The Contribution of Nuruddin al-Raniri to the Field of History in The Malay-Indonesian World

Norhayati Hamzah

1Department of Islamic History and Civilization, Academy of Islamic Studies
Universiti of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract: Nuruddin Muhammad bin Ali bin Hasanji bin Muhammad Hamid ar-Raniri al-Quraisyi al-Syaffi’i, known as Nuruddin al-Raniri (d. 1658), was a prominent Islamic scholar of Aceh during the rule of Sultan Iskandar Thani (1636-1641). As a scholar, al-Raniri had authored numerous works on various disciplines of Islam specifically on tasawwuf, theology and fiqh. However, his contribution to the field of history was no less profound. He was the first writer in the Malay-Indonesian World to initiate a new form of Malay historical writing and to introduce the concept of Islamic history in his historical work named Bustan al-Salatin fi Dhikr al-Awwalin wa al-Akhirin (The Garden of the Kings on the Recollection of the Past and Present/ The Garden of Kings, showing forth the origin of all creation and the end thereof). Therefore, this article endeavours to analyze the contribution of al-Raniri to the field of history in the Malay-Indonesian World through the discussions on the concept of universal history and the concept of Islamic history based on the above mentioned text. The outcome of this research reveals the significant contribution of al-Raniri to the introduction of the concept of Islamic history in Bustan al-Salatin and the role of Bustan in providing principles for the guidance for kings and rulers in carrying out their duties.

INTRODUCTION

The Malay World had produced great Malay scholars in the past in various fields including history. One of them is Nur al-Din al-Raniri, a renowned and versatile scholar of Aceh during the rule of Sultan Iskandar Thani (1047-1051/1637-1641). His full name is Nur al-Din ibn ‘Ali ibn Hasanji ibn Muhammad Hamid al-Raniri (Al-Attas, 1966, 12). His date of birth is unknown (C.A. Grinter, 1979, 8), but Azra and Amirul Hadi (2004) suggest that al-Raniri was born towards the end of the sixteenth century (Azra, 2004, 54 & Amirul Hadi, 2004, 153). Al-Raniri was born into a diaspora Hadrami family of Hamid clan in Ranin in Gujerat, India (Riddell, Peter, 2003, 116) and al-Attas suggested that his mother was Malay. The date of al-Raniri’s arrival to Aceh was clearly stated by his own statement in the Bustan: “Tatkala ia sampai ke bandar Aceh Darussalam pada Hijrah seribu empat puluh tujuh tahun, pada enam hariibulan Muharam, pada hari ahad.” (Malay Raffles 42, p. 3) (He arrived on Sunday/ May 31, 1637). Shortly after his arrival, al-Raniri was appointed as Shaykh al-Islam by the Sultan (Jelani Harun, 1999a, 2; Azra, 2004a, 59; Amirul Hadi, 2004, 153 &155; Sher Banu A. L. Khan, 2012, 100). In 1048/1638 al-Raniri composed a book on history on the behest of Sultan Iskandar Thani which he later named “Bustan al-Salatin fi Dhikr al-Awwalin wa al-Akhirin” (The Garden of the Kings on the Recollection of the Past and Present) which will be the main discussion of this article.

The Works of Nur al-Din al-Raniri: Al-Raniri made a great contribution to the development of Islamic sciences in the Malay World. As a prolific writer in Malay and Arabic, al-Raniri had written 14 books within his short period in Aceh (1047-1054/1637-1644) with 13 of them in Malay language (T. Iskandar, 1964, 440 & T. Iskandar, 1967, 44). Although al-Raniri’s concentration was on kalam (Islamic theology) and tasawwuf (mysticism), he also wrote on fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), hadith (tradition) and history. Concerning the number of al-Raniri’s masterpieces throughout his life, Voorhoeve listed 19 works while Daudy listed 29 works (Voorhoeve, 1955, 153-158 & Daudy, 1983, 48-57). On the other hand, Wan Saghir, a prominent Malay manuscript collector and a prolific writer concerning the ulama’ of Nusantara had stepped forward by giving the complete list of al-Raniri’s work consisting of 34 treatises. Most of al-Raniri’s writings were in the field of tasawwuf numbered around 15 books aimed at refuting the concept of wahdat al-wujud (the unity of existence) of Hamza al-Fansuri and Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani (T. Iskandar, 1964, 440 & Anthony Reid. (Ed.), 2006, 45). For instances Jawahir al-Ulum fi
Kashf al-Ma’lum (the Pearl of knowledge to uncover the truth) (1052-1054/1642-1644), Hujjat al-Siddiq li-daf’i’l-Zindiq (the Proof of the truthful for the refutation of the heretics) (1638-1641), Hill al-Zill (The Exposition of the shadow) (1638-1644) and Fath al-Mubin ‘ala al-Mulhidin (The Obvious victory over heretics) which was completed in 1068/1657. Besides tasawwuf, al-Raniri had authored thirteen works on Kalam and the most prominent are Asrar al-Insan fi ma’rifat al-ruh wa al-Rahman (The Secrets of man (revealed through) the cognition of the spirit and the Merciful) (1641-1644), Akhbar al-Akhirah fi Ahwal al-Qiyamah (The Stories of the Hereafter regarding the events of the day of Resurrection) (1052/1642) and Durrat al-Faraid bi sharh al-‘Aqaid (Precious Pearls on the Description of Aqidah) (written before 1635).

Apart from the mentioned works on tasawwuf and kalam, al-Raniri too was well-known for his masterpiece on fiqh entitled “Sira’t al-Mustaqmin” (The Straight Path) written in Malay (started in 1634 and completed in 1644). It was the first book in Malay in the Malay-Indonesian World that clarified and taught the Malay society on Islamic beliefs and practices (Azra, 2004, 67-68). Last but not least, his only work on history namely Bustan al-Salatin as mentioned above was not only the largest work of al-Raniri but also the longest text written in the history of traditional Malay literature (consists of seven books with 1250 pages) (Siti Hawa Salleh, 1992, xiv & Jelani Harun. 1999a, 13).

The Manuscript of Bustan al-Salatin: The original manuscript of Bustan has gone missing, but several copies are still survived till the present-day (Jelani Harun, 1999, 28-30). Presently, there are at least 34 manuscripts of Bustan, one in Aceh, two in Berlin, one in Brussels, one in Cape Town, one in Colomba, one in Frankfurt, three in Jakarta, two in Kuala Lumpur, thirteen in Leiden, five in London, three in Paris and one in Kuala Terengganu (Jelani Harun, 2009, 28-30). A complete manuscript of Bustan from Book I-Book VII is unavaiable. Therefore, studies on the whole text of Bustan have to be carried out using different manuscripts. The only manuscript consisting of Book I-Book V belongs to the copy of the manuscript of UM 41 (US UM 41), located at the library of the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. Among other manuscripts in Malaysia are Manuscript MF 395 (Bustan al-Salatin) located in UKM and MSS 3059 (Bustan al-Salatin) located at the National Library (Perpustakan Negara), both contain Book VII (Seven) of Bustan al-Salatin. This article utilizes three manuscripts of Bustan (Book I-V) that are Raffles Malay 8 and Raffles Malay 42 (both manuscripts are located at the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society in London) and UM 41 (located at the Library of the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur). These three manuscripts are selected for this article as Raffles Malay 8 and Raffles Malay 42 are the most complete manuscripts that contain Book I- Book V, while UM 41 is the only existing manuscript of Bustan that contains Book III. Besides that, these manuscripts are clearly written and physically in good condition. However, the main concentration of this article will be the Raffles Malay 8 as it is the earliest manuscript of Bustan and the basis for Raffles Malay 42 and Wilkinson’s version (1900).

Generally, Bustan al-Salatin consists of Seven Book and each book is divided into several chapters (fasal) as the following (Raffles Malay 42 (Bustan al-Salatin), 5; Manuscript UM 41 (Bustan al-Salatin), 5-6; Siti Hawa Haji Salleh. (Ed.), 1992, xii; Jelani Harun, 1999, 77-85). Nevertheless, this article will only concentrate on Book I-Book IV due to existence of historical element in Book I-Book II while Book III and Book IV represent the didactic element of Book III –Book VII of Bustan.

- **Book I:** Bab yang pertama pada menyatakan kejadian tujah petala langit dan bumi (The Creation of heaven and earth) (30 fasal /30 chapters).
- **Book II:** Bab yang kedua pada yang menyatakan segala anbia dan segala raja-raja (Book two concerning prophets and rulers) (13 fasal / 13 chapters).
- **Book III:** Bab yang ketiga pada menyatakan raja-raja yang adil dan wazir yang berakal (Book three concerning just kings and wise ministers) (6 fasal /6 chapters).
- **Book IV:** Bab yang keempat pada menyatakan segala raja-raja yang pertapa dan segala aulia yang soleh-soleh (Book four concerning ascetic rulers and pious saints) ( 2 fasal /2 chapters).
- **Book V:** Bab yang kelima pada menyatakan kelakuan raja-raja yang zalim dan wazir yang aniyah (Book five concerning unjust rulers and oppressive ministers) ( 2 fasal /2 chapters).
- **Book VI:** Bab yang keenam pada menyatakan orang yang sakhi yang mulia-mulia, dan segala orang yang berani yang besar-besar (Book six concerning noble, generous persons and brave men) ( 2 fasal /2 chapters).
- **Book VII:** Bab yang ketujuh pada menyatakan akal dan ilmu, dan firasat, dan penyakit, dan ilmu tasyrih, dan ilmu tabib, dan segala sifat perempuan, dan setengah daripada hikayat yang indah-indah (Book seven concerning intellect, medicine, physiognomy, women, etc.) (5 fasal /5 chapters).

The Contribution of al-Raniri to the Field of History in the Malay-Indonesian World: Historically, Bustan was not the first historical book written in the Malay world, indeed Taj al-Salatin...
(The Crown of Kings) written by Bukhari al-Jauhari in 1603 had preceded Bustan as a book of history (Winstedt, 1920a, 39-47). However, Bustan proves to be more advanced than the former since it combines the aspect of religion and history whereas Taj al-Salatin merely concentrates on religion (T. Iskandar, 1966, 13). In addition, Al-Attas stated that Bustan comprises both the religious and historical values (Muhammad Yusoff Hashim 1992, 234). However, Bustan al-Salatin differed to that of the previous book on history in the Malay-Indonesian World as al-Raniri was the pioneer of the concept of universal history in Malay historiography and consequently indicates the contribution of al-Raniri to the field of history. In his concept of universal history, al-Raniri narrates chronologically the universal history and incorporates the Malay kings into the universal history. According to al-Attas, al-Raniri broke the tradition of Malay history writing as Bustan differed from the previous works on history in the aspects of content and writing technique (Muhammad Yusoff Hashim 1992, 234). With the new concept, al-Raniri had pioneered a new form of Malay historical writing (Azra, 2004, 68). Another significance of Bustan is that al-Raniri did not only write the concept of universal history but also added the didactic element in the universal history within the framework of Islam that demonstrates the concept of Islamic history in Bustan. These points will be elaborated in the structure and content of Bustan as below.

The introductory part of Book I of Bustan as the following clearly indicates the structure and content of Bustan, ‘bahawa membahasakan suatu kitab dengan antara jawi padahal mengandungi perkataan segala yang mendiami tujah petala langit dan tujuh petala bumi. Wa siratu’l-salatani’l-awwalinawa’l-akhirin. Dan menyatakan kelakuan segala raja-raja yang dahulu dan yang kemudian’. (To write a book in Jawi concerning the deeds of the denizens of the seven layers of the earth…To relate the deeds of kings of former times and later)

The above quotation shows that al-Raniri had divided his writing into two elements, history and didactic. The first contain the concept of the universal history (Book I-Book II) and the second is the didactic element (Book III-Book IV) as being shown in the diagram at the appendixes.

The above diagram clearly indicates the structure of Bustan which is divided into two elements - history and didactic. Book I and Book II demonstrate the historical element containing the concept of universal history started from the creation of the universe until the history of the Prophets and the Kings of former times that ended at the Kings of Aceh, while Book III-Book IV narrate the history of the ancient kings and the caliphs of Islam with didactic element. From the number of pages, it is obvious that the element of didactic (360 pages) in Bustan dominates the element of history (264 pages). Therefore, this point needs explanation of why al-Raniri emphasized the didactic in his writing of Bustan and this will be discussed in the following.

Book I (the creation of the Universe) consists of the description on the creation of Nur Muhammad (The Light of Muhammad), that was the earliest creation, followed by Lohmahfuz (the Preserved Tablet), Kalam (the Pen), Arasy (the creation of the throne) until the creation of regions. Al-Raniri’s writing concerning the creation of the universe is basically originated from the idea of the creation of the universe mentioned in the Qur’an. For instances, sura al-Baqara (2): 22, 29 & 164 (concerning the creation of the heavens and earth), Sura al-Ra’d (13): 3, Sura al-Nahl (16): 14-15 and Sura al-Furqan (25): 53 (concerning the creation of oceans and rivers), Sura al-Rahman (55): 46, Sura al-Hadid (57): 21 (the creation of paradise) and Sura al-Shaffat (37): 5, Sura al-Nahl (16): 16 and Sura al-Anbiya (21): 33 (the creation of the sun, moon and stars).

In my opinion, the structure of Book I can be divided into two categories; the first is the creations relate to the heaven, and second, the earth. The first category describes fourteen chapters regarding the creations related to Allah (the creation of Nur Muhammad, Lohmahfuz, Kalam, arasy, Kursi, Liwa’al-Hand, angels, Sidrat al-Muntaha, the Jan, the wise, the paradise, the nymphs, Baitul makmur, the hell and the creation of that which supports the earth). On the other hand, the second category relates sixteen chapters concerning the creation of earth and its content (the creation of the seven layers of the heavens, the seven layers of the earth, the sun, the moon and stars, the meteor, the clouds, cool water, ice and dew, lightning, thunderbolts and thunder, the heavenly bodies, the seven layers of the earth, the Kaabah, the Mount Qaf, the earthquakes, the globe, the oceans and rivers, the lands and the regions). The creations do not only reveal the greatness of Allah but they also indicate that the second category is larger than the first one. From the author’s point of view, the reason is that Allah purposely creates the universe that will benefit the whole of mankind in order that human being is able to fulfil their roles as the caliphs of Allah on earth. This purpose is clearly mentioned in the Qur’an and the way al-Raniri structured his Bustan portrays his concept of Islamic history that is based on the Qur’an.

As the universe is created for mankind, al-Raniri built the historical connection between the Book I and Book II by narrating the life of human being on earth starting from the history of the Prophets and the Kings of Aceh that consists of 13 chapters (the total of 190 pages). It started with the creation of the Prophet Adam followed by the history of the Prophets of Islam (Idris, Nuh, Hud, Saleh, Ibrahim, Luth, Ismail, Ishaq, Ya’kub, Yusuf, Ayyub, Musa, Is,
Muhammad, etc.) and the history of the kings who ruled in former times after Prophet Adam that could be referred to in the above diagram. It is interesting to note that al-Raniri intentionally aims to include the history of the Malay kings of Aceh as part of universal history. This is due to the fact that Bustan was written on the order of al-Raniri’s patron, Sultan Iskandar Thani, and it was al-Raniri’s responsibility to glorify the Kings of Aceh.

The second structure of Bustan is the didactic element that is placed in Book III and Book IV (the total of 360 pages). These books (Book III and Book IV) are related to Book I and Book II in which al-Raniri systematically arranged the universal history in chronology, starting from Allah as the Creator, creation of the universe (Book I) followed by the creation of mankind and their history (Book II). These creations were subject to the shariat and adab (ethics) of Islam (content of Book III and Book IV) to ensure that human beings lived in accordance to the law of Allah. The Qur’an does not only describe the creation of the world and the history of the Prophets and rulers (Book I-Book II of Bustan) but it also contains the element of didactic by describing stories of individuals either with good or bad characters (in Bustan refers to the Just King and Wise Minister and Ascetic Rulers and Pious Saints (Book III-Book IV). The purpose of the stories concerning didacticism in Qur’an is to teach or educate mankind on adab so that they would take lessons from the past history and live in accordance to the Islamic teaching. This is clearly stated in Sura al-Rum, verse 9 that carries the meaning “Have they not travelled in the land and seen the nature of the consequence for those who were before them? They were stronger than these in power, and they dug the earth and built upon it more than these have built. Messengers of their own came unto them with clear proofs (of Allah’s Sovereignty). Surely Allah wronged them not, but they did wrong themselves.” and Sura Yusuf, verse 3, “We relate to you, [O Muhammad], the best of stories in what We have revealed to you of this Qur’an although you were, before it, among the unaware.”

Al-Raniri was inspired by the didactic element in stories in the Qur’an that he wrote special chapters on didactic (Book III and Book IV) to teach mankind the way to Allah (the right path) and human were given the chance to repent and return to Allah. In other words, Islam offers forgiveness to those who repent and return to the obedience to Allah (Mazheruddin Siddiqi, 1994, 14 & 24). Thus, al-Raniri in Book III relates stories of the conduct of the Caliphs and the kings of former times. For example, the stories of caliphs Umar al-Khattab, Umar b. ‘Abdul Aziz and Harun al-Rashid and the kings of former times (King Ismail Samani, King Abdullah b. Tahir, King Ya’kub b. al-Laih, etc. At the end of each story, al-Raniri gave some advices to the readers as a guide to the right way they should behave (didactic element). Below is an example of the stories with didactic element in Book III:

Setelah itu maka dimulai daripada setengah ceritera Amiralmukminin Harun al-Rasyid radiahullahu anhu yang adik lagi pihun daripada segala raja-raja. Ialah raja yang kelima daripada bani Abbas, iaitu anak cucu baginda Abbas radiahullahu anhu...kata yang empunya ceritera, adalah adat Raja Harun al-Rasyid radiahullahu anhu, apabila bulan Syaaban, maka ia menitahkan membawa segala orang yang dipenjaraan itu di hadapannya. Maka diperiksaan pada tiap-tiap orang itu. Maka jika ada dosa mereka itu patut dengan hukum Allah maka dibalaskannya akan dia, dan jika ada dosa lain daripada hukum Allah, maka diampun baginya (Harun al-Rasyid, the fifth Abbasid caliph was just and the most preferable among the Abbasid caliphs. It is said that in the month of Sha’ban, Harun al-Rasyid examined each prisoner and if the offence of a prisoner deserved to be punished according to the law of Allah, he will be punished and if not, he was offered forgiveness and being released).

Nasihat: Sesegoyan baga segala raja-raja jangan ia menghukumkan lain daripada hukum Allah (Raffles 8, 409). (Advice: The kings should punish the guilty people according to the law of Allah).

Continuous didactic stories were given by al-Raniri inside the Book IV concerning the conduct of the saints of God in former times. In this book, al-Raniri narrates the stories of Ibrahim b. Adham, Iskandar Zulkarnain, Abu’l-Fawaris Syah b. Sujah, Kings of Yemen, Sheikh Abdullah, Musa ibn Muhammad ibn Sulaiman and others. For example, the story of Ibrahim b. Adham who was before the King of Balkh but later renounced his luxurious life and throne to devote himself to Allah (Russell Jones, 1974, 10). In the writer’s opinion, al-Raniri too took the idea of pious people from the Qur’an when he narrated the stories of pious people in Book IV. The idea was from the stories of Luqman al-Hakim (sura Luqman (31)): 13-19, Iskandar Zulkarnain (sura al-Kahf (18)): 84-98 and the Ashabul Kahf (the people of the cave/The seven sleepers) in Sura al-Kahf (15): 9-26. The story of Luqman al-Hakim is a well-known story in Muslim tradition regarding a wise man who guided his son on the concept of tauhid in Islam. Meanwhile, the Ashabul Kahf is the story of seven young men who had fled to a cave to avoid their disbeliefing folk and they slept for more than 300 years by the will of Allah. In addition, didactic element in Bustan was also manifested in the stories of pious saints such as the Prophet Musa and the Prophet Isa, Sheikh Bilalu’l-Khawasi and Sheikh Abdul Rahman.

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that the element of didactic in Bustan is larger in content compared to the historical element as al-Raniri purposely inserted some advices to the caliphs or saints of God in order that the reader would be able to apply lessons from history and lived according to the teaching of Islam. This style of didactic writing was repeated in many parts of Bustan especially in Book III and IV that shows the importance of didacticism in Islam. The didactic element in Bustan parallels the purpose of history in
Islam that is to bring mankind to the final destination that is to return to Allah. With that purpose, historical writings generally contain adab in the form of didactic as didactic is the principle of understanding Islamic history. From the context of the Malay kings, the didactic element in Bustan functioned as guidance to the kings of the right way to perform their duties and in general to show the reader the way they should perform based on the teaching of Islam. In brief, the didactic literature in Book III and Book IV could not be separated from the concept of Islamic universal history as it contains history of the past concerning the conduct of pious kings and pious saints. In other word, the didactic literature is part of the process of Islamic universal history and thus, Bustan contains the concept of Islamic history and accordingly has proven Bustan as a work on Islamic history.

CONCLUSION

Bustan al-Salatin is the masterpieces of Nur al-Din al-Raniri in the seventeenth century Aceh, written on the command of Sultan Iskandar Thani of Aceh (1636-1641). The composition of Bustan witnessed the contribution of al-Raniri to the field of history with the introduction of the concept of universal history that incorporates the Malay kings into the universal history, the first of its kind in the Malay-Indonesian World. It begins with the creation of the heavens and earth, followed by the history of the Prophets of Islam and Rulers in former times including the history of the Kings of Aceh (historical element) with the didactic elements inside of Book III and Book IV as part of the process of Islamic history. These elements are narrated in length inside the Qur’an and they indicate that al-Raniri had referred to the Qur’an since the very beginning of his writing of Bustan as he had purposely aimed to compose a work on Islamic history. Last but not least, Bustan had played an enormous role in the history of the Malay-Indonesian World and become influential and widely used not only in the 17th till 19th century Aceh but throughout the South-East Asia especially among the Malay kings as guidance to perform their duties.

REFERENCES

Manuscript Raffles Malay 8 & Manuscript Raffles Malay 42 (Bustan al-Salatin)
Diagram 1: The Structure and Content of Book I-IV of Bustan al-Salatin

Concerning the conduct of kings and the kings of former times, relating their stories so that the

Just Kings and Wise Ministers (629 pages)

Book IV (360 pages)

DIDACTIC

Ascetic Rules and Pfus Sahn (270 pages/chapters)

Book IV (112 pages)

Concerning the conduct of pious kings who possess this world in former times to follow

the wishes of Allah and concerning the conduct of the saints of God in former times

Concerning the appointment of kings and their duties together with their duties, the

(D 27)

Diagram 1: The Structure and Content of Book I-IV of Bustan al-Salatin

Concerning the conduct of pious kings who possess this world in former times to follow

the wishes of Allah and concerning the conduct of the saints of God in former times

Concerning the appointment of kings and their duties together with their duties, the

(D 27)

Diagram 1: The Structure and Content of Book I-IV of Bustan al-Salatin

Concerning the conduct of pious kings who possess this world in former times to follow

the wishes of Allah and concerning the conduct of the saints of God in former times

Concerning the appointment of kings and their duties together with their duties, the

(D 27)