith scholars, only a few of them used the Sufi hadith methodology which is not accepted in the scientific methodology of hadith, such as the narrative method through dreams and *mukasyafah*. Al-Jili built the concept of insan kamil based on the most basic teachings of Islam, namely the pillars of Islam, the pillars of faith, and the teachings of spiritual ethics as a process to reach the level of insan kamil. Al-Jili adds spiritual meaning to the various ritual acts he performs. Therefore, al-Jili combines both spiritual and physical dimensions of worship (Danarta 2021: 161-184).

This paper is a literature study, using a hermeneutical approach. The theory used in this paper is the text interpretation theory from Jorge Gracia. Meanwhile, to understand the meaning, this paper uses Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of symbolism-esotericism. Thus, the meaning content in Sosrokartono's calligraphy can be found to be relevant to the concept of Insan Kamil from Al-Jilli.

### **Jorge Gracia's Text Interpretation**

According to Jorge Gracia, the text (verbal/literary language) contains six elements: entity, sign, specific meaning, intention, selection and context. Entity: the parts that make up the text. Sign: signs in the text. Specific meaning: special meaning. Intention: What is meant by the speaker/writer. Selection: The choice of words. Context: relation with object.

Still according to Gracia, that interpretation as a text consists of texts that are interpreted as 'interpretandum', additional information 'interpretans' and mufassir. However, it should be realized that the additional comments from the mufassirs are not interpretations, but a combination of the interpreted text and the additional text called interpretation. While the interaction of reading by the reader to the interpretation which results in an understanding of the meaning of the text is called understanding.

Gracia emphasized the function of interpretation, especially on the historical and meaning function. For historical function, he focused on the principle of proportional understanding. While the function of meaning, he put emphasis on the cultural function of the text rather than the linguistic function (Gracia 1995, 147).

The relevance of the idea in the study of the meaning of the manuscript methodology is; first, the nature of the text as an interpretandum confirms that the understanding of the text cannot be separated from the use of grammatical meaning at that time, so that it is appropriate for a comparative study of the second manuscript; the principle of proportional understanding that it offers can also be considered as a methodology for understanding the historical meaning of the text; third, the cultural function of the text provides a new reference in interpreting the two manuscripts of different ages. Therefore, the study of the term Ma'rifat Alif is based entirely on the understanding and interpretation of the texts from the works of Sosrokartono and Abdul Karim Al-Jilli.

### **Ferdinand de Saussure's Esoteric Symbolism**

While the theory of esoteric symbolism in its actual form is part of the slice of cultural products and is a symbolic phenomenon. Symbols are part of the practice of signs. What is called this sign when referring to Ferdinand de Saussure's opinion (1974), consists of two main elements: the signifier and the signified. The signifier, an element that marks something,

while the signified is the content/meaning that is being marked. The signifier will therefore always refer to the signified and the signified itself then refers to reality (Piliang 2003, 158).

From the Saussurian perspective, it can be understood that esotericism is part of the theology, metaphysics and mysticism areas, which in the object of study the term *Ma'rifat Alif* is a symbolic phenomenon which contains meaning. The use of Alif symbolizes a signifier that reflects a certain meaning or content (signified). Of course the meaning contained in the symbolism of esotericism is built based on convention, in the sense that the meaning in the symbolism of esotericism is agreed upon by a particular community or group of people.

So in other words, in Saussure's system of signification, meaning in an esotericism is nothing but a social agreement among the community of language users (Culler 1976, 19). The meaning in these forms of esotericism does not have to be unidirectional, but there is a dialectic between social groups and other social groups, or between individuals and other individuals, in this case between Sosrokartono and Abdul Karim Al-Jilli. Some people, according to Saussure, are only users of signs that are already available, while some others have reinterpreted the meaning of symbols in a number of esotericisms so that each community can freely exchange signs, exchange meanings, and even ideology (Piliang 2003), 258).

In addition, the sign in this symbolic framework also has a function for communication. Symbols or signs are tools to convey messages. This message is the meaning of the symbol or sign. Umberto Eco also stated that a sign or symbol in the context of semiotic communication is placed in the communication chain, and therefore this symbol or sign is a vital element in communication activities and practices. For Eco, this sign interpretation of which Eco defines as semiosis: an infinite interpretation of signs or symbols (Piliang 2003, 267).

In terms of estoric symbolism as a manifestation of the application of this sign system, in Indonesian context, is manifested by the presence of various local symbolisms, such as *Pring*, *Lidi* or *Sapu Lidi* which, according to Sosrokartono, the shapes resemble Alif as a knowledge that is found through a collection of experiences and integrated with an understanding of culture and the natural state of a place (Padmanugraha 2010, 12).

## DISCUSSION

### Sosrokartono: an Overview

His full name is Drs. Raden Mas Panji Sosrokartono (10 April 1877 – 8 February 1952). He was an Indonesian war journalist, translator, teacher, and Indonesian mystic. As the son of R.M. Ario Sosrodingrat, R.M.P. Sosrokartono is the older brother of R.A. Kartini, who inspired Kartini to become a figure of women's emancipation. His intelligence has been recognized since childhood. After graduating from Europeesche Lagere School in Jepara, Sosrokartono continued his education at H.B.S. in Semarang.

Then in 1898, Sosrokartono continued his education to the Netherlands by entering the Leiden Technical School. However, as he felt the major was not suitable to his preference, he moved to the Department of Eastern Languages and Literature and graduated with a Doctorandus in de Oostersche Talen degree from Leiden University. He was the first Indonesian student to continue his education in the Netherlands.

Sosrokartono's father, R.M. Adipati Ario Sosroningrat, third son of R.M.A.A. Tjondronegoro IV, a Regent of Demak who is well-known for his progressive and open-minded character, especially with modern culture. Meanwhile, Sosrokartono's mother is M.A. Ngasirah, daughter of the couple K.H. Modirono and Mrs. Hj. Siti Aminah. Kiai Madirono is a cleric who leads an Islamic boarding school in Telukawur, Jepara as well as a copra trader in Mayong Market. Based on his family background, Sosrokartono had both noble and clerical blood.



Being a descendant of Tjondronegoro IV, R.M.A.A. Sosroningrat is considered lucky . With his position as the son of Tjondronegoro IV who was known to be a progressive thinker and an anti feudal, he was able to experience Dutch education. R.M.A.A. Sosroningrat married Ajeng Ngasirah in 1872. When they were married, Ajeng Ngasirah was only 14 years old. With his family background, Sosrokartono has grown up to be a noble figure who is not arrogant. In fact, the Sosrokartono family is known to be humble and virtuous.

As a son of a *prijayi*, Kartini said that her brother, Raden Mas Panji Sosrokartono had an adequate education; starting at Europeesche Lagere School in Jepara, Hogere Burger School in Semarang, RMP Sosrokartono is a smart and intelligent student at school, he is indeed a diligent person and loves to read. RMP Sosrokartono is also known as a humble and polite person in his school. While at HBS, RMP Sosrokartono already had a great interest and concern for languages, not only Dutch and German, but Chinese, Latin, Sanskrit, and others. However, he did not forget to learn Javanese literature and culture.

He then continued on to an Engineering school in Delft. Feeling unsuitable with the major, Kartono moved to the Department of Eastern Languages and Literature at Leiden University. Sosrokartono was the first generation of Indonesians to study in the Netherlands. Although he was the only student from Java, but his good command of the Dutch language and polite behavior, and a great interest in language and culture, had attracted the attention of the lecturers at the institution. In six months he was able to master Greek and Latin.

Thanks to his perseverance and sincerity, he successfully completed his studies of eastern languages and literature at Leiden University with *summa cum laude* predicate. He was then earned a title "Doctoranduss In de Oesterche Talen" from the Universitiet Leiden. On 29 August 1899, Sosrokartono was invited as one of the speakers at the 25th Nederlands

Taal-en Letterkundig Congres in Gent, Belgium. His speech entitled *Het Nederlandsch in Indie* or Dutch in the Dutch East Indies was a hard slap against imperialism.

Because of his ability, R.M.P. Sosrokartono has several professions and therefore he was nicknamed “The Genius of the East” and “De Javanese Prins.” One of his professions was a reporter for World War I, from the New York Herald Tribune daily in Vienna, Austria since 1917. In the book “Memoir” writings Mohammad Hatta, it was written that Sosrokartono earned a salary of USD 1250. Even to facilitate his movement during World War I, he was given the rank of Major by the United States War Commander. Another achievement, Sosrokartono is the first journalist in Indonesia who can photograph the crater of Mount Kawi from above, without using an airplane.

In world history, the official World War I peace agreement took place in the city of Versailles, France. While many journalists who sensed ‘secret peace agreement’ were still busy looking for information, the New York Herald Tribune had apparently succeeded in publishing the results of secret peace talks in the jungles of Champagne, Southern France that shocked America and Europe. The author is ‘anonymous’, using only the ‘Three Star’ identifier code. The code among journalists of World War I was known as the code of R.M.P. Sosrokartono (Adisasmita 1971, 17).

In ‘Memoir’, it was also written that R.M.P. Sosrokartono, who spoke Basque, became an interpreter for Allied troops when they passed through the Basque tribal area towards the end of World War I, secret peace negotiations were held between the warring parties. The Basques are one of the tribes that live in Spain. The negotiating parties board a train and stop in Compaigne forest in the South of France. Inside the train, the warring parties hold secret peace agreement. The soldiers around the negotiation site have been closely guarded and not everyone can enter the site, including journalists. No one was allowed to approach the negotiation

venue within 1 km. All results of secret peace negotiations may not be published due to an embargo until formal negotiations take place.

R.M.P. Sosrokartono was also a translator in Vienna (Austria), mastering 24 foreign languages and 10 regional languages in Indonesia. In 1919 the League of Nations was founded based on the initiative of United States President Woodrow Wilson. From 1919 to 1921, R.M.P. Sosrokartono became an Indonesian who was able to serve as the Chief translator for all languages used in the League of Nations. In fact, he managed to beat the polyglots (linguists) from Europe and America so that he won the position. The League of Nations changed its name to the United Nations Organization in 1921.

R.M.P. Sosrokartono was also known as a doctor, in the Netherlands he was popular as a White Water Doctor, because he could cure diseases only by using water as a medium. It is said that Sosrokartono heard the news about the illness of a 12-year-old child. The child was the son of an acquaintance who suffers from a serious illness, and despite being treated by several doctors, the illness did not disappear. With his strong empathy and a great desire to ease the suffering of others, at that very moment he visited his friend's son who was terminally ill.

Arriving at the location, Sosrokartono immediately put his hand on the boy's forehead and a miracle happened. Suddenly the sick boy began to get better in seconds, and that day he was healed. The incident astonished people who were there, including the doctors who had failed to cure the child's illness. After that, there was an expert in Psychiatry and Hypnose who explained that actually Drs. R.M.P. Sosrokartono has immense personal power of magnetism that he is not aware of.

Upon hearing this explanation, he finally reflected on himself and decided to leave his job Geneva and went to Paris to study Psychometrie and Psychotecniek at a college in that city. However, because he was a Language and Literature graduate, he was only accepted as a *toehoorder*

since the College was specifically accepted students who graduated from medical doctors (Furchan 2005, 12).

Sosrokartono was an activist and scholar. Sosrokartono also initiated the establishment of Indische Vereeniging in November 1908. Indische Vereeniging (Indies Association) was an Indonesian student organization (at that time the name was still Dutch East Indies) in the Netherlands. Sosrokartono and his friends founded this organization 7 months after he successfully completed his undergraduate studies. This organization was used to accommodate and meet Indonesian students (Dutch East Indies) who were studying in the Netherlands at that time. His name was also listed on the editorial board of the daily Bintang Timoer published in the Netherlands in 1903, led by Drs. Abdul Rivai.

Indische Vereeniging was established on November 15, 1908 by a number of Indonesian students, including: Sosrokartono, Hoesein Djajadiningrat, R.N Noto Soeroto, Notodiningrat, Sutan Kasyayangan Saripada, Sumitro Kolopaking, and Apituley. At the beginning, this organization used the Dutch name: Indische Vereeniging, then in 1922 the name was changed into Indonesische Vereeniging (Indonesian Association) and in 1925 its name was changed to Indonesian (Malay) to Perhimpoean Indonesia. One of the organizations collaborating as a partner in the Indische Vereeniging struggle was Budi Utomo. To Budi Utomo, Indische Vereeniging sent a book as an effort to contribute ideas for the struggle of the Indonesian people.

Then the following year, on February 3, 1925, the organization changed its name to “Perhimpoean Indonesia”. The use of Indonesian as the name of the organization showed that Indonesian students in the Netherlands were now stronger. During this period, Sosrokartono was also noted as one of the persons who helped the national movement towards Indonesian independence. Harry A. Poeze, recorded this saga. This is the content of the speech which has been translated into Indonesian:

*“Bangkitlah hai putra- putri Jawa. Serbulah bukit ilmu pengetahuan yang ada di depanmu. Sungguh jauh dari maksud saya untuk menjadikan kamu menjadi orang Belanda. Pertama- tama kamu harus menyadari bahwa kamu itu orang Jawa dan tetap orang Jawa. Kamu bisa saja menguasai kemajuan orang Eropa, tanpa mengorbankan kepribadianmu dan sifat- sifatmu (Poeze 2008, 67).*

“Arise, O sons and daughters of Java. Invade the hill of knowledge that is in front of you. It is far from my intention to make you Dutch. First of all you have to realize that you are Javanese and still Javanese. You can master European progress, without compromising your personality and your character (Poeze 2008, 67).

Until 1927 Sosrokartono decided to leave Taman Siswa and founded the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School. In this Padepokan or Islamic Boarding School, apart from guiding pilgrims to spiritual life, they also served health problems. At each treatment, Kartono usually gave the patient water and a piece of paper with the letters Alif (abbreviation for Allah) written on it.

On April 30, 1930 he began to conduct spiritual healing with water which was carried out at his residence on Jalan Pungkur Bandung (now Jl Dewi Sartika), which was then called Darus Salam (Place of Peace). The Javanese who seek treatment for him called him ‘Ndoro Sosro’, the Sundanese called him ‘Dokter Cai’ or Doctor Alif, the Dutch and the Indo-Dutch called him ‘Oom Sos’ and the medical community called him ‘Wonder Doctor’ (miracle doctor). He was not married, has no students and representatives.

On Friday Pahing, February 8, 1952 at the house Jl. Pungkur No. 19 Bandung, known as Dar-Oes-Salam, Drs. R.M.P. Sosrokartono passed away. President Soekarno ordered the AURI (Air Force of the Republic of

Indonesia) to bring the body of RMP Sosrokartono by military aircraft to Semarang. His body was then buried in the Sedhomukti family cemetery in Kudus.

Some of his writings include *Serat saking Tanjung Pura*, *Laku Lan Maknaipun*, hundreds of articles and news in the American newspaper *The New York Herald Tribune*, then the book *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi*. This real author of this book was actually ‘anonymous’, using the identifier code ‘Bintang Tiga’ or “Three Stars”, but his followers fully recognized that this is the work of Sosrokartono and others.

### **Abdul Karim Al-Jilli**

Abdul Karim Al-Jilli’s full name is Abdul Karim ibn Ibrahim ibn Abdul Karim ibn Khalifah ibn Ahmad ibn Mahmud al-Jili. He was born in Baghdad in early Muharram 782 AH (about 1355/1356 AD) and died in Zabid, northern Yemen. However, there is also another version which states that he died in 826 AH (1421/1422 AD). Al Jili was still a relative of Shaykh Abdul Qadir Al-Jilani. The name Jili or Jilani in his name contains two connotations. First, because he still has blood relations with the Arab tribe (the Rabi’ah), who live in Jilan (Kilan), a province within the Persian territory located south of the Caspian Sea. Second, because he was born in the Jil district in Baghdad (Fathurrahman 2008, 13-17).

Abdul Karim al-Jilli was considered by experts as an interpreter, the best one who can interpret Sheikh Muhyidin Ibn Arabi’s thoughts regarding the concept of al-Kamil’s human being which has a resemblance to Alif Sosrokartono’s concept of Alif. This was influenced by his teacher Syarafudin bin Ismail al-Jabarti, one of the followers of Ibn Arabi’s philosophical Sufism. Al-Jilli’s works have also provoked debate. Abdul Karim al-Jilli argues, humans have the potential to be true or superior and perfect by maximizing their *rubbiyah* or spiritual potential. To deliver this concept, Al-Jilli refers to the holy text of the Qur’an (Surah Al-Hijr:

29 and QS. Al-Thin: 4). In his perspective, humans are perfect creatures because they are physically created in a straight form resembling the alif letter, indicating that humans act as God's representative on earth. In addition, human perfection is affected by his spiritual potential. It is the combination of the body and the spirit that places human as a miniature of God on earth (Al-Jilli t.t., 77-78).

In 790 H Al-Jili was in Kusyi, India to deepen his Sufism. During this visit to India, Al-jili saw Ibn Arabi's philosophical mysticism and the sects such as the Syisytiyah (founded by Mu'in al-Din al-Shysyti, W. 623H in Central Asia), Suhrawardiyah (founded by Abu Najib al- Suhrawardi, W.563 H., in Baghdad), Naqsyabandiyah (founded by Baha al-Din al- Naqsyaband, W.791 H. in Bukhara) flourished. Before reaching India, he stopped in Persia and studied Persian. In Persia, he wrote his work *Jannat-u al-Ma'arif wa Ghayat-u Murid wa al-Ma'arif*.

At the end of 799 AH he visited Mecca in order to perform the pilgrimage, but on this occasion he also had time to exchange ideas with people there. This indicates that his love for science exceeds his love for other things. Four years later, in 803 H, al-Jili visited the city of Cairo. He studied at the University of al-Azhar, and met many theologians, philosophers, and Sufis. It was in this city that he finished writing his book entitled, *Ghunyah Arbab al-Sama' wa Kasyf al-Qina' an Wujud al-Istima*.

Al-Jilli's works include, *Al-Insan Al-Kamil Fi Ma'rifat-I 'L-Awakhir Wa 'L-Awa'il*, *Al-Durrah Al-'Ayniyah Fi L-Syawahid Al-Ghaybiyah*, *Al-Kahf Wa 'L-Raqim Fi Syarh Bi Ism-I 'L-Lah Al-Rahman Al-Rahim*, *Lawami Al-Barq*, *Maratib Al-Wujud*, *Al-Namus Al-Aqdam* and so on. Al-Jilli is very popular with the teachings and concepts of Sufism about al Insan al Kamil (Perfect Human). In al-Jilli's view, al-insan al-kamil are generally saints in Islam who have gone through 'soul contemplation' or *mujahadah nafs* so that the essence of Allah manifests in him. Although this kind of manifestation is not in its entirety, however, al-insan al-kamil

is the figure of the khalifat Allah fi al-ardl al-haqiqi (true caliph on earth). As Allah SWT has indicated in Surah al-Baqarah verse 30.

There is an interesting saga about the book *Insan Kamil* by Al-Jilli. Once was a faqih named Ibn Amir who was sick for a year and a half. He had tried various medications but to no avail. Until finally a fiqh expert came to visit him and brought the *Insan Kamil* book. The book is then burned to cook white bread. Strangely, Ibn Amir's illness was cured because of the medicine he made by using the two books for cooking the bread.

According to Al-Jilli, a person reaches his utmost spirituality if he has arrived at the state where he meets the spirits of the Rasuls (Islamic Prophets) which is crystallized in the characteristics of Prophet Muhammad SAW. It can be started by taking the virtues and wisdom of the prophets. Al-Jilli also felt the need to mention the wisdom of the Prophets Adam and Moses and Isa AS, to the saints and pious people, as a reflection of the picture of people who have reached *maqam al-Kamil* or *sariro tunggal*. The main core of Al-Jilli's teachings in formulating the concept of *Insan al-Kamil* is the term *Martabat al-Ghaib*, which is about human existence and the stages in its spiritual journey (Al-Jilli t.t., 58, 74-78).

There are several levels of enlightenment or mortal according to Al-Jilli. First, the mortal servant of himself, because of the presence of God. Second, the mortal servant of Allah, because of the presence of the secrets of *af-'al rububiyah*. Third, the mortal servant who depends on the attributes of God, because he has met the essence of God. When a salik has reached these three levels, then he will feel the presence of God in him, Al-Jilli calls him *Insan al-Kamil* or *ahlus sufi*, namely *wahdatul wujud* (Al-Jilli t.t., 38).



## Estoric Symbolism of the Letter Alif

A spiritual or religious experience begins with silence and a moment of great power. In William James' category, such a dazzling "God-drunk" state is immortalized with something solid—in semiotic terms called symbols—of the eternal and the unreachable—which is actually about something sublime. Or about the enchanting beauty. The experience may be the result of longing and love. It is a sign of longing and amazement. It was in this situation that R.M.P SosroKartono had "Alif", something that is also commonly experienced by other ascetics.

In the letter Alif, SosroKartono is present as an utmost situation, an unusual moment and a very sacred meaning. This made him very careful with Alif—in his calligraphy work. SosroKartono said that "installing Alif must be done with effort, it should not be hung up and then abandoned, like drying clothes". These words give an understanding that he does not want someone to install Alif carelessly, the person who is allowed to install Alif is a person who has already practiced, because Alif has a deep meaning for human life in the world (Ciptoprawiro 1986, 58).

When a person experiences the presence of something else, which is Numinous, as experienced by SosroKartono who made Alif a symbol, then unconsciously and consciously, he will also like things that are straight, for example, he likes *Pring* and *Lidi* (SosroKartono 1931).

In psychology, someone's preferences affect his behavior and thoughts. This is also an influencing factor in SosroKartono's way of thinking. In the 5th century, or 500 years earlier, Saint Augustine uttered a feeling similar to SosroKartono: "All the time I trembled alone, like a bamboo stick by a river."

Alif for SosroKartono is not only meant as the first letter of hijaiyah or the number one that stands upright. Alif owned a very deep meaning that he never realized. Among the meanings of Alif for SosroKartono is that Alif describes oneness in *kasunyatan* or reality, which is the unity of the four fa'al Jiwa, namely Catur Murti.

Alif is a metaphor for supernatural powers, among others, to cure diseases. Alif is a means of focusing concentration towards achieving a situation of openness of the soul to accept elements from outside. Alif as a substitute for the word *Aku*, and Alif describes *Jumbuhing Kawulo Gusti*.

### 1. The Oneness Alif

For Sosrokartono, the word Allah consists of five jamid letters, namely *alif*, *lam*, *lam*, *alif* and *ha*. Each letter has its philosophy, but all are collected and focused on the main one, the One Alif. Why Alif? Because *alif* contains *tauhid-dzati*, namely *al-Abadiyah*, which means that all these forms do not exist, or will disappear except *al-Abad-al-Haq* (Ar-Rahman, 26-27). But all that exists is also One, consisting of soul, body and universe.

According to Sosrokartono, these four forms are the symbols of Catur Murti's practice, namely the union of the four *fa'als*, namely feelings, thoughts, words, and actions. With the union of these four actions, humans will find the reality (Javanese: *Kasunyatan*) from this reality they will find Oneness (Sosrokartono 1931).

Sosrokartono's understanding of *Alif Abadiyah* is in line with the concept of Alif according to the great Sufi Abdul Karim Al-Jilli (1365-1421). Sosrokartono stated that the letter Alif at the beginning of Allah's sentence, leads to knowledge of the Absolute Essence, namely *al-Abad*, as a mirror and *washilah* for all that exists. If a servant is able to reflect through the secret of Alif, or this essence of monotheism, the veil that separates creatures and *khaliq* will be opened. The human self as the caliph of Allah and Allah, is like two *alif* mirrors that are facing each other and looking at each other (Al-Jilli t.t., 26).

### 2. The Strength Alif

According to Sosrokartono, in Allah's sentence, there is a second *alif* word, it is not visible, nor is it written, but it must be pronounced, namely the perfect *alif*, and in *tajwid* it is read longer. The unwritten letter

Alif shows that there is supernatural power in the Alif letter. In this world there are things that are invisible, too, unnoticed, but their existence is real, that is *Sang Alif*, the second Alif letter in Allah's sentence.

This Alif is a sign of supernatural powers that are always inevitable. This is because in the first Alif, Allah is the essence and the most real being. However, in the second Alif, Allah, too, is the most abstract being and essence.

Those two things are God's will. His luminous existence can be recognized through the senses of the ratio, and its abstractness must be recognized through the maximum human spiritual effort, and human spiritual efforts produces a soul that is ready to receive the secret of His *tajalli*. Thus humans will be able to absorb the supernatural power of God.

In one of his efforts, Sosrokartono showed the way shown in one of his postulates: *Langgeng tanpo susah, tanpa seneng, antheng mantheng, sugeng jeneng...* (Upright, without happiness without sorrow, calm in the midst, not wavering and keeping a good name). The secret of the soul to receive the secret of *tajalli* and His power was introduced by Sosrokartono, among others, by being upright like the letter Alif. Upright in the middle, means that we do not lean to the left or right, or lean up or down, but stay in the middle.

In terms of geometry, this position is like two straight lines crossing each other, and in the middle there is the number 0. This 0 if it is tilted just a little, it will shift to minus one (negative) or plus one (positive) and so on. The number 0 is different from empty or nil. So the ideal position is indeed *Alif-washati*. The upper line is the symbol of *nafs-ruhbiyah* (soul), the lower line is the symbol of *nafsaniab* (lust), the line to the right is *al-aql* (ratio) and the line to the left is *khayali* (fantasy).

Regarding the term mystic power in Alif, this is in line with the concept of Abdul Karim in terms of *Alif abl al-Ghaib*. The second letter of Allah's sentence also shows that there is another existence from the

simplicity of the human-body, namely the existence of *abl al-Ghaib*, which he calls the ‘medium’ of insan al-Kamil, because he was chosen to be able to approach Him and receive His *tajalli*.

According to Al-Jilli, *anna dzat Alallah ta’ala ghaib al-Abadiyah allati kullu yara musthafiyah lima’atin la waqiah ‘alaiba...* (the essence of Allah is *ghaib al-Abadiyah*, which every expression that tries to describe it from various sides will not be appropriate in reality, but it can be understood coherently, because of its power. To explain the essence of Alif, al-Jilli makes an analogy with the essence of a quds bird that flies in empty space, but has power (Al-Jilli tt, 22 & 26 ).

### 3. The Marifat Alif

Alif Marifat means a combination of the real and the unreal, but legible Alif. Sosrokartono then asked between “I (rough form) + I *wujud al-ghaib*” = *Marifat*. Alif literally means *Jumbuhing Kawulo Gusti*. While the invisible Alif means *Manunggaling Kawulo Gusti*. The two terms (*jumbuhing* and *Manunggaling Kawulo Gusti*) have the same meaning which is the marifat of the unification of man (nature) with God, the only difference is only on the *lafadz* and pronunciation only.

According to Sosrokartono, this universe is just a *jumbuhing*, or rough vessel for His *tajalli* or *manunggaling*. So everything that exists in this universe, there is no meaning small or large, high or low. Because everything is essentially *mir’ah* from *Alif Abadiyah*.

As a consequence of that thought, it is necessary that there is no existence that is essentially just a rough vessel, such as the status of rich-poor, subjects-nobles, or people-rulers. All are essentially the same (second alif), however each position (first alif) gives value and opportunity to the meaning: “*Ngawula comes kawulaning Gusti lan meyu ayuning urip, ...*” (serving God’s servants and improving the beauty of life).

It was revealed that Sosrokartono had three Alifs, namely: The black Alif, with a white base. The Alif is white, with a light blue base, and the Alif is white, with a red base. According to Sosrokartono, before God was known and recognized by his creatures, God was in a state of *'amma* or unknown, this symbol was black, with a white base. Then *al-'amma* accepted *al-Abadiyah*, God in this state is *tajalli* for Himself, God in this state still cannot be characterized, this symbol is alif white, with a light blue base. The light blue color as the basis is a symbol of the universe (life), where God reigns in the entire universe, while the red base color is a symbol of courage, and this is a human whose note is the *caliph fil-ard* (leader of nature), which allows God to do *tajalli* perfectly.

Then God revealed His Essence (Iniyah) to the universe. *Iniyah* is a sign for the emergence of God with all perfection from His inner side. In this position, The Alif is white, with a red base, as the culmination of a servant's relationship with God. The term colorful symbols above are also raised by al-Jilli based on reciprocity; God wants to be known by his creatures and creatures or creations want to know their God, so there is a common interest; the desire of each.

After that humans receive the level of wisdom in stages from actions, names, attributes, to the complete essence of God, in this case perfect wisdom is the position of being a human being of al-Kamil after going through four phases, namely *tajjali on af-'al*, *tajjali* on His attributes. , *tajalli* on His name and and *tajalli* on His Essence. This can happen because humans have the nous of God, namely, nafs, spirit and qulb (Al-Jilli t.t., 56).

## Conclusion

For al-Jilli everyone can experience a spiritual process as described by Sosrokartono (Alif is black, with a white base. Alif is white, with a light blue base, and Alif is white, with a red base) because humans are equipped

with spiritual powers ( Al-Taftazani 1979, 9-15). After all the stages have been successfully passed, and humans have reached the highest level, then God will perform *tajalli* (appearance). This type of appearance goes through three stages of *tanaẓul* (descending), namely *Ahadiyah*, *Huwiyah* and *Iniyyah*.

First, with *Ahadiyah*, God appears to the servant by His deeds. So the deeds of the servant are mortal (disappear), and those who appear *kharīqul adat* (seem strange) from the nature of *af'al baqa'* (eternal deeds) of God. Second, *Huwiyah*, God sees one of the attributes of His name to His servants. So I am mortal because of the light of His name (the great light of His Name). The first name to descend is *al-Maujud* (The Almighty) and the last *al-Qayyum* (The Almighty). Third, *Iniyyah*, God appears in the nature and Essence of His servants. This stage is called *al-abd al-Shifah* (miniature of God, *Insan al-Kamil*, because of his nature and essence). So the servant is mortal, and what comes out are extraordinary *karomahs* (Al-Syarqawi, 1975, 194-198).

The concept of Alif in *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* and *Insan al-Kamil*, was implicitly discussed long before Sosrokartono and al-Jilli lived. In Java two important names are known, namely Kanjeng Sunan Kalijaga and Shaykh Siti Jenar, while in Arabic there was al-Ghazali in his book. *al-Mishkah al-Anwar*, by presenting the conception of “I” as a figure or individual “*al-Mutha*”, a figure that must be obeyed (Al-Ghazali 1970, 33). What is meant by *al-Ghazali* with a figure that must be obeyed is none other than how a person finds his true self, so that the meaning of self will be fulfilled (finding *al-insaniyah*/individualistic), and humans can arrive at the concept of “*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*.”

Therefore the theory of Sufism is successfully translated into a symbol of Alif. So that the term *Manunggaling Kawulo Gusti* later became a relay and was held by most Sufis in Indonesia, such as Sheikh Nurrudin Ar-Raniri, a Sufi who lived in the 16th century who gave the same meaning

to the concept of *wahdatul wujud*. (Zoetmulder 1991, 88), including Sastrokartono with the concept of alif.

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