

## Banjar Ulama Traditions in South Kalimantan

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### Abstract

This article discusses the tradition of scholarship among the Banjar people in South Kalimantan. As the majority group, the Muslim followers of the Banjar ethnic group in South Kalimantan are closely tied to the role of scholars (ulama) in the dissemination of Islam, especially within the Banjar community. It is not surprising that the title given to a scholar includes the term 'tuan guru haji' (master teacher of the pilgrimage). Such titles are bestowed upon individuals who have studied religious knowledge in the Haramain or the Middle East, following the educational tradition of Banjar scholars oriented towards Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari. Based on this foundation, this article aims to answer the question of how the Banjar tradition of scholarship fulfills its role in propagation (Dakwah). Through a qualitative approach, this research understands that religious lectures within the Banjar scholar's Dakwah tradition have become the most popular means of spreading Islamic teachings. In practice, scholars are not only considered preachers but also educators, leaders, and guides in worship. In this context, scholars play a central role in the lives of the Banjar community, and it is believed that they can address various challenges in life.

**Keywords:** *Tradition, Scholarship, and the Banjar Ethnic Group*

### Abstrak

Artikel ini mendiskusikan tentang tradisi keulamaan Banjar di Kalimantan Selatan. Sebagai kelompok mayoritas, penganut muslim suku banjar di Kalimantan Selatan tidak bisa dilepaskan dari peran ulama dalam proses penyebarannya, khususnya di tengah masyarakat Banjar. Tidak heran jika, sebutan yang disematkan kepada seorang ulama, salah satunya dijuluki sebagai 'tuan guru haji'. Sebutan ulama semacam ini, diberikan kepada orang-orang yang belajar ilmu agama di Haramain ataupun Timur Tengah, karena tradisi pendidikan ulama Banjar yang berkiblat kepada Syekh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari. Atas dasar itulah artikel ini ingin menjawab pertanyaan tentang bagaimana tradisi keulamaan Banjar menjalankan peran Dakwah?. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif penelitian ini memahami bahwa pengajian dalam tradisi dakwah ulama Banjar, ternyata menjadi sarana dakwah yang paling populer. Apalagi dalam praktiknya, selain pendakwah, ulama juga selalu dianggap sebagai pendidik, pemimpin dan pembimbing ibadah. Dalam hal ini, ulama memainkan peran sentral di tengah kehidupan masyarakat Banjar, sehingga diyakini bahwa ulama dapat menyelesaikan berbagai permasalahan kehidupan.

**Kata kunci:** *Tradisi, Keulamaan, dan Suku Banjar*

### Introduction

In ancient times, Islamic treasures were filled with the works and thoughts of the companions and tabi'in. So now it is the ulama who carry the mandate to continue the relay of spreading the treasures of Islam. Because it is said that ulama are the heirs of the Prophets, and ulama are also often associated with people with religious knowledge. Therefore, the position and role of ulama are very influential as a guide

and legitimization of policies in Indonesian Islamic society, especially in South Kalimantan.

Based on the census that has been carried out, the majority of the population of South Kalimantan is the Banjar tribe, and more than 97% are Muslims. Therefore, the Banjar tribe is known to be religious<sup>1</sup>. The large number of people who embrace Islam is not something that happens. All of this is the result of the hard work of the ulama who spread Islam to remote areas of South Kalimantan. Therefore, ulama are considered essential figures who play a role in the lives of the Banjar people.

Islam and Banjar have a reasonably harmonious relationship. The Islamic nuances in the land of Banjar are felt. If we look at the history of the arrival of Islam to the land of Banjar, the people happily accepted the teachings brought by the ulama. The role of Banjar clerics and intellectuals had a very positive influence on the spread of Islam. From the first arrival of Islam until now, they have moved and fought for Islam to develop and spread widely throughout Banjar.

The social, cultural, and political changes that occurred impacted the role and position of the ulama. This has changed society's perspective on the criteria for a scholar and what things a person must have to be categorized as a scholar. This has had quite a dynamic impact on the Banjar clerical tradition. Therefore, this article further examines the Banjar clerical traditions in South Kalimantan. The various titles given to the ulama and the educational traditions an ulama must follow. Furthermore, what is the role of an ulama in the life of the Banjar people?

This article wants to answer how the Banjar clerical tradition carries out the role of Da'wah. With a qualitative approach, this research understands that recitation in the Banjar ulama preaching tradition turns out to be the most popular means of preaching. Moreover, unlike preachers, ulama are also always considered educators, leaders, and guides of worship. In this case, the ulama plays a central role in the lives of the Banjar people, so it is believed that the ulama can solve various life problems.

## **Research Method**

This research used qualitative methods through a literature review (Library research). The author collected data from thoughts and scientific works related to this study to be used as a reference and source of written data. In the data search process, the author collected data sources taken from research that had been conducted previously. Data sources include websites, articles, journals, theses, dissertations, books, and social media. A summary of the data source can be a conclusion representing the analysis results.

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Suryadinata, Evi Nurvidya Arifin dan Aris Ananta. *Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2003), 65-68.

## Result and Discussion

### 1. The term for Banjar Ulama

The word 'ulama' is taken from Arabic, which means someone knowledgeable or someone who knows. The word 'ulama' is the plural form, namely علماء, while the singular word or mufrad is عليم.<sup>2</sup> Imam al-Jurjani stated in his book *at-ta'rifat* that the word al-'alim linguistically means "an expression for someone who knows something because that person knows Allah, His names and attributes."<sup>3</sup>

According to Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani, Ulama are people who know and understand various sharia laws to determine the validity of a person's intentions and other sharia practices. Meanwhile, according to Sheikh Ali Ash-Shabuni, someone can be considered a scholar if he has a deep fear because of his knowledge. Sheikh Wahbah Zuhaili added that what is meant by ulama is people who can observe natural phenomena for the benefit of life in this world and the afterlife and are afraid of the threats Allah will give them if they fall into disgrace. An immoral person cannot be said to be a scholar.<sup>4</sup>

In Indonesia, there are various titles for ulama; this usually depends on each region. Just as in the Java area, they usually refer to an ulama as Kyai; some in the Lombok area also refer to ulama as master teachers. Likewise, ulama in the Minangkabau area is often referred to as teachers or sheiks.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, in South Kalimantan, Banjar culture has various titles such as 'sheikh', 'tuan guru', 'ustadz', 'mu'allim', 'mufti', 'datu' and 'qadhi'.

One of the titles given to ulama is 'ustad' and 'Muslim'; if we explore further, this comes from Arabic, which means educator. Apart from that, there is also the title 'teacher.' In Banjar culture, the term 'tuan guru' is usually added to the hajj title, so a cleric's address in everyday life is usually 'tuan guru haji.' In Banjar culture, the word 'hajj' has a special morning meaning for those who bear it. This is usually given to people who have performed the hajj to the holy land of Mecca. The title 'hajj' is not specifically for ulama. However, look at the history of the Banjar ulama tradition from the 18th century to the mid-20th century. In that case, most of those who studied at Haramain must have completed the hajj before returning to their homeland. Therefore, it is not surprising that the call 'haji' in Banjar culture is very synonymous with ulama. The term 'teacher' is usually combined with the short name of the cleric or the name of the place where the cleric teaches or lives, such as the term 'Guru Sekumpul,' which is the name for Tuan Guru Haji Muhammad Zaini bin Abdul Ghani who comes from Sekumpul, Martapura, South Kalimantan.

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<sup>2</sup> Mahmud Yunus, *Kamus Arab Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Penyelenggara Penterjemah Pentafsir Al-Qur'an, Cet. I, 1973), 278.

<sup>3</sup> Ali Bin Muhammad Al-Jurjani, *At-ta'rifat*, Juz 1 (Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-'Arabi, 1405 H), 188.

<sup>4</sup> Badruddin Hsukby, *Dilema Ulama Dalam Perubahan Zaman* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1995), 45-56.

<sup>5</sup> Zamachsyari Dhofir, *Tradisi Pesantren* (Jakarta: LP 3 ES, 1982), 55.

## 2. The Education of Banjar Ulama

Hinduism, Buddhism and Kaharingan are the religions practiced by the people of the island of Kalimantan before the arrival of Islam. The spread of Islam by means of da'wah and education continues to this day. Even though Islamic religious teachings have taken over people's beliefs, religious culture and traces of previous teachings still remain and cannot be completely eliminated. So some of these things still influence the culture and religion of society today.<sup>6</sup> The arrival of Islam on the island of Kalimantan, especially South Kalimantan, is still uncertain. This was stated by historians, their reason is that it is difficult to find data to reveal this fact.<sup>7</sup>

In the 18th century, Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari (1710-1812) was the main figure behind the development of the Islamic religion and the increase in knowledge about Islam at that time.<sup>8</sup> He was one of the pioneers of Banjar ulama. The history of his life became an example and role model for subsequent scholars. According to the story, Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari was sent by Sultan Tamjidillah (1734-1759 AD) to go on the pilgrimage to the holy land when he was 30 years old. For approximately 30 years, he studied at the Grand Mosque in Mecca. After that, he studied again for approximately five years in Medina. While studying, he not only studied but also taught the knowledge he had gained to other people.

Banjar clerics at the end of the 19th century to the mid-20th century usually went to the holy land to study and take advantage of the momentum to perform the Hajj. If we pay attention, this follows in the footsteps of Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari. Then, after returning from the holy land, they returned to their respective villages to preach. Their da'wah is of various kinds; some open educational institutions, and others open religious studies or taklim assemblies. In general, scholars who studied in the holy land at the end of the 19th century were once Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari students in Dalam Pagar. Meanwhile, in the 20th century, many other than the students of Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari who went to study in the holy land came from various Islamic educational institutions spread across South Kalimantan, such as Kandangan, Barabai, and Amuntai.<sup>9</sup>

Then, in the 20th century, the educational traditions of Banjar ulama underwent important changes, which also happened in other areas of the archipelago. The direction of education, originally located in the holy land (Haramain), has now shifted to other Middle Eastern countries, such as Egypt, namely at al-Azhar University. This

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<sup>6</sup> Kamrani Buseri, *Sepintas Masuknya Islam Di Borneo* (artikel, 28 Desember 2009), 65.

<sup>7</sup> Mukhyar Sani, *Jurnal Al-Hadarah*, Vol. 2 No 3, Januari-Juni 2003 dalam *Dakwah Islam dan Perkembangannya di Kalimantan Selatan*, 31.

<sup>8</sup> Munadi, Fathullah, *Syekh Arsyad Al-Banjari; dalam Konteks Kajian Al- Quran di Nusantara*, (Banjarmasin: Antasari Press, 2011), 42-43.

<sup>9</sup> Rahmadi. *Jaringan Intelektual Ulama Banjar Abad XIX dan XX (Studi tentang Proses, Pola dan Ekspansi Jaringan)*. (Banjarmasin: Antasari Press, 2010).

cannot be separated from the intervention of the Wahhabi sect by the Ibn Saud dynasty, which succeeded in controlling the holy land. Therefore, the Banjar ulama, in particular, considers that this sect is not under existing religious understanding and has spread in the country.

Then, in the second half of the 20th century, the educational traditions of Banjar ulama persisted in the direction of education in the Holy Land (Haramain) and Egypt. However, there have been several changes: First, the Saudi Arabian government provides scholarships for lectures there, such as Umm al-Qura' Mecca University or the Islamic University of Medina. So, studying in the holy land does not always involve following halaqah at the Grand Mosque. Even though the average ideology developed in that country is Salafi-Wahabi, we have no right to say that those who have studied there are among their group. Second, some Banjar clerics are satisfied with studying at Islamic boarding schools in Java or Kalimantan. There is no need to go abroad. According to some ulama, this is to maintain the previous ulama's ideology, namely ahlu sunnah wal jama'ah. Third, the mecca of knowledge is not only in the holy land and Egypt; now, some Banjar people can study religious knowledge in Yemen, Malaysia, Pakistan, and other countries. This shows that there are many educational pathways for prospective ulama.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Recitation as a means of Da'wah for Banjar Ulama

Linguistically, recitation has the basic word "kaji," which means lesson (especially in matters of religion); recitation can also be interpreted as teaching and reading the Koran. The word formation that starts with "pe" and ends with "an", namely recitation, has two meanings: a verb and a noun. The verb has the meaning of teaching, namely teaching about Islamic knowledge. The noun is defined as a forum or place for implementing the teaching, but this term is better known as majlis ta'lim among the Banjar people.<sup>11</sup>

As previously mentioned, recitation is a forum or means that aims to guide someone to become a Muslim who is faithful and devout, has good behavior and is virtuous. The method used by preachers in recitation is the lecture method. This method is an interaction between da'i and mad'u in a certain way to achieve goals based on wisdom and love.<sup>12</sup> So in this way we can say that what is meant by recitation is an effort to propagate the spread of Islam in a place that teaches an understanding of religious knowledge in the midst of community life.

Recitation activities or ta'lim assemblies are carried out simply, such as those

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<sup>10</sup> Mujiburrahman. Rahmadi. M. Zainal Abidin. "Figur Ulama Banjar Kharismatik Masa Kini di Kalimantan Selatan" *Al-Banjari. Jurnal Studi Islam Kalimantan* Vol. 11 No. 2. (2012), 112-113.

<sup>11</sup> Dewan Redaksi Ensiklopedi Islam, *Ensiklopedi Islam* ( Jakarta: Ichtar Baru Van Hoeven, 1997), 120.

<sup>12</sup> Wahidin Saputra, *Pengantar Ilmu Dakwah* ( Jakarta: Rajawali, 2012), 234.

carried out in mosques, prayer rooms, schools and people's homes. This can be said to be non-formal without any other binding rules. However, this is more following the direction of the cleric or teacher who leads the recitation. So that a recitation system like this is more accepted and firmly rooted in people's lives. This type of recitation model has also developed since the arrival of Islam in Indonesia, especially in the land of Banjar.<sup>13</sup>

In the onslaught and competition of formal educational institutions, especially education that teaches Islamic sciences. The taklim assembly is a means of da'wah that still has a fairly strong existence. The Taklim assembly survived and even transformed into an institution that still maintains its traditions so that it is considered the most effective medium for preaching and can reach all levels of society. This is also supported by good management of the taklim assembly and cooperation between the surrounding community.

If we explore further, the taklim assembly is rooted in the journey and preaching of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Form of da'wah to Muslims by socializing Islamic teachings. This can be said to be a unique phenomenon because it results from the civilization and culture of Muslims. Especially in this modern era, taklim assemblies can reach various levels of society, from city communities to even rural communities.

Since the 18th century, da'wah, through recitation facilities in Banjar, was pioneered by Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari. Then, his students continued the recitation until it spread to various regions in South Kalimantan. Slowly, recitation and Banjar culture became one, so recitation became one of the Banjar clerical traditions in the method of preaching. Now, recitation is no longer foreign to the Banjar people. In every town and village in South Kalimantan, there are always recitations led directly by local clerics. Others have taklim assemblies, which invite ulama and habaib to come to give sermons at the assembly. Recitations can also be carried out in various places, such as yasinan gatherings, which mothers hold in their homes. It can also be in a mosque, langgar, office or special place suitable for recitation.

There are various kinds of recitation materials taught. Usually, it depends on the cleric who leads the recitation. However, these materials generally cover Islamic sciences, such as Tauhid, Fiqh, Sufism, Tafsir, and Hadith. In recitation, learning usually also uses certain books, such as the book of Twenty Traits for monotheism, the Book of the ladder of Worship or Safinah an-Naja for fiqh, the book Siyar as-Salikin or Ihya Ulum ad-Din for Sufism, the book Arbain an-Nawawi for the hadith, the Tafsir al-Jalalain book for the interpretation, or the lungukunan book which covers several scientific aspects. Some of these books are in Arabic, and some are

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<sup>13</sup> Ahmad Sarbini, "Internalisasi Nilai Keislaman Melalui Majelis Taklim," *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 5, no. 16 (2010), 60.

also in Malay Arabic. Apart from that, recently, the material popular among the Banjar community is reading manakib-manakib from famous figures or scholars, like Sheikh Samman's manaqib and the teacher's manaqib as a group. The reading of manakib among mothers is usually the manakib of the wife of the Prophet Muhammad. namely manakib sayyidah Khadijah.

#### **4. Banjar Ulama as Educators, Leaders and Worship Guides**

In the life of the Banjar people, a cleric can be said to be a servant of the Prophet's people. Almost every day, whether morning, afternoon or evening, the community always asks for help from ulama. Moreover, the elderly ulama are considered to have karomah. There are various goals of society with their respective intentions. Among them: people come to ask for prayers for blessings, ask questions about religious law, ask for water to light their hearts or for naughty children, ask for prayers for healing from illnesses and various kinds of life problems that exist in the community. That is an illustration of the role of ulama in the land of Banjar who are considered to be able to solve all life's problems. The role of ulama from time to time continues to develop and their role is vital for the lives of Muslims. Apart from serving the people, ulama are also educators, leaders and worship guides. Some ulama also take a role in politics. Therefore, ulama are known as versatile and reliable people.

Apart from filling in recitations and taklim assemblies, ulama are usually also required to give Friday sermons. This is also a clerical tradition that has existed for a long time. Moreover, if the cleric is a well-known, prominent and charismatic cleric, you can be sure that he will have sermons every week or even a full sermon schedule for the next few months. This also cannot be separated from the dense population which continues to increase accompanied by the increase in the number of mosques. So this causes many preaching demands that must be fulfilled by the ulama. Therefore, sometimes we can find a preacher who is not worthy. Even though the external appearance is supportive, his recitation of the Al-Qur'an is still not perfect. In the first half of the 20th century, the ulama gave sermons mostly still using Arabic. After that, there was a combination of Indonesian and Arabic. However, if you look at history, it seems that sermons using Indonesian or Malay have been carried out by Muhammadiyah reformers.<sup>14</sup>

We can find other clerical traditions when there are celebrations commemorating major Islamic holidays. For example, in the month of Rabiul Awwal, ulama are usually asked to give lectures about the birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. There is also a commemoration of Isra Mi'raj in the month of Rajab, a commemoration of Nuzulul Qur'an in the month of Ramadan. Apart from

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<sup>14</sup> Tim MUI Kalsel dan Tim LP2M UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. *Ulama Banjar Dari Masa ke Masa*, (Banjar: Antasari Press, 2019), xxii-xxiii.

that, it can also be on days that are considered sacred by society, such as naming ceremonies (tasmiyah) or weddings. All lecture material is adapted to the commemoration event. When compared to recitations, lectures are classified as delivering lighter material. Therefore, someone can become a preacher even with limited knowledge of religion. As long as this is also supported by clever speaking and humor that can attract the audience's attention. Because the lecture material does not necessarily require in-depth expertise in Islamic knowledge, as does the recitation of the book held at the taklim assembly. The term for lectures in urban areas is also called 'taushiyah'.

Ulama also have the task of leading the implementation of worship. Apart from giving sermons and lectures, ulama are also asked to be imams in carrying out the five daily prayers in congregation, both in langgars and mosques. This has become a tradition of the ulama's activities in everyday life. Apart from the five daily prayers, ulama are also asked to lead other religious services such as the Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha prayers, Friday prayers and funeral prayers. In certain months, such as Ramadan, they are usually asked to lead tarawih prayers. In rural areas, it has even become a custom for a cleric to lead the reading of talqin, tahlil or yasin for people who have died. However, if a cleric is absent, we also need to know that the person who leads the worship is not required to always be a cleric. As long as the person has the knowledge and ability to read the Koran fluently and understands the procedures for worship, this is enough for that person to lead the worship.

In Banjarese terms, someone who leads the implementation of worship but does not have in-depth knowledge of Islamic religion is called papakihan. If the ulama are absent, then papakihan takes the role of replacing the ulama's role temporarily. Another religious tradition that is never separated from the duties of ulama is reading prayers. Starting from small events such as slametan or manyalamat to other large formal events. Prayers are usually read in Arabic, because Arabic is considered a sacred language in Islam. even the prayers taught in the Koran and others The source of the Prophet's Hadith uses Arabic. However, usually at other major state events the Indonesian language is also included.<sup>15</sup>

Banjar people are known as religious and like to carry out the Hajj pilgrimage. One clear proof is the long queue of prospective Hajj pilgrims from South Kalimantan. Therefore, usually in the Hajj pilgrimage group there must be a cleric who guides and accompanies them. So now we can be sure that most Banjar ulama have their own 'Hajj Guidance Group' (KBIH). Apart from the Banjar people's love of carrying out the Hajj pilgrimage, Banjar people, especially those in rural areas, are also known to really like religious practices, wirid-wirid and prayers. Therefore, those scholars who often or like to give deeds, wirid and prayers, have a large number of

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<sup>15</sup> Tim MUI Kalsel dan Tim LP2M UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. *Ulama Banjar ...*, xxiii-xxiv.



recitation congregations. The explanation of the practice is usually accompanied by its merits. Among several advantages, if someone reads a prayer or wirid and practices it, then this will provide benefits or positive impacts for the practitioner, both in this world and in the afterlife.

## Conclusion

The majority of the population of South Kalimantan is the Banjar tribe and most of them adhere to the Islamic faith. This cannot be separated from the role of ulama in spreading Islam among the Banjar people. Social, cultural and political changes also have an impact on the development of the position and role of Banjar ulama. So this greatly influences the standards and criteria that a person must fulfill in order to gain public recognition as a scholar. One of them is the educational tradition of Banjar scholars who are oriented towards Mecca or Medina, this is to follow in the footsteps of the pioneer of Islam in Banjar land, namely Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari. However, as time went by, the direction of education began to shift to other Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt and Yemen. The role of ulama in Banjar society also has a central role, because ulama are considered as educators, leaders and guides of worship. Apart from that, ulama are also considered to be able to solve all life's problems.

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