

Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's Intellectual Contribution to Ḥadīth Studies in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article examines the position of Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani in the tradition of hadith studies in the Nusantara by focusing on his biography, educational background, works on hadith, and his role in the development of Islamic scholarship. This study employs a qualitative approach through library research, utilizing the works of Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and other relevant scholarly sources. From a biographical perspective, Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani is recognized as a Nusantara scholar who played a significant role within the Islamic intellectual networks of the nineteenth century. His educational experience in pesantren and in the scholarly circles of Mecca provided a strong foundation for shaping his understanding of hadith. His works demonstrate a consistent use of hadith in discussions of jurisprudence and ethics, following the classical scholarly tradition. Through these writings, his ideas were widely disseminated and became important references in pesantren education. His contribution to hadith studies is evident not only in his scholarly productivity but also in his influence on the formation of hadith teaching traditions in the Nusantara. Therefore, Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani can be regarded as one of the key figures in the historical development of hadith studies in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Nawawi al-Bantani; Ḥadīth Studies; Indonesian Ulama*

Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji posisi Syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani dalam tradisi studi hadis di Nusantara dengan menitikberatkan pada riwayat hidup, latar pendidikan, karya-karya hadis, serta perannya dalam perkembangan keilmuan Islam. Penelitian ini disusun menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi pustaka dengan memanfaatkan

karya-karya Syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani dan sumber-sumber ilmiah yang relevan. Dari sisi biografi, Syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani dikenal sebagai ulama Nusantara yang memiliki pengaruh luas dalam jaringan keilmuan Islam pada abad ke-19. Riwayat pendidikannya di lingkungan pesantren dan pusat keilmuan Makkah memberikan landasan kuat bagi pembentukan pemahamannya terhadap hadis. Karya-karya beliau menunjukkan penggunaan hadis secara konsisten dalam pembahasan fikih dan akhlak dengan pendekatan yang mengikuti tradisi ulama klasik. Melalui karya-karya tersebut, ajaran dan pandangan Syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani tersebar luas dan dijadikan rujukan di berbagai pesantren. Kontribusinya terhadap studi hadis tidak hanya tampak dari produktivitas penulisannya, tetapi juga dari pengaruhnya dalam membentuk pola pengajaran hadis di Nusantara. Oleh karena itu, beliau dapat ditempatkan sebagai salah satu figur penting dalam sejarah perkembangan studi hadis di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *Nawawi al-Bantani; Studi Hadits; Ulama Indonesia*

Introduction

The study of ḥadīth in Indonesia has a long and distinctive historical trajectory, commencing with the arrival of Islam in the Nusantara archipelago between the 7th and 13th centuries CE, where ḥadīth was introduced alongside the Qur'ān through trade routes and Sufi missionary activities. In its early phases, ḥadīth scholarship remained largely applicative and integrated with other disciplines such as fiqh and taṣawwuf, without rigid theoretical compartmentalization, as evidenced in the 17th century through figures like Nuruddin ar-Raniri and Abdul Rauf as-Singkili. A significant advancement occurred in the 19th century, when networks between Nusantara scholars and the Middle East intensified, leading to more systematic codification and commentaries on ḥadīth. Although ḥadīth studies in Indonesia experienced relative stagnation until the late 20th century, they have since undergone rapid development in the contemporary era through the establishment of dedicated ḥadīth programs in Islamic higher education institutions and the publication of analytical works, rendering them an integral component of both the pesantren tradition and modern academic discourse (Firdaus, 2023).

In the 19th century—a golden era for scholarly networks between the Nusantara and the Hijaz—several prominent ḥadīth specialists emerged contemporaneously with Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani (1813–1897 CE), including Shaykh Mahfudz at-Tarmasi from Pacitan, who emphasized methodological and theoretical dimensions of ḥadīth; Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, influential in Mecca; and Shaykh Daud al-Fatani, active in the Jawi textual tradition in Patani. These figures, alongside others such as Shaykh Abdul Hamid Kudus and Shaykh Muhammad Khatib

Sambas, taught extensively in the Masjid al-Ḥarām and Madinah, strengthening the transmission of ḥadīth chains (sanad) and disseminating knowledge through commentaries and instruction to students from Southeast Asia (Faizi, 2024).

Among these contemporaneous ḥadīth scholars, Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani occupies a central position as an intellectual master of the pesantren tradition, distinguished by his broader and more prolific contributions, particularly through works such as *Tanqīḥ al-Qawl al-Ḥathīth fī Sharḥ Lubāb al-Ḥadīth* and *Qāmi' al-Ṭughyān*, which not only provide textual and intertextual explications of ḥadīth but also integrate them with the socio-cultural context of the Nusantara. In contrast to Shaykh Mahfudz at-Tarmasi's greater focus on methodological rigor, Nawawi excelled in a practical and systematic approach that facilitated comprehension among pesantren students, thereby establishing his works as primary references within the *kitab kuning* (classical yellow books) curriculum and accelerating the dissemination of ḥadīth knowledge across Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

Previous studies have addressed aspects of Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's contributions to ḥadīth scholarship, including van Bruinessen's (1996) portrayal of him as an intellectual master of the pesantren tradition, Nurzakka's (2021) analysis of *Tanqīḥ al-Qawl*, and Burhanuddin et al.'s (2020) contemporary examination of his oeuvre in general. Other works, such as Arwansyah and Masruri (2022), concentrate on Nawawi's commentary methodology in ḥadīth, while Fathurahman (2017) highlights his role in fostering Islamic intellectualism in Indonesia. Nonetheless, in-depth investigations specifically dedicated to his intellectual role in the development of ḥadīth studies in Indonesia remain limited, leaving considerable scope for further exploration.

This study aims to analyze the intellectual contribution of Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani to ḥadīth studies in Indonesia, with particular emphasis on his relevant works, commentary methodology, and impact on the pesantren tradition and sanad transmission. Employing a historical-analytical approach, the research seeks to enrich understanding of the legacy of Nusantara scholars in advancing ḥadīth scholarship and its enduring relevance in the contemporary context

Method

The research method used in this study is qualitative research with a library research approach. This research was conducted by collecting various relevant data and written information, such as books, journals, scientific articles, manuscripts, and books by Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani

that discuss hadith. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to examine and gain an in-depth understanding of Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani's thoughts and contributions to the development of hadith science.

In the research process, the collected data was analyzed using descriptive-analytical methods. The first step was to search for data and historical information related to the focus of the research, such as the biography of Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani, his works related to hadith, and his thoughts in this field. After that, the data was interpreted and combined to produce a comprehensive understanding of him as an important figure in the study of hadith in the archipelago, to enrich the study of hadith in Indonesia. Thus, this study is expected to explain in detail his intellectual legacy, which is still relevant today.

Results and Discussion

The Life of Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani

To gain a deeper understanding of him, the first step is to examine his background, particularly his origins and the social environment that shaped his capacity as an expert in Islamic studies. This prominent scholar is widely known as Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani among Muslims in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. His full name is Muhammad Nawawi Abu 'Abd al-Mu'ti bin Umar bin 'Arabi bin al-Jawi al-Bantani. He was born in the village of Tanara, located in the Tirtayasa area, Serang Regency, Banten Province (now part of West Java). He died in the holy land of Mecca in 1314 Hijri or 1897 AD after devoting his life to studying and teaching knowledge. His final resting place is in a cemetery near the tomb of Sayyidah Khadijah, and not far from the graves of Asma bint Abu Bakar and Abdullah bin Zubair, who were companions of the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

Sheikh Nawawi's parents were KH. Umar bin 'Arabi, who worked as a teacher of Islamic studies in the Tanara region and held the position of penghulu (religious leader) recognized by the Dutch colonial administration. Both of his parents came from the same region. In terms of birth order, Sheikh Nawawi was the eldest son among several siblings, namely Ahmad Shihabuddin Said, Tamim, Abdullah, and two sisters named Syakila and Syahria. Genealogically, he was recorded as the twelfth generation of the lineage of Maulana Syarif Hidayatullah, popularly known as Sunan Gunung Jati from Cirebon. The same lineage also produced the first Sultan of Banten, Maulana Hasanuddin. From childhood, this noble family heritage had a significant influence on Sheikh Nawawi's intellectual and spiritual development.

Sheikh Nawawi's religious education began at an early age under his father's guidance, particularly in theology, Arabic grammar, Qur'anic interpretation, and Islamic law. His intellectual journey continued to Mecca, the holy land, where he lived as an academic and teacher. He died in the Syi'ib "Ali" area of Mecca on 25 Shawwal 1314 Hijri or 1897 AD, at the age of about 84. Important figures such as Ibn Hajar and Asma bint Abu Bakr ash-Shiddiq are buried in the Ma'la cemetery, his final resting place. To this day, his scholarly contributions, including major works such as *Minhāj ath-Thālibīn* by Imam an-Nawawi, which he studied, remain important literature in Islamic studies.

Educational History of Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani

When he was five years old, he was raised by his father, Umar bin Araby, who founded the first Islamic boarding school in the region. Among the subjects studied were Islamic jurisprudence, theology, Arabic linguistics, and exegesis of the Qur'an. He and his two brothers, Ahmad and Tamim, studied under Kyai Sahal in Banten and Kyai Yusuf in Purwakarta. He went to Cikampek, West Java, for three years to study language in East Java. At the age of fifteen, he left for Mecca to perform the Hajj pilgrimage and expand his knowledge. After living there for three years, he was given the opportunity to return to his home in Tanara. However, the political situation in his homeland, which was still under Dutch colonialism, and his academic life in Mecca attracted him to return to Mecca and settle in the Syi'ib Ali region until his death. (Natsir, n.d.)

During his stay in Mecca, Sheikh Muhammad Nawawi studied under the guidance of prominent figures such as Sayyid Ahmad Zaini Dahlan, Sayyid Ahmad Nahrawi, and Sayyid Ahmad Dimyati at the Grand Mosque. His intellectual horizons expanded further after studying under Sheikh Muhammad Khotib Al-Hambali in Medina and establishing scholarly connections with Indonesian scholars such as Sheikh Khotib As-Sambasi and Sheikh Yusuf Sumbawani. To expand his network of sanad outside the Hijaz region, he also undertook scholarly journeys to Egypt and Syria to study under Yusuf Samulaweni, Al-Nakhrawy, and Abdul Hamid Daghestani. After completing his long academic journey, he then worked as a teacher at the Grand Mosque and dedicated himself to education for approximately thirty years (Hidayat, 2019). Before going to Mecca to pursue further education, Sheikh Nawawi studied under his influence, which spread to various Islamic boarding schools throughout the archipelago. Snouck Hurgronje noted that for three decades, Sheikh Nawawi consistently dedicated himself in Mecca to studying all branches of Islamic knowledge. In addition to focusing on his personal intellectual

development, he also emerged as a leader who facilitated and eased access to education for students from Java in the holy land. He went on the hajj in 1830.

The Works of Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani In The Field of Hadith

To ensure that his writings were accurate and of high quality, Sheikh Nawawi always consulted with leading scholars in the process of compiling his works. They would first read and review his manuscripts before publication. Because of this process, the results were not only extensive but also of high quality (Natsir, n.d.). His works are widely distributed throughout Egypt, Syria, and many other cities in the Islamic world, as evidenced by the numerous cities where he published them. Sheikh Nawawi's works are highly sought after by students and scholars due to their easy-to-understand language and rich meaning. He was given the titles Ayan 'Ulama al-Qarn al-Rabi' 'Asyar li al-Hijrah, al-Imam al-Muhaqqiq wa al-Fahhamah al-Mudaqqiq, and Sayyid 'Ulama al-Hijaz due to his extraordinary reputation. Some of Sheikh Nawawi's important works in the field of hadith include:

A. Tanqih al-Qaul Syarh Lubab al-Hadis

According to him in the introduction to his book, *Tanqih al-Qaul al-Hatsits*, which means "brief revision," Imam Suyuthi's *Tafsir Lubab al-Hadith* contains many differences and errors (*tahrif*) (Nawawi, n.d., p. 2).

"The author's initiative in writing this work was to provide commentary on the book Lubbab al-Hadis, considering that its contents have undergone many deviations and changes because there is no work that explains it. In addition, this commentary was written in response to the wishes of Javanese scholars who have discussed the status of this book at length."

This book not only contains hadiths, but also discusses relevant concepts of hadith science. Many important concepts are explained. These include explanations of the matn of hadith, the meaning of sanad, the difference between sanad and isnad, and the definition of sahih hadith. This book, known as the explanation of Imam Suyuti's book of hadith, comprises 65 pages in total, including the introduction and table of contents (Mahdy, 2016).

Although he was born in the archipelago, he used Arabic to write this book and all his other works. This was the result of several years of study in the Middle East, where he demonstrated extraordinary abilities. The main book, which contains four hundred hadiths of the Prophet, was adapted for the compilation of this explanatory book. The 400 hadiths were divided into 42 themes, with 10 hadiths in each. Imam Suyuti

compiled several hadiths, but he did not mention their sanad (Suryadilaga et al., 2010, p. 34) and immediately mention the text (Nashir, 2014, p. 29) all hadiths. In addition, he claims that every hadith included in his book is authentic ('Itr, 1994, p. 2) Aqidah, worship, muamalah, and morals are very diverse themes in this book.

B. Nasaih al-'Ibad Syarh 'ala Al-Munbihat al-Istidad li Yaum al-Ma'ad

This book provides guidance on how to prepare for the Day of Judgment. It is a commentary on the book by Syihabuddin Ahmad bin Ali bin Muhammad bin Ahmad asy-Syafi'i bin Hajar al-Asqalani. It contains forty hadiths about the Day of Judgment.

C. Sahih Muslim Syarh by an-Nawawi

Syarah Syarh an-Nawawi on Sahih Muslim, which is one of the most respected collections of authentic hadiths. Muslim scholars around the world use this explanatory book as a primary reference in studying and understanding the Prophet's hadiths.

D. Riyad As-Sholihin

This hadith literature occupies a very prominent position among the Muslim communities of the archipelago, given its comprehensive coverage of various dimensions of life. In it, readers can find relevant hadith guidance on issues ranging from ethics and morals to worship practices and principles of social interaction or muamalah.

The Contribution of Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani To Hadith Studies

Thanks to the support of his students, his works were widely distributed. A national Islamic figure in Indonesia, Imam Nawawi al-Bantani's teachers greatly contributed to Islamic education and the national struggle. He was a renowned scholar from Banten who lived from 1813 to 1897. He was a muhaddith, faqih, and mufassir (Burhanuddin & Qudsy, 2019).

In addition, he has many monumental works. Some of his important contributions to the study of hadith in Indonesia include:

A. Hadith Transmission System

The scholar Nawawi al-Bantani was very careful in narrating hadith. To ensure that the hadith he conveyed had a valid and accountable chain of transmission, he adhered strictly to the rules of narration in his scholarly practice. He avoided using hadith that contradicted the Qur'an or other hadith that were considered authentic. This selective approach demonstrates Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani's commitment to preserving the purity of Islamic teachings and his role as a scholar who upholds integrity and credibility in the tradition of hadith scholarship (Hasibuan & Imawan, 2024).

B. The Dissemination of Hadith Knowledge

By teaching at many Islamic boarding schools and mosques and writing a lot of easily accessible hadith literature, Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani greatly helped spread hadith knowledge throughout Indonesia. He is known as a teacher of scholars and prominent figures in the spread of Islam, and his work has had a significant impact on the development of Islam in the archipelago. Due to his strong expertise in Islamic studies and his numerous works, which are recognized by the scholarly community both domestically and internationally, he has received this recognition. As mentioned earlier, although he was born in Banten, he spent most of his life in the Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia. He was assigned to replace his teacher, Sheikh Ahmad Khatib Sambas, when his teacher resigned from his position as Imam of the Grand Mosque due to his intelligence and extraordinary dedication. In addition to performing his duties as Imam at the Grand Mosque, Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani also participated in teaching and held halaqah, which were attended by students from all over the world.

C. Its influence on Muhadis Nusantara

Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani greatly influenced muhadiths in the archipelago. His works made him a primary reference for scholars in the archipelago for the study of hadith. Therefore, Sheikh Nawawi is considered the founder of Islamic schools in Indonesia. In intellectual tradition, this can be referred to as a "springhead." He participated in Islamic science seminars throughout the country. Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani wrote many books to share his knowledge.

D. Engagement with the Islamic World

He contributed to hadith research throughout the Islamic world, not only in the archipelago. He wrote many books on tafsir, tasawuf, and fiqh, as well as numerous translations that helped scholars around the world. His tafsir of the verses of the Qur'an is one of his most important works, which has helped Muslims in Indonesia and around the world.

The Development of Hadith Studies In The Archipelago In The 19th Century

In the 19th century, Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani was among the Javanese youths who went to Mecca to study religion. He stayed there for quite a long time, as did many other students from the archipelago. His main goal was to deepen his knowledge, but during his journey he also became involved in Islamic scholarship, which at that time was centered in Mecca. It was from this environment that the foundations of Sheikh Nawawi's religious thinking were formed. While in Mecca, Sheikh Nawawi was directly exposed to the strong Islamic scholarly tradition in the field of

Sharia. This influenced his view of Islamic teachings. Whereas previously the Islamic tradition in the archipelago had emphasized Sufism, this experience gave rise to a new tendency that placed greater emphasis on Sharia. This change took place gradually and became part of the intellectual process he underwent (Hakim, n.d.).

At the same time, several other prominent scholars of the archipelago emerged, such as Kiai Ahmad Rifa'i, Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, and Shaykh Mahfudz at-Tarmasi. Compared to Shaykh Mahfudz, who was known for his specialization in hadith, Shaykh Nawawi did not place hadith as a separate main subject of study. Nevertheless, hadith still held an important position in his thinking and works (Muhammad, Imawan, & Majid, 2023, p. 300).

When Sheikh Nawawi returned to the archipelago, either directly or through the dissemination of his works, the way of thinking he brought from Mecca began to have an influence. His books were studied in various Islamic boarding schools and became a reference in understanding Sharia law. Through this channel, Sheikh Nawawi's thinking helped drive changes in the direction of Islamic scholarship in the archipelago, including an increased focus on hadith as a source of teaching (Firdaus et al., n.d.).

Nawawi remained honest regardless of his network of scholars. He was greatly influenced in his intellectual life by learning from teachers who were experts in their respective fields. In the field of hadith, Nawawi contributed to hadith literacy in the 19th century AD. His work *Tanqih al-Qaul* had a significant influence among Muslims in Indonesia, including Islamic boarding schools and community religious study groups. However, it was not the only book on *fiqh al-hadith* written by Nawawi.

The Dissemination of Hadith Works by Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani In Islamic Boardings Schools

His works have been widely distributed in Islamic boarding schools for quite some time. His books are not only distributed, but also studied and taught in schools. Therefore, Sheikh Nawawi's thoughts on hadith have become more popular and have become part of the scientific tradition of Islamic boarding schools in the archipelago. Many Islamic boarding schools have used Sheikh Nawawi's hadith books as teaching materials. This situation shows that his ideas have been well received in Islamic boarding schools. Students continue to gain knowledge about the content and understanding of Sheikh Nawawi's hadith through continuous instruction (Amin, 2019).

K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, a scholar from Jombang who studied directly under Sheikh Nawawi, was instrumental in disseminating Sheikh Nawawi's hadith works to Islamic boarding schools, especially in Java. Since then, Sheikh Nawawi's hadith works began to be widely used and referenced in pesantren education. Until around 1990, many of his works were still used as teaching materials. Some of them were even studied in regular classes for beginner and advanced students ("Perjalanan Hidup Imam Nawawy Al-Bantany", n.d.).

The way the books are taught shows this influence. The explanations provided are clear and detailed, making it easier for students to understand the content of the hadith. The pesantren tradition emphasizes careful reading of texts and deepening of meaning. Sheikh Nawawi's hadith works are still used in a number of pesantren to this day. This shows that the scholarly tradition he created still exists. Through his hadith books, Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani contributed greatly to the development of the discipline of hadith in pesantren throughout the archipelago (Amin, 2019).

According to Sheikh Nawawi, education is aimed at achieving Allah's pleasure and happiness in the hereafter, while also freeing humans from ignorance, encouraging the advancement of Islam, and maintaining its continuity through scientific foundations. In addition, education is also a form of gratitude for the gifts of reason and physical health. This attitude of gratitude is reflected in three dimensions, namely understanding and mastery of knowledge (cognitive), feelings of joy and inner acceptance (affective), and the utilization of Allah's blessings in accordance with His will in behavior and spiritual life (psychomotor and spiritual).

Conclusions

Nusantara scholars include Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani, who contributed greatly to the advancement of Islamic scholarship, especially hadith. His strong view of Islamic teachings in terms of sharia was shaped by his educational journey and life in the Nusantara and Mecca. He wrote books on hadith, one of which is still used and studied in Islamic boarding schools to this day.

The existence and use of Sheikh Nawawi's hadith works in Islamic boarding schools shows that his influence continues from generation to generation. Through the teaching of these books, Sheikh Nawawi's hadith thoughts are passed on to students and scholars after him. The network of students and Islamic boarding schools, especially through the role of figures such as K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, helped strengthen the dissemination of these works. Thus, Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani can be regarded as a

religious figure who made a real contribution to the development of hadith studies in the archipelago.

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