

MADRASAS BEYOND JAVA: Al Washliyah and the Making of Sunni Religious Authority

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Abstract: This paper explores the historical, philosophical, and curricular foundations of the Al Washliyah madrasas as institutions dedicated to preserving Sunni theology and the jurisprudential tradition of the Shâfi'î legal school beyond Java. The study examines the organizational documents, institutional development, and curricula of Al Washliyah using a historical approach and library research. The findings show that the Al Washliyah madrasas emerged from the intellectual traditions of Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli and Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah, both of which emphasized a strong commitment to Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah and the Shâfi'î legal school. This commitment has been institutionalized through a structured educational system that incorporates the study of the classical Islamic scholarly tradition (*turâth*) in theology (*'aqîdah*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), legal theory (*uṣûl al-fiqh*), Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsîr*), hadith, and Arabic language studies. Al Washliyah madrasas function not only as Islamic educational institutions but also as institutional mechanisms for transmitting and reproducing Sunni scholarly authority across generations. As such, they play a vital role in preserving the continuity of the Sunni intellectual tradition and fostering successive generations of *ulama* in Indonesia.

Keywords: Madrasa, Sunni Theology, Shâfi'î school, Al Washliyah

Abstrak: Makalah ini mengkaji landasan historis, filosofis, dan kurikuler madrasah Al Washliyah sebagai institusi yang didedikasikan untuk melestarikan teologi Sunni dan tradisi fikih mazhab Syafi'i di luar Jawa. Penelitian ini mengkaji dokumen organisasi, perkembangan kelembagaan, dan kurikulum Al Washliyah dengan menggunakan pendekatan historis dan studi kepustakaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa madrasah Al Washliyah berakar pada tradisi intelektual Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli dan Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah, yang keduanya memiliki komitmen kuat terhadap Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah dan mazhab Syafi'i. Komitmen tersebut dilembagakan melalui sistem pendidikan yang terstruktur dengan memasukkan kajian tradisi keilmuan Islam klasik (*turâth*) yang meliputi teologi (*'aqîdah*), fikih (*fiqh*), usul fikih (*uṣûl al-fiqh*), tafsir Al-Qur'an (*tafsîr*), hadis, dan bahasa Arab. Madrasah Al Washliyah tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai lembaga pendidikan Islam, tetapi juga sebagai mekanisme kelembagaan dalam mentransmisikan dan mereproduksi otoritas keilmuan Sunni lintas generasi. Dengan demikian, madrasah Al Washliyah memainkan peran penting dalam mempertahankan kesinambungan tradisi intelektual Sunni sekaligus membentuk generasi ulama secara berkelanjutan di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Madrasah, Teologi Sunni, Mazhab Syafi'i, Al Washliyah

INTRODUCTION

Madrasas have long been among the most important institutions for the transmission of the Sunni Islamic intellectual tradition in Indonesia (Lukens-Bull, 2019). However, scholarly discussions of madrasa education have focused predominantly on pesantren and Islamic educational networks in Java, while Sunni madrasas outside the island have received comparatively little scholarly attention (Bruinessen, 1994, 1995). One of the most significant yet understudied educational networks is that of Al Washliyah, an Islamic organization founded in East Sumatra in the early twentieth century that has developed into one of Indonesia's major Islamic educational organizations (Ja'far et al., 2022; Siddik & Rosnita, 2014). From its inception, Al Washliyah placed education at the core of its organizational mission. It developed a well-organized madrasa system to preserve and transmit the theological principles of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah and the Shâfi'î legal school (Ja'far, 2016a, 2019a). Although the history of Al Washliyah and its institutional development has been examined in previous studies, relatively little attention has been paid to how its madrasas have functioned as institutions for preserving and transmitting Sunni theology and jurisprudence through their philosophical foundations, historical networks, and curricular structures.

The present study, therefore, aims to analyse the historical and philosophical foundations of the Al Washliyah madrasas, and to explain how a curriculum based on

classical Islamic scholarship (*turâth*) has made the uninterrupted transmission of the Sunni intellectual legacy possible. The primary source of data for this study is the Al Washliyah madrasah curriculum published in the 1950s (Pengurus Besar Al Djamijatul Washlijah, 1956). This study demonstrates that Al Washliyah's ability to maintain its identity as a proponent of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah and the Shâfi'î legal school has not depended solely on organizational commitment. Rather, the madrasa as an institutional structure has played a crucial role in perpetuating Sunni scholarly authority across generations. The study argues that Al Washliyah madrasas were built on the intellectual legacy of Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli and Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah. Drawing on these historical foundations, Al Washliyah developed a tiered educational system and structured curriculum that systematically integrated the teaching of Ash'arî theology and Shâfi'î legal school. Al Washliyah madrasas function not only as Islamic educational institutions but as strategic centers for the preservation, transmission and reproduction of Sunni theological and jurisprudential traditions in Indonesia, especially outside Java, through an ongoing educational system firmly based on the heritage of classical Islamic scholarly tradition.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative library research method with historical and content analysis approaches. The research focused on examining the

historical and philosophical foundations of Al Washliyah madrasas and their role in preserving and transmitting the Sunni Islamic intellectual tradition in Indonesia. The primary source of data was the Al Washliyah madrasah curriculum published in the 1950s by Pengurus Besar Al Djamijatul Washlijah (1956). This document was selected because it provides direct evidence of the institutional structure, educational levels, and curricular orientation developed by Al Washliyah during its formative period. Secondary sources included scholarly books, journal articles, historical studies, and previous research concerning Al Washliyah, Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli, Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah, Sunni theology, the Shâfi'î legal school, and Islamic education in Indonesia. Data were collected through systematic documentation and close reading of relevant primary and secondary sources. The analysis was conducted by identifying historical continuities, philosophical orientations, curricular structures, and the inclusion of classical Islamic scholarly traditions (*turâth*) within the Al Washliyah madrasa system. The findings were then interpreted comparatively to explain how educational institutions contributed to the continuity of Ash'arî theology and Shâfi'î jurisprudence across generations. This approach enabled the study to reconstruct the institutional mechanisms through which Al Washliyah madrasas preserved Sunni intellectual traditions beyond Java.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Brief History of Al Washliyah

The philosophical roots of Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah (or Al Washliyah) madrasas are inseparable from the organization's establishment in the early 1930s. From the outset, education was regarded not merely as a means of transmitting religious knowledge but also as a primary method for ensuring the continuity of the Sunni Islamic intellectual tradition that had flourished in East Sumatra (Ja'far, 2021b; Ja'far & Iqbal, 2023; Syahnan & Ja'far, 2021). The establishment of Al Washliyah madrasas reflected the commitment of ulama and Muslim intellectuals to preserving the orthodoxy of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah through a systematic and organized educational system, rather than establishing educational institutions merely to meet the requirements of formal schooling (Siddik et al., 2023). Therefore, the philosophical foundation of Al Washliyah madrasas is built on three interconnected pillars: the historical continuity of their establishment, their strong adherence to Sunni theology and the Shâfi'î legal school, and the transmission of the intellectual legacies of the two educational institutions from which they emerged, namely Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli (MIT) and Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah.

Historically, Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah emerged from an educational milieu. The name Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah, which literally means "the association

that connects or unites,” was proposed by Shaykh Muhammad Yunus in a meeting held at Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli on 26 October 1930 (Sjihad, 1951). The organization was officially founded at this institution on 30 November 1930, corresponding to 9 Rajab 1349 AH. (Washliyah, 1936). The fact that the madrasa served as the social and intellectual setting in which the concept of the organization was conceived indicates that education was not merely an activity after the organization had been formed. Thus, Al Washliyah’s identity was fundamentally scholarly, rooted in a community of teachers and students. Thus, education became the core mission of the organization, rather than one of its activities.

The establishment of the organization was also reflected the cooperation between two prominent Islamic educational communities di Medan. The first was from Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli, led by Shaykh Muhammad Yunus (Tanjung, 2012) and Shaykh Ja’far Hasan, while the second was from Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah, led by Shaykh Hasan Ma’sum (Maisyaroh & Iqbal, 2023a). Students and alumni of these two institutions, including Abdurrahman Sjihad, Ismail Banda, M. Arsjad Th. Lubis, A. Malik, Sjamsuddin Said Lubis, Mhd. Abdul Aziz Effendy, Nurdin, Adnan Nur Lubis, Abdul Wahab Lubis, Yusuf Ahmad Lubis, Ya’kub, O.K.H. Abdul Aziz, Baharuddin Ali dan Usman Deli, played leading roles in the establishment of Al Washliyah (Ja’far,

2022b). The educational backgrounds of these founding figures suggests that Al Washliyah emerged from an intellectual network based on the legacy of Islamic education rather than a movement based on actual political concerns (Ja’far, 2019b). Since the very beginning, the organization was conceived as a forum for ulama and students under a common educational framework for the preservation of Sunni Islamic culture.

This pedagogical concept was soon translated into institutional practice. Under the leadership of Abdurrahman Sjihad, Chairman of Al Washliyah, the organization established its first madrasa in Medan on 1 August 1932 (Ja’far, 2020c, 2021a). The founding of this first madrasah marked a significant step in the institutionalization of Al Washliyah’s educational mission. From an institutional perspective, this initiative shows that the organization did not limit itself to the construction of a religious identity; it simultaneously created the institutional mechanisms through which that identity could be transmitted to future generations through a structured educational system. In this manner the madrasa became the chief means of conveying Sunni theology, jurisprudence and the wider legacy of Islamic scholarship to the Muslim population in a systematic and ongoing way.

The growth of Al Washliyah’s educational network was remarkably rapid. By 1935, the organization had established eighteen madrasas and

schools in Medan and nineteen outside the city, thus within five years of its founding it had already established an extensive educational network; this rapid expansion further consolidated education as the core of the Al Washliyah movement. In 1930–31 there were no educational facilities (Washlijah, 1936). By 1942, however, the organization had set up 193 madrasas and schools. The Japanese occupation was a major setback, with just seventy-one institutions operating and 122 damaged or destroyed between 1942 and 1945. But after Indonesian independence Al Washliyah managed to rebuild its educational network. Between 1945 and 1955 there were 667 madrasas, between 1955 and 1959 there were 975 madrasas, and by 1980 there were 1,477 madrasas and schools (Washlijah, 1959a, 1959b). This sustained expansion shows that Al Washliyah madrasas were not isolated educational institutions but rather part of a long-term process of educational institutionalization within Indonesian Muslim society.

The institutional expansion was supported by a constant increase in student enrolment and instructional personnel. By 1955 Al Washliyah was catering for some 70,000 students, assisted by some 700 teachers. One year later, in 1956, its educational network had reached 301 Tajhizi schools, 296 Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, 14 Madrasah Tsanawiyah, three Qism al-‘Âly institutions, one Takhassus program, 39 public elementary schools (Sekolah

Rakyat), seven junior secondary schools (SMP), two SMEP (Secondary Schools of Economics), two SGB (Teacher Training Schools) and five PGA (Religious Teacher Education Schools) making a total of 670 educational institutions (Washlijah, 1956). This composition shows that Al Washliyah has established a comprehensive educational system from elementary Islamic education to the training of teachers and higher education in Islamic studies. The diversity of institutions illustrates the organization’s ability to adapt to the changing national education system while remaining ideologically committed to Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ‘ah and the Shâfi‘î legal school.

The same historical trend has continued into the present. By 2021, Al Washliyah was operating 704 educational facilities in fourteen provinces on the islands of Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Bali. Its educational network comprised 234 kindergartens, 81 elementary schools, 96 Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, 48 junior secondary schools, 138 Madrasah Tsanawiyah, 12 senior level schools, 28 vocational secondary schools and 67 Madrasah Aliyah (Ja’far, 2022a). Al Washliyah also managed nine higher education institutions, comprising four universities and five colleges. The wide spread of the educational heritage from East Sumatra to the rest of the country is evidence of the development of a statewide Islamic educational network. Thus, the madrasas of Al Washliyah are not only educational institutions, but also permanent institutional mechanisms for

the preservation and transmission of Sunni theology (Ash'ari) and the Shâfi'i legal school through an organized educational system that operates across generations and regions.

Al Washliyah and the Sunni Tradition of Madrasas

In addition to their historical roots, the philosophical foundations of Al Washliyah madrasas are strongly based on clear theological and legal principles. The First Congress in 1936 institutionalized this identity in its resolutions, demanding that members of Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah should follow the Shâfi'i school of law and profess the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah (Sjamsuddin, 1955). The implications of this resolution went beyond the issue of organizational membership. It formed the normative basis for all educational initiatives conducted under the auspices of Al Washliyah. The madrasa was thus not intended to be a religiously neutral educational institution to serve the varied orientations of Islamic communities; rather, it was deliberately designed to promote and institutionalize the Sunni tradition through a systematic program of religious teaching.

The first basic concept is the supremacy of Islam as the normative principle of the organization. Al Washliyah's constitutional rules confirm that all operations carried out in the name of the organization must be founded on Islamic law and must not contradict its ideals. Hence, all

organizational strategies and educational programs are subject to the precepts of the Sharî'ah (Pengurus Besar Al Djamijatul Washliyah, 1950). The principle expresses the idea of education as a coherent expression of religious commitment. The madrasa aims not only to educate graduates who have mastered Islamic sciences (Ja'far, 2022c; Ja'far & Noor, 2024), but also to raise people whose lives are shaped by the ethical and legal norms of Islam.

The second principle is a strong dedication to the Shâfi'i legal school. The organizational documents require that all acts performed under the jurisdiction of Al Washliyah must comply with Islamic legal rulings as understood within the Shâfi'i madhhab, including the resolution of organizational concerns (Ja'far, 2020a). It shows that Shâfi'i legal school is not only the object of teaching but also the rule that controls the management and decision-making of institutions. The madrasas of Al Washliyah thus function as institutions of the continued transmission of the Shâfi'i legal legacy through their curriculum, teaching procedures, and the development of a distinctive academic culture.

The third principle is adherence to the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah, particularly the Ash'arite theological tradition. This creed is the way of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, and it is the way of salvation, states Al Washliyah (Pengurus Besar Al Djamijatul Washliyah, 1950). This statement gives a clear theological identification of all the

educational establishments under the control of the organization (Irwansyah, 2021; Ja'far, 2016b). It means the educational philosophy of Al Washliyah is not only about the delivery of Islamic information, but it also reaches the construction of the religious worldview firmly entrenched in the Sunni heritage. In this respect, the madrasa is the main institutional mechanism for the continuity of Sunni theology, especially outside the island of Java.

These theological and legal beliefs were not created in a vacuum but were inherited from the intellectual traditions of Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli and Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah (Ja'far et al., 2024). Founded in 1918, Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli became into one of the most influential Islamic schools in East Sumatra. The institution had been managed by Shaykh Ja'far Hasan and Shaykh Muhammad Yunus, both of whom were students of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qâdir ibn Shabîr al-Mandilî at the Grand Mosque of Mecca (al-Masjid al-Ḥarâm). At Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli, instruction was focused on memorization of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic books) which was theologically and jurisprudentially anchored on the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah creed and the Shâfi'î school of law (Asari & Tanjung, 2019; Tanjung, 2012). This intellectual legacy was then passed on to Al Washliyah by the organization's graduates, who became the founders of the organization and the builders of the expanding network of madrasas.

Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah, referred to by Yusuf Ahmad Lubis as an "Islamic High School" (Majelis Ulama Sumatera Utara, 1983), also contributed to this intellectual tradition through the network established by Shaykh Hasan Ma'sum (Ja'far, 2020b). His intellectual formation in Mecca and Medina, together with his scholarly ties to prominent Muslim scholars, helped establish the madrasa as a respected center of Islamic learning with considerable scholarly authority. Unlike Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli, which emphasizes memorization, Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah has instead developed a tradition based on *ḥalaqah* that focuses on the study of classical Islamic texts. And yet, despite these pedagogical variations, both institutions had the same intellectual direction, that is, the preservation of the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah and the Shâfi'î legal school as the pillars of Islamic education (Ja'far, 2015; Maisyaroh, 2023; Maisyaroh & Iqbal, 2023a, 2023b; Mukhtar Harahap et al., 2023). This unifying vision was then incorporated in the educational system of Al Washliyah, giving rise to an original madrasa identity that has been surprisingly stable through time.

Thus, the philosophical foundations of Al Washliyah madrasas were born from the intersection of intellectual tradition, theological conviction, and institutional vision. Although Al Washliyah was born from the Muslim community of Medan, its educational system was firmly grounded

in the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah and the Shâfi'i legal school, which served as normative foundations guiding its educational practices and institutional operations. At the same time, the intellectual legacies of Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli and Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah provided the scholarly foundations on which Al Washliyah created its extensive madrasa network as a means of preserving Sunni theology and Shafi'i legal school. Therefore, the Al Washliyah madrasas should be seen not only as Islamic educational institutions, but also as institutional mechanisms by which the Sunni intellectual tradition has been perpetuated, disseminated, and reproduced throughout Indonesia, particularly beyond Java.

Al Washliyah Madrasas and the Classical Sunni Literature during 1950s Indonesia

1. Madrasah Ibtidâ'iyyah and the Classical Sunni Texts

At the Madrasah Ibtidâ'iyyah (elementary madrasa) level, Al Washliyah places traditional Sunni literature at the core of student's religious education. The curriculum has been designed to develop proficiency in Qur'anic recitation and Arabic, and also to systematically cultivate an understanding of the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah and the Shâfi'i legal school through authoritative classical texts that have long been the foundation of traditional Islamic education. Elementary education in the Al Washliyah system is thus not only meant

to teach the kids to read religious texts, but also to shape their theological orientation and legal outlook in accordance with the religious beliefs of the organization.

The curriculum of the Madrasah Ibtidâ'iyyah, particularly in the area of theology (*'aqidah*) shows a remarkable devotion to the Sunni theological tradition. One of the basic text used to introduce pupils to the principles of Islamic belief is Sayyid Aḥmad Raḥmân al-Saqqâf's *Al-'Aqâ'id al-Dîniyyah*. For decades this text has been widely used in the Sunni madrasas of Southeast Asia since it provides the key teachings of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah in an approachable manner while maintaining within the Ash'arî theological tradition. Students are also introduced to discussions of the divine qualities, the prophethood, angels, revealed scriptures, the Last Day, and divine decree (*qadâ'* and *qadar*) from a Sunni theological perspective, beside *Kifâyat al-'Awâm*. These manuscripts exist, showing that the theological teaching at Al Washliyah is not self-contained, but part of a long-established chain of intellectual transmission anchored in the Sunni educational networks of both the Middle East and the Malay-Indonesian world.

The attachment of the organization to the Shâfi'i school is much more conspicuous in the teaching of Islamic law. The *Matn al-Taqrîb* by Abû Shujâ' is the basic text for exposing pupils to the legal rules about acts of worship and social transactions in the Shâfi'i

school. *Matn al-Taqrîb* is one of the most popular brief manuals (*mukhtaṣar*) of Shâfi'î jurisprudence in the Muslim world, and it provides a normative framework for ritual cleanliness, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage and basic commercial transactions. In an effort to be able to go deeper into these topics, the curriculum also includes *Fath al-Qarîb* by Ibn Qâsim al-Ghazzî as its main commentary (*sharḥ*). The pairing of a short legal text (*matn*) with its commentary is a reflection of a pedagogy whereby pupils are required to memorise not only the legal rules, but also to grasp the explanations and legal rationale behind them. This form of instruction is a particular feature of the *kitab kuning* pedagogy and has been a characteristic of the Shâfi'î academic tradition and has been sustained in the Al Washliyah madrasa system.

In addition to theology and jurisprudence, the curriculum contributes to the students' moral formation through classical ethical writings such as *Taysîr al-Khallâq*, *Waṣâ'yâ al-Âbâ' li al-Abnâ'*, and *Adab al-Fatâ wa al-Fatât*. Teaching on Hadith is based on *Matn al-Arba'în* by Imâm al-Nawawî, one of the most studied collections of the prophetic traditions in the Sunni intellectual tradition. The *Hidâyat al-Mustafîd* is used as a textbook for the teaching of the Qur'anic recitation and the science of *tajwîd*, with special focus on the perfect pronunciation and recitation of the Qur'an. Meanwhile Arabic language education is given a

considerable role in the curriculum through books such as *al-Âjurrûmiyyah*, *Matn al-Binâ'* and *Matn al-Maqṣûd*. But their main function is pedagogical, to prepare pupils for direct access to classical Arabic Islamic literature through the linguistic competency they supply.

Hence, the curriculum of Madrasah Ibtidâ'iyah indicates that the transmission of the Sunni intellectual heritage starts at the elementary level with the careful selection of works that have long had authoritative status within the tradition of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah. Ash'arî theology is presented in standard theological manuals, whereas Shâfi'î jurisprudence is taught in paired study of *Matn al-Taqrîb* and *Fath al-Qarîb*, which for centuries have been the primary entry point to the study of Islamic law at Sunni madrasas. Thus, elementary education within the Al Washliyah system constitutes the first stage in the reproduction of the Sunni intellectual tradition which is then deepened at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Qism al-'Aly levels through the study of increasingly advanced and sophisticated classical texts.

2. Madrasah Tsanawiyah and the Classical Sunni Texts

At the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, the Al Washliyah curriculum represents a shift from primary religious education to a more advanced engagement with the Sunni intellectual heritage. At the Madrasah Ibtidâ'iyah level, students are introduced to the

foundations of theology and jurisprudence through concise classical manuals. At the Tsanawiyah level, instruction centers on understanding legal reasoning, the methodology of legal derivation, and the interrelationship among the various disciplines of Islamic scholarship. The curriculum shows that Al Washliyah's educational system is designed not only to develop proper religious practice but also to cultivate the intellectual ability to engage the scholarly thought of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah, particularly within the Shâfi'i tradition.

The *Tuhfat al-Ṭullâb* of Zakariyyâ al-Anṣârî is the standard textbook in the discipline of jurisprudence. This work is chosen because it is an important development of *Matn al-Taqrîb* and *Fath al-Qarîb*, studied at the elementary level. One of the leading later (*muta'akhkhirûn*) scholars of the Shâfi'i school was Zakariyyâ al-Anṣârî who wrote a book which not only includes legal rulings but also explains systematically the internal structure of Shâfi'i jurisprudence. The result is that students are exposed to a wider legal system which enables them to see the unity and interconnectedness of the individual chapters of Islamic law as one legal system.

This advanced study is supplemented with teaching in *uṣûl al-fiqh*, the subject dealing with the technique of Islamic legal reasoning. The curriculum uses *al-Waraqât* by Imâm al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynî, one of the most influential introductory works on legal theory in the Shâfi'i tradition, and *al-*

Luma' by Abû Ishâq al-Shîrâzî, which provides a more systematic account of the sources of law, methods of legal reasoning (*istidlâl*), consensus (*ijmâ'*), analogical reasoning (*qiyâs*), and the principles of legal derivation (*istinbât*). The inclusion of these two works shows that Al Washliyah conveys not just the content rulings of Islamic law, but also the methodological bases upon which Sunni jurists build legal arguments. Thus, students are urged to grasp the reasoning behind the judgements of the law rather than simply memorising them.

The study of *Qawâ'id al-Fiqhiyyah* (legal maxims) through *al-Ashbâh wa al-Nazâ'ir* of Jalâl al-Dîn al-Suyûtî reinforces the attention to the legal technique. This work introduces the students to the general legal principles that regulate the solution of legal problems in the Shâfi'i school. At the same time, *Ḥuṣûn al-Ḥamîdiyyah* improves the theological education by explaining the dogmas of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah in a more analytical and argumentative way than the simple books taught at the basic level. The combination of jurisprudence, legal theory, legal maxims and theology reveals how the Al Washliyah curriculum establishes continuity between the normative and methodological parts of the Sunni intellectual tradition.

The Madrasah Tsanawiyah curriculum also consolidates the ancillary courses that have been historically defining for the education for Muslim scholars. In the study of hadith, students study *Riyâḍ al-Ṣâlihîn* by Imâm al-

Nawawî to cultivate religious ethics and devotional practice and *Sharḥ al-Bayqûniyyah* is studied in *muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadîth* to grasp the classification and authenticity of Hadith. Logic (*manṭiq*) is also presented as a tool for systematic thinking. The study of Arabic grammar (*naḥw*), rhetoric (*balâghah*), and advanced Arabic language continues to be at the core of the curriculum so as to enable students to engage directly with classical Islamic writings. The addition of these disciplines indicates that a mastery of the *turâth* is not seen merely as the ability to study ancient texts but as well as the ability to understand the intellectual structures and styles of argumentation that underlie the scholarship of Sunni ulama.

The above explanation shows that the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level is an important stage in the reproduction of the intellectual tradition of Al Washliyah. Elementary education lays the groundwork for a Sunni identity by instilling Ash'arî theology and Shâfi'î jurisprudence, whereas secondary education expands upon this base by introducing students to the methods of legal derivation, legal maxims, Hadith studies, and the rational disciplines that support the classical Islamic scholarly tradition. This curricular progression suggests that the preservation of Sunni theology and Shâfi'î jurisprudence in Al Washliyah is achieved through a gradual educational process that moves from mastery of foundational knowledge to an understanding of the intellectual methods

that have long characterized the scholarship of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah.

Madrasah Qism al-'Aly and the Classical Sunni Texts

The Qism al-'Aly represents the highest level Al Washliyah's madrasah educational system and serve as the primary stage for preparing future ulama. The difference between Qism al-'Aly and the Madrasah Ibtidâ'iyah, where the fundamentals of theology and jurisprudence are taught, and the Madrasah Tsanawiyah, where the methodologies of the Islamic sciences are taught, is that the curriculum of Qism al-'Aly is focused on the mastery of the classical Islamic heritage (*turâth*) that has been the main source of reference for the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah throughout the centuries. The structure of the curriculum indicates that the aim of education is not only to produce students who know the basics of their religion, but also to produce graduates who are able to read, interpret and explain the classical Islamic intellectual tradition based on the recognised authority of the Sunni scholarly schools. In the major centers of Islamic learning, therefore, most of the basic disciplines are taught through authorised sources that have been part of the Sunni educational heritage for centuries.

In the jurisprudence, the curriculum uses *al-Maḥallî* by Jalâl al-Dîn al-Maḥallî as the main textbook and

Minhâj al-Ṭālibîn by Imâm al-Nawawî in the absence of this text. The choice of these books puts the students at the very center of the Shâfi'î legal tradition. One of the most important works in the history of the Shâfi'î school of jurisprudence, *Minhâj al-Ṭālibîn*, became the basis for countless comments (*shurûḥ*) and super-commentaries (*ḥawâshî*) by later jurists. Their inclusion suggests that Al Washliyah goes beyond the provision of pragmatic jurisprudence by directing students to the authoritative writings that have influenced the development of Shâfi'î legal thinking. This strategy creates a continuity of intellect in the educational process between Al Washliyah madrasas and the broader networks of Shâfi'î scholarship in the Middle East and the Malay-Indonesian world.

The study of *uṣûl al-fiqh* and legal maxims further strengthens advanced legal methodology. Teaching legal theory using Tâj al-Dîn Ibn al-Subkî's *Sharḥ al-Jalâl al-Maḥallî 'alâ Jam' al-Jawâmi'*, one of the most important texts in the Shâfi'î school of legal theory. The text presents a thorough coverage of the principles of legal derivation, sources of law, methods of legal reasoning and scholarly controversies about legal interpretation. Simultaneously, the course on *Qawâ'id al-Fiqhiyyah* is still using *al-Ashbâḥ wa al-Nazâ'ir* by Jalâl al-Dîn al-Suyûtî, and facilitates learners to comprehend the application of universal legal principles to answer specific juridical problems. Together these topics teach students to

comprehend both the results of *ijtihâd* and the process of producing Islamic law as developed in the Shâfi'î legal school.

The Sunni character of the curriculum is also obvious from the selection of literature on Qur'anic exegesis and Hadith. In tafsîr students study numerous key ancient commentaries such *Anwâr al-Tanzîl wa Asrâr al-Ta'wîl of al-Bayḍâwî*, *Lubâb al-Ta'wîl fî Ma'ânî al-Tanzîl of al-Khâzin*, *Madârik al-Tanzîl wa Ḥaqâ'iq al-Ta'wîl of al-Nasafî*, and *Tanwîr al-Miqbâs*, traditionally attributed to Ibn 'Abbâs. These works are representative of the major exegetical tradition of Sunni Islam which combines linguistic study, transmitted narratives and theological interpretation within the framework of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah. In Hadith studies the students study *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim* or if not available then *Ṣaḥîḥ al-Bukhârî* thus have direct access to the most authentic books of Hadith in Sunni tradition. The choice of these works indicates Al Washliyah's effort to expose its students to the original sources that have influenced the traditional Islamic academic tradition.

The Qism al-'Aly curriculum, apart from the study of jurisprudence and Hadith, also emphasises the spiritual dimension of Sunni Islam by studying *al-Risâlah al-Qushayriyyah*. This work by Imâm al-Qushayrî is one of the most prominent texts of the Sunni Sufi tradition, combining spiritual training with a strong adherence to the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah. This

demonstrates that the ulama training in Al Washliyah is not just aimed at mastery of Islamic law, but also of moral purity and spiritual refinement. The curriculum also includes courses in *Adab al-Munâẓarah* (the ethics of scholarly debate) and comparative religion, and equips graduates to engage in discussion, create scholarly arguments, and provide religious guidance based on the established Sunni intellectual tradition.

What has been discussed above indicates that Qism al-ʿAly is the highest point of the transmission of the Sunni intellectual tradition by Al Washliyah during 1950s. The Madrasah Ibtidâʿiyyah lays out the foundations of the Ashʿarî theology and the Shâfiʿî legal school, and the Madrasah Tsanawiyah introduces the methodologies of the Islamic scholarship. Qism al-ʿAly moves the students toward the mastery of the foundational works (*turâth*) which have been the principal references for the Sunni ulama over the centuries. The curriculum thus demonstrates that the sustenance of Sunni theology and Shâfiʿî jurisprudence in Al Washliyah is attained through a methodical, systematic and ongoing educational process. By reading these authoritative texts over time, Al Washliyah madrasas reproduce the Sunni scholarly tradition by educating successive generations who can continue the intellectual authority of classical Islam in Indonesia but also retain their identity as institutions of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâʿah.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that education has been central to the identity of Al Washliyah from its inception and that Al Washliyah madrasas are the institutional core and foundational basis for the emergence and development of Al Washliyah. Al Washliyah madrasas, formed within the intellectual traditions of Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli and Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah, were established to maintain the continuity of the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâʿah and the jurisprudence of the Shâfiʿî school through a systematic educational system. This commitment has been reflected in the establishment of an extensive educational network from elementary to higher education, which has survived successive historical challenges and developed into a nationwide system of Islamic education. Thus, the historical evolution of Al Washliyah madrasas shows that they are not only formal educational institutions but also strategic instruments for preserving the Sunni intellectual tradition, cultivating future generations of ulama and Muslim intellectuals, and transmitting the religious identity of Al Washliyah to subsequent generations and across regions. The philosophical foundations of these institutions are rooted in a firm commitment to Islam, the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâʿah (Ashʿarism) traditions, and the Shâfiʿî legal school, which together provide their theological, juridical, and pedagogical frameworks. These commitments are reflected not only in

the organization institutional identity, but also in its curriculum, governance and educational practices, all of which are oriented towards sustaining and transmitting the Sunni scholarly tradition. This orientation was further reinforced by the intellectual heritage of Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli and Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah, both of which promoted the study of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts), cultivated scholarly networks, and maintained a strong tradition of Islamic learning that was subsequently incorporated into the Al Washliyah educational system. Thus, Al Washliyah madrasas should not be understood merely as Islamic educational institutions; rather, they function as institutional mechanisms through which Sunni theology and Shâfi'î jurisprudence are systematically transmitted, reproduced, and developed within the Indonesian Muslim community. The Sunni intellectual tradition is preserved through a graded, systematic, and continuous educational system in which the classical Islamic heritage (*turâth*) constitutes the primary foundation of learning. At the Madrasah Ibtidâ'iyah level, students are introduced to the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah, the jurisprudence of the Shâfi'î school, and Islamic moral formation through the study of authoritative classical texts. At the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, this foundation is further developed through more advanced study of the methodological disciplines of Islamic scholarship, including *uṣūl al-fiqh*,

qawâ'id al-fiqhiyyah, Hadith studies, and the linguistic sciences. Through these disciplines, students learn not only the substantive aspects of legal rulings but also the methodological principles underlying their derivation (*istinbât*). At the Qism al-'Aly level, this process reaches its most intensive stage, serving as the principal institutional setting for the formation of ulama. Students engage deeply with foundational texts in jurisprudence, legal theory, Qur'anic exegesis, Hadith, Sufism, and other subsidiary disciplines that have historically constituted the authoritative corpus of Sunni scholarship. The curriculum of Al Washliyah madrasas therefore functions not merely as a program of religious instruction but also as an institutional mechanism for the reproduction of Sunni scholarly authority. By systematically transmitting the intellectual foundations of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah and the Shâfi'î legal tradition, the madrasas contribute to the continuity of the Sunni intellectual tradition in Indonesia through the sustained formation of ulama grounded in the classical Islamic scholarly heritage (*turâth*).

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