

**THE ENDURANCE OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN
ISLAMIC SOUTHEAST ASIA: A STUDY OF
SULTANAH SAFIATUDDIN (R. 1641-1675)**

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Master's Study Program of Islamic Studies at the Faculty of
Islamic Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts (M.A.)



by:

Sofi Ghoniyah

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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNASIONAL INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

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The Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam experienced its heyday in the first half of the 17th century. Throughout its history, Aceh Darussalam has been inextricably linked to the role of women. Acehnese women played a multitude of roles in political affairs, serving as court officials and even assuming the role of state leader. The emergence of women as royal leaders was not entirely unexpected, given that Acehnese women had been actively involved in court affairs during the reign of previous kings. Sultanah Safiatuddin, the first queen of Aceh, was able to maintain her reign for almost 35 years without any coups or assassination attempts. This study aims to discuss the factors that enabled Sultanah Safiatuddin to maintain her rule for so long. Although Sultanah Safiatuddin was the first queen of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam, she had the same legal sovereignty as her male predecessors. This sovereignty is evidenced by the use of titles, coins, and the royal seal. During her tenure as ruler of Aceh, Sultanah Safiatuddin's reputation for wisdom, the support of court officials, and the influence of scholars contributed to her position as the leader of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam. Accounts of Safiatuddin's wisdom are documented in both Acehnese and Western manuscripts and archived. Her effective leadership earned the loyalty of the nobles, who provided invaluable assistance in governance. The scholars who supported her also had a significant impact on the challenges posed by scholars who rejected the leadership of a woman.

Keywords: *Sultanah Safiatuddin, Leadership, Supporters, Sovereignty, Aceh Darussalam.*

ملخص البحث

كانت مملكة آتشيه دار السلام مملكة إسلامية مملكة قوية ومشهورة من قبل المجتمع الدولي كواحدة من الممالك الخمس الكبرى الإسلامية. شهدت هذه المملكة ذروتها في النصف الأول من القرن السابع عشر. تاريخياً، لا يمكن فصل آتشيه دار السلام عن دور المرأة. لعبت نساء آتشيه العديد من الأدوار في الشؤون السياسية كمسؤولات في القصر، بل وأصبحن سلطانات. إن ظهور النساء كسلطانات آتشيه ليس مفاجئاً للغاية لأن نساء آتشيه خلال الملوك السابقين لعبن دوراً نشطاً في شؤون القصر. واستطاعت السلطانة صفية الدين، ملكة آتشيه الأولى، أن تحافظ على حكمها قرابة 35 عاماً دون أي انقلابات أو محاولات اغتيال. يهدف هذا البحث إلى مناقشة العوامل التي أدت إلى احتفاظ السلطانة صفية الدين بسلطته لفترة طويلة. وعلى الرغم من أن السلطانة صفية الدين كانت أول سلطانية في مملكة آتشيه دار السلام، إلا أنها كانت تتمتع بالسيادة القانونية مثل أسلافها الذكور. وتظهر هذه السيادة في استخدام الألقاب والعملات المعدنية وكذلك الأختام الملكية. شخصية السلطانة وحكمتها أثناء قيادتها لآتشيه، ودعم مسؤولي القصر والعلماء المؤثرين عزز مكانتها كزعيمة لمملكة آتشيه دار السلام. تم تسجيل البيانات المتعلقة بحكمة صفية الدين في مخطوطات من آتشيه والغرب. وبسبب حسن قيادتها، أعطى النبلاء ولائهم لصفية الدين وساعدوها كثيراً في الحكم. كما كان لرجال الدين الذين دعموها تأثير كبير على التحديات التي جاءت من العلماء الذين رفضوا قيادة المرأة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السلطانة صفية الدين، القيادة، الأنصار، السيادة، آتشيه دار السلام.

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I would like to express my gratitude to God Almighty, who, despite I am not an abidah, has granted me the opportunity to achieve my dreams one by one and facilitated all my affairs in such a way that I have been able to complete this thesis in a satisfactory manner.

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To the faculty staff,

I would like to express my gratitude to Kak Dhita, who has consistently provided exemplary care and support, even going so far as to forego her weekend days off to assist with preparations for my thesis defense. I would also like to acknowledge Kak Fakhriyan, Kak Dzakiyyah, and Kak Naufal for their invaluable contributions. May you all continue

to enjoy good health and happiness. I would like to express my gratitude for your patience and understanding.

In this paragraph, I would like to state that, at this time, this thesis represents my most significant academic endeavor. This thesis represents a significant investment of effort on my part. Despite the numerous shortcomings, I have striven to do my best. It has not been an easy process, but I am grateful to have completed it. Hopefully, it will motivate me in the future to continue learning. I will remember that I was once able to write this, and I will undoubtedly be able to continue my education in the future.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

By 1297, Sumatra had embraced Islam. This was marked by the discovery of tombstones in the ancient cemetery of *Geudong*. In 1323, Ibn Battuta visited Sumatra, which had established a well-organized sultanate and international relations around the Indian Ocean with China. During his time, Pasai issued gold coins, sent ships to major Asian ports, and developed the Malay writing system using Arabic script. Pasai was the largest center of Islamic learning in Southeast Asia and a producer of silk.¹ Ibn Battuta also noted that the kingdom he visited was ruled by a religious sultan of the Shafii school who was highly respected by his people. The sultan was Malik al-Zahir.²

At the end of the 15th century, the Sultanate of Aceh was established on the ruins of small kingdoms that later became the vassal areas of Aceh, called *Nanggro*, headed by an *Uleebalang*. The appointed *Uleebalang* was the king who had previously ruled the small kingdoms. In 1526, the previously victorious Pasai became part of the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam.³

The Sultanate of Aceh became the strongest Muslim power in Southeast Asia in the 16th century. The sultanate controlled almost the entire northern part of the island. The sultanate was centered in the city of Banda Aceh, which was then the center of trade and a transit port in the Malacca Strait region. Since the end of the 15th century, the Sultanate of Aceh controlled the trading ports in the northern region, further strengthening its position. The Sultanate of Aceh is the only sultanate in the Sumatra region that is recognized by Westerners as having political value.⁴ The Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam was recognized as one of the Islamic kingdoms that belonged to the Big Five Islamic kingdoms at that time. The other four were Ottoman Turkey centered in Istanbul, the Kingdom of Morocco in North Africa, the Kingdom of Isfahan in Persia, and the Mughal Empire in India.⁵

In the early 17th century, Aceh was a powerful maritime kingdom that was independent in trade. The sultanate had extensive international relations.⁶ The early to mid-17th century was the peak of Aceh's heyday, beginning with Iskandar Muda's accession to

¹ Anthony Reid, *Menuju Sejarah Sumatera* (Jakarta: KITLV press, 2011), 5.

² Ibn Battuta, *Travels in India and Africa 1325-1354* (London: Routledge, 1929), 273–74.

³ *Sejarah Pendidikan Aceh* (Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1984), 16.

⁴ Taslim Batubara, “Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah al-Qahhar: Sang Penakluk dari Kesultanan Aceh Darussalam” 1, no. 1 (2020).

⁵ A. Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1977), 141.

⁶ Wahidin and Warisman, *Sosiohistoris Islam Asia Tenggara* (Riau: Kali Media, 2021), 67.

the throne in 1607. It was also a time when Islamic science and culture flourished throughout the Aceh kingdom.⁷

Women in Acehnese society are a factor that cannot be ignored.⁸ Accounts of women's political power are rare in Malay manuscripts, but Aceh has a different history. *Hikayat Aceh* mentions that Sultan Iskandar Muda's grandmother once took over the leadership of the Sultanate of Aceh because her son, Sultan Salah ad-Din, was incompetent and useless.⁹ The role of women in the Kingdom of Aceh has been seen since the reign of Sultan Alaidin Riayat Syah al-Mukammil (r. 1589-1604), where women have gained an honorable position in the community. They even hold important positions in the palace, such as Malahayati, who became the head of palace protocol and led 2000 female soldiers, whose association was named as *Armada Inong Balee*.¹⁰

Aceh was famous for its tradition of women playing an important role in society. The best example of this is the reign of four queens (sultanahs) in the country of Aceh from 1641 to 1699.¹¹ The leadership of four women in the government of Aceh for more than half a century can be considered successful.¹² The four queens who ruled the Sultanate of Aceh for nearly 60 years from 1641 to 1699 were Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah (1641-1675), Sultanah Nurul Alam Naqiatuddin Syah (1675-1678), Sultanah Inayat Zakiatuddin Syah (1678-1688), and Sultanah Kamalatuddin Syah (1688-1699). The emergence of female leaders in the Sultanate of Aceh was not unnatural, as previous leaders had involved women in the sultanate system, such as admirals of the navy and female regiments of palace guards.¹³

The appointment of women as queens is not just a case of strong men using helpless women as puppets. Acehnese women did not only play the role of "domestic" people, but Acehnese noble women also actively played their roles and were involved in trading activities.¹⁴

⁷ *Sejarah Pendidikan Aceh*, 3.

⁸ H. Mohammad Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Medan: Waspada, 1981), 380.

⁹ Jacqueline Aquino Siapno, *Gender, Islam, Nationalism and the State in Aceh: The Paradox of Power, Co-Optation and Resistance*, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2013), 55, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315029078>.

¹⁰ Muhammad Thalal and Muliadi Kurdi, *Ulama Aceh dalam melahirkan human resource di Aceh* (Banda Aceh, Indonesia: Yayasan Aceh Mandiri, 2010), 83.

¹¹ Amirul Hadi, "ACEH IN HISTORY: Preserving Traditions and Embracing Modernity," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 37, no. 2 (April 14, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v37i2.92>.

¹² Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, 1:380–81.

¹³ Rd Siti Sa'adah, "Ratu-Ratu Aceh Abad Ke-17 M" 13, no. 2 (2007): 219–31, <https://pips.fitk.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/al-turats/article/view/4263>.

¹⁴ Anthony Reid, "Female Roles in Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia," 2024.

It is interesting to discuss why and how a woman became a leader in an Islamic kingdom. Western accounts describe the Sultanah as a female monarch who was able to create stories and shape her figure. Tavernier, a French merchant and traveler, noted that the idea of female rule had become a common belief in Aceh.¹⁵ Thomas Bowrey, an English merchant, also noted that Aceh's queens were leaders respected by their people.¹⁶ Aceh's first three queens managed to maintain their rule until their natural deaths - not by being killed or poisoned like some of their predecessors - even though women were very rarely at the helm of a kingdom.¹⁷

This research discusses why and how Aceh's first queen, Safiatuddin Syah, ruled her kingdom and managed to survive for more than three decades. Her long reign was inextricably linked to her leadership style and the support of the great men around her, which will be discussed in later chapters.

1.2 Literature Review

According to Nordin, Sultanah Safiatuddin was the first woman to be appointed Sultan in the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam. She succeeded her husband, Iskandar Tsani, who died in 1641 without a male heir. Safiatuddin ruled Aceh for about 35 years and prioritized education, economy and religion in her reign. She managed to make progress in education, culture and the country's economy, such as gold currency and taxation of foreign merchants. She was a Sultanah who was highly respected for her wisdom, compassion and concern for women.¹⁸

As mentioned by Aah Syafaah, Sultanah Safiatuddin made great contributions to education, literature, and the promotion of Islamic values in Indonesia.¹⁹ This is confirmed by Basri that Sultanah's efforts to improve human resources in Aceh included supporting ulama by providing scholarships abroad, supporting the construction of madrasas and libraries, and bringing in foreign scholars. In terms of education, Aceh's progress can be compared to the heyday of science during the era of Harun al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun.²⁰

¹⁵ Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), 69.

¹⁶ Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal 1669-1679*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

¹⁷ Sher Banu A. L. Khan, *Sovereign Women in a Muslim Kingdom: The Sultanahs of Aceh, 1641-1699* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), 210.

¹⁸ Shah Rul Anuar Nordin et al., "KEPEMIMPINAN WANITA DALAM KESULTANAN ACEH DAR AL-SALAM," 2018.

¹⁹ Aah Syafaah, "PERAN TOKOH WANITA PADA MASA KOLONIALISME," *Jurnal Tamaddun: Jurnal Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam* 5, no. 2 (November 30, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.24235/tamaddun.v5i2.2122>.

²⁰ Hasan Basri M Nur, "Kiprah Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Dalam Memajukan Pendidikan di Kerajaan Aceh Darussalam," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora* 1, no. 1 (2024).

Irawati states that Sultanah Safiatuddin ascended the throne at a time when women's leadership was still controversial because the prevailing Islamic thought in society still considered it taboo for women to lead a country. This objection was challenged by scholars who considered women to be illegitimate leaders. But the challenge was successfully suppressed by two scholars who supported her, namely Nuruddin ar-Raniry and Abdurrauf as-Singkili. During her time in power, there were conflicts and attempts to undermine her authority, but with her ingenuity, Sultanah Safiatuddin launched her political communication strategy by involving key community groups, including men, who could then help her overcome conflicts and manage interests between different groups and institutions.²¹ Eventually, however, Ozay mentions that economic decentralization and political changes affected Sultanah's reign.²²

Notwithstanding the challenges that arose during his tenure, Sher Banu asserted that Safiatuddin demonstrated an ability to effectively navigate these difficulties. Sultanah Safiatuddin's leadership style and political communication can be seen in the way she communicated with the VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie), a Dutch trading company that was trying to dominate the market in Southeast Asia. Her wisdom can be seen in the way she refused to pay for jewelry that her late husband, Iskandar Tsani, had ordered at an inflated price. She did not allow the VOC to control the port of Aceh and tended not to implement the agreements made between Aceh and the Netherlands because she saw Aceh as so disadvantaged by the agreement. In addition, Sultanah Safiatuddin never allowed the Dutch to act to punish the mistakes made by the Acehnese people.²³ Irfanullah adds that besides her diplomacy with the VOC, Sultanah Safiatuddin was also good at putting himself in the middle. She successfully handled a violent dispute between Nuruddin al-Raniry and one of Hamzah Fansury's followers and brought the situation back to stability.²⁴

After the leadership of Sultanah Safiatuddin, the next three successors were also women. According to Saadah, there are supporting and inhibiting factors for the leadership of the Sultanahs of Aceh. Supporting factors include political, sociological, and theological factors. Political factors that supported the coronation of the first Sultanah were the crown

²¹ Marlinda Irawati, "Women's Political Communications: Assessing Leadership In Queen Safiatuddin In Aceh Darussalam In The 17th Century," *InterKomunika* 1, no. 1 (September 9, 2016): 65, <https://doi.org/10.33376/ik.v1i1.6>.

²² Mehmet Ozay, "Women as Rulers Phenomenon in Southeast Asian Islamic Society: The Queens of Aceh," 2011.

²³ Khan, *Sovereign Women in a Muslim Kingdom*.

²⁴ Gumilar Irfanullah and Varidlo Fuad, "Jejak Moderasi Beragama di Kesultanan Aceh di bawah Pemerintahan Sultanah Safiatuddin," *Jurnal Tamaddun : Jurnal Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam* 10, no. 1 (July 1, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.24235/tamaddun.v10i1.10572>.

prince crisis and the need to choose a leader so that the country would not be chaotic. Sociological factors began during the leadership of Sultan Alaidin Riayat Syah, where women were actively involved in the political affairs of the state. He appointed Keumalahayati as Admiral of the Fleet, Cut Limpah as head of the "Secret Council" or *Secretraad*. The widows had an organization called *Armada Inong Bale*, which was involved in the resistance against the Portuguese. Under the leadership of Sultan Ali Riayat Syah, there was also a regiment of women palace guards. Given the active participation of women before the Sultanah era, the emergence of women leaders in later times is not too surprising. The theological factor is inseparable from the previous two, where Qur'anic and hadith scholars such as Nuruddin ar-Raniry and Abdurrauf As-Singkili supported women's leadership in terms of religious legality. This support also muted the protests of *Wujudiyah* followers. In the end, however, Kamalatuddin Syah was forced to abdicate due to opposition, the defection of the elites, and the *fatwa* from Mecca.²⁵

Previous studies on the leadership of Sultanah Safiatuddin have been conducted. Despite the excellent exploration in using archives, there is a dearth of analysis to explore more on various aspects of Sultanah Safiatuddin's characteristics and leaderships. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by establishing a link between the figure, leadership style, and support of influential individuals and the Sultanah's long tenure in leadership. Besides discussing the factors of long tenure of Sultanah Safiatuddin's leadership, this research also criticizes the thought of Anthony Reid about Queen's governance's shortcomings, linking between sovereignty and leadership, and mentions the support of *sufi* order that didn't discussed in previous studies.

1.3 Research Questions

There were many reasons for Safiatuddin's long reign as queen. Not only because of the crisis of crown perince or because the elites were forced to crown her, but they also had certain reasons behind the coronation of Iskandar Muda's widow. First of all, this research will answer why and how Safiatuddin ascended the throne, and how was her sovereignty.

Many rulers were unable to remain on the throne because they were incompetent or too weak to lead. However, Safiatuddin, in the midst of a society that was still influenced by Islamic thought that did not consider female leaders to be legitimate heads of state, was actually able to rule until the end of her life with a duration of almost 35 years. Second, this research will answer the question of how Safiatuddin was able to maintain her power.

²⁵ Sa'adah, "Ratu-Ratu Aceh Abad Ke-17 M."

Another important factor is how many followers a leader has to prevent coup attempts and rebellions. Safiatuddin stopped ruling because she died - of natural causes - not because of a rebellion that caused him to be killed. Finally, this study will answer the question of the role of the Sultanah's supporters during her leadership.

1.4 Research Limitations

This research focuses on the reign of the first queen of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam, Sultanah Safiatuddin. This research discusses how Safiatuddin's figure, how her leadership style was, and what support she received so that she could rule long enough.

1.5 Method

The method used in this research is a qualitative method with a historical approach. The data sources used are divided into two, namely primary data sources and secondary data sources. Primary data sources include transliteration of Acehnese manuscripts written in Malay and records of Western travelers who visited Aceh during Safiatuddin's reign. Secondary data sources include articles and books related to the research topic. In the absence of historical sources pertaining to Sultanah Safiatuddin's leadership, particularly in Malay or Arabic, this thesis employs primary sources related to the sultanah's reign as a means of addressing this gap in the historical record. For example, *Bustan al-Salatin*, *Adat Aceh*, *Qanun Meukuta Alam*, and other manuscripts. These manuscripts used as primary sources because this research discusses about the history of Aceh in the 17th century and needs the data written at the time in question.

1.6 Research Outline

A research outline is presented below.

This research is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction, including the background of the research, a literature review, research questions, research limitations, a method, and assumptions. Chapter 2 discusses the figure of Sultanah Safiatuddin, including her biography, how she occupied the throne in place of her husband, the meaning of the title *Zillullah fi al-'Alam* found in her name, and the coins and royal seal that prevailed during her reign. Chapter 3 examines her leadership style, encompassing her stance on education, her approach to women's issues, her diplomatic interactions with the VOC, her discernment, and a critique of Anthony Reid's perspective. Chapter 4 delves into the role of prominent figures in providing support for the Sultanah, which was instrumental in maintaining political stability within the court. It also discusses the

influence of various groups, including the ulama, orang kaya, and Sufi communities. Chapter 5 presents concluding remarks and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: EXAMINING SULTANAH SAFIATUDDIN'S POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY

This chapter presents a biography of Sultanah Taj al-Alam Safiatuddin Syah, beginning with her childhood and concluding with her enthronement. In addition, the title of Sultanah, gold coin, and royal seal during her reign are discussed. This chapter focuses on the discussion of the sovereignty of Sultanah Safiatuddin as the leader of Aceh, a figure who exercised legitimate and recognized power. This sovereignty is evident from the use of titles in her name, including "Sultanah," "*Berdaulat*", and "*Zillullah fi al-Alam*". Additionally, the name and title of Sultanah Safiatuddin are inscribed on gold coins that were in circulation during her reign. Furthermore, the royal stamp, which bears the name of the Sultanah along with the names of her eight predecessors, demonstrates that her sovereignty is equal to that of her predecessors.

2.1 Biography

Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah was the daughter of Sultan Iskandar Muda and his wife Putri Sani Ratna Indra who was the daughter of Maharaja Lela Daeng Mansur known as Teungku Chik Direubee. Her original name was Putri Seri Alam. Her year of birth was estimated to be in the quarter of the 17th century, around 1612/1613 CE, as the age difference with her husband Iskandar Tsani was only one year. Iskandar Tsani was born around 1610/1611. She married Iskandar Tsani in 1620 CE.²⁶ Taj al-Ālam was a laqab – honorific or descriptive epithets – given to her meaning “The crown of the world” to stress her inheritance from the great Iskandar Muda, for taj is the Arabic equivalent of the Sanskrit-derived makota, rendering her laqab synonymous with her father's, Makota Alam.²⁷

When she was young, she studied with Hamzah Fansuri (d. 1590) and became fond of poetry and writing. After she grew up and married, she helped Hamzah Fansuri build a library. She also studied fiqh with Nuruddin ar-Raniry, and although she was a woman, she had knowledge of military science, having been influenced by her brother, Maharaja Lela Abdul Rahim, who was an artillery expert. Putri Seri Alam loved to ride horses and this continued until she became queen later in life.²⁸

²⁶ Irawati, “Women’s Political Communications.”

²⁷ Annabel Teh Teh Gallop, *Malay Seals from the Islamic World of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2019), 80–81.

²⁸ HM Zainuddin, *Srikandi Atjeh* (Medan: Pustaka Iskandar Muda, 1966), 17.

During the reign of her father, Sultan Iskandar Muda (r. 1607-1636), a line of female palace guards was formed from the ranks of volunteers when the Aceh troops attacked Malacca in 1639. This line functioned as a reserve coast guard force in case the Portuguese attacked. At that time, Tajul Alam held the highest position in the line.²⁹

Safiatuddin studied from the age of 7. She studied with Hamzah Fansury (d. 1590), Nuruddin ar-Raniry (d. 1658), Seri Faqih Zainul Abidin Ibnu Daim Mansur, Sheikh Muhyiddin Ali, Sheikh Taqiyuddin Hasan, Sheikh Saifuddin Abdul Qahhar, and other scholars who were great teachers at Jami'ah Baiturrahman. In addition to mastering the sciences of fiqh, government, history, logic, philosophy, Sufism, and literature, Safiatuddin also studied various languages such as Urdu, Arabic, Persian, and Arabic.³⁰ Hamzah Fansury was a Sufi poet who espoused the *Wahdatul Wujud* school of thought. She was proficient in several languages, including Arabic, Persian, and Urdu.³¹ Nuruddin ar-Raniry was a scholar of Hadrami descent who was born in Gujarat. His mother assumed as Malay.³²

According to Hasjmy, the lineage is indisputable: Sultan Alauddin Abdullah Malik Mubin- Malik Munawwar Mahmud Syah - Sultan Salahuddin Syamsu Syah - Sultan Johan Ali Ibrahim Mughayat Syah - Admiral Malik Abdul Kahhar Ali Riayat Syah - Iskandar Muda Meukuta Alam (r. 1607-1636) - Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin (r. 1641-1675).³³ The lack of available data regarding some of the individuals' ancestors precludes further elucidation of these names. It is recommended that this be examined in future research.

Culturally, the eldest son of the Sultan of the Kingdom of Aceh is the heir apparent. If the eldest son is not available, the next oldest son assumes the role. If neither son is able to take over, a council is formed to lead on behalf of the sultan temporarily. This council is usually the sultan's mother or uncle. However, if there is no son who can replace the sultan, then a daughter can step forward as the leader of the kingdom.³⁴

Upon conquering Pahang, Sultan Iskandar Muda brought a son of Sultan Alauddin Mughayat Syah to Aceh Darussalam. Born in 1611, the boy was taken to Aceh at the age of seven³⁵. Sultan Iskandar Muda took care of him and gave him the title Sultan Bungsu

²⁹ Zainuddin, 17.

³⁰ Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu*, 95.

³¹ Abdul Hadi W.M. and L.K. Ara, *Hamzah Fansuri Penyair Sufi Aceh* (Jakarta: Penerbit Lotkala, 1984), 7.

³² Thomas Gibson, *Islamic Narrative and Authority in Southeast Asia from the 16th to the 21st Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 55.

³³ Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu*, 35.

³⁴ Abu TM Raiyan, *Sultanah Dalam Kerajaan Atjeh Darussalam (1641-1699 M)* (Banda Aceh: Pena, 2024), 47.

³⁵ Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu*, 48.

(later known as Sultan Iskandar Tsani). After two years, Sultan Iskandar Muda made the decision to marry Sultan Bungsu to his daughter, Putri Sri Alam Permaisuri. Once the marriage was complete, Sultan Bungsu received another title: Sultan Hussein Syah. Sultan Iskandar informed Syaikh Ibrahim that Sultan Hussein Syah would be named Sultan Mughal and would succeed him as the leader of the kingdom after his death. After ruling for 37 months and 24 days, Sultan Iskandar Muda died and was succeeded by Sultan Mughal, who was later titled Sultan Iskandar Tsani Alauddin Mughayat Syah Johan Berdaulat Zillullah fil Alam. He ascended the throne on the 29th of Rajab, Saturday.³⁶

Hasjmy states definitively that Iskandar Muda had a son prepared to be his successor and made him crown prince. Iskandar Muda executed his son, Meurah Popok, because he committed adultery with a beautiful wife of a young officer. Meurah Popok was the crown prince, loved by Sultan Iskandar Muda. Meurah Popok was a just and wise leader who applied the law regardless of the offender. Iskandar Muda was asked by his servant why he killed his son. Iskandar Muda replied, “*anak mati ada makamnya, tapi kalau hukum mati ke mana akan dicari*” (“Dead son has grave, but if the law dies, where will it be sought?”).³⁷ However, there is still no other source about the story of Meurah Popok, which indicates that further examination of this topic is warranted.

Another account by Reid shows that Iskandar Muda suffered defeat in 1629 in front of Malacca. He killed many of his closest people, even his own son. After he died, his son-in-law Iskandar Tsani succeeded him, but he died in 1641. The court officials wanted to avoid an extreme and absolut system of government, so they appointed four consecutive women as heads of state.³⁸

Sultan Mughal (Sultan Iskandar Tsani) reigned for four years, three months, and seven days before dying on Monday, 7 Dhu’l Qa’dah 1048 AH, as recorded in Adat Aceh.³⁹ The Bustan al-Salatin version states that Sultan Iskandar Tsani ruled for four years (r. 1636-1641), three months, and six days. Sultan Iskandar Tsani died on Monday, 6 Dhu’l Qa’dah 1050 H. Based on these two manuscripts, on that very day, *Paduka Sri Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah Berdaulat Zillullah fil ‘Alam* ascended the throne in place of her husband. Once she was crowned queen, Sultanah Safiatuddin wasted no time in building her husband's tomb more magnificent than any previous burial site. This was a testament to her

³⁶ Rosyid Ridlo and Haniatur Rosyidah, *Bustān As-Salāṭīn (ML 422) Nuruddin Ar-Raniry* (Jakarta: Perpusnas Press, 2024), 31–40.

³⁷ Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu*, 44–45.

³⁸ Reid, *Menuju Sejarah Sumatera*, 7.

³⁹ Ramli Harun and Tjut Rahma, *Adat Aceh* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1985), 29.

undying love for her late husband. He had passed away at the tender age of 30, leaving Safiatuddin to mourn at just 29.⁴⁰

Acehnese elites placed Safiatuddin on the throne without gender being a significant factor. They selected her based on her direct lineage, which was most closely related to her predecessor. The *Orangkaya* unquestionably favored Safiatuddin over another foreign royal son who was not of Acehnese blood, like her predecessor, Iskandar Tsani. The Acehnese elite disliked Iskandar Tsani because he was a foreigner and wasteful, thus a burden on the state. However, the Acehnese accepted Iskandar Tsani as ruler because he was directly appointed by Iskandar Muda. A candidate for ruler had to be supported by the majority of Acehnese *Orangkaya* and ulama. Safiatuddin had the support of both and was accepted as the rightful ruler of Aceh. How long that power would last depended on how she acted as ruler in the future.⁴¹

Tajul Alam's coronation as queen was not free from conflict, but she had great influence and wealth. She was able to mobilize the Aceh royal army under the leadership of her mother's brother, Maharaja Lela. In fact, because of this conflict, a cleric named Faqih Hitam was killed along with several others because they opposed the Sultanah's leadership.⁴²

2.2 The Title of *Zillullah fil 'Alam*

Prophet Muhammad had two main roles: as a messenger of God to deliver revelation to humanity and as the ruler of the world's first Islamic state. Prophet Muhammad founded the first Islamic state in Medina with the Qur'an as its constitution. Prophet Muhammad transformed Medina into an Islamic state with the clear goal of winning the trust of the people of Medina and maintaining it with a constant process of relationship like a statesman. Prophet Muhammad's success in protecting Medina from the threat of Mecca earned him the love of the people of Medina. The concept of an Islamic state was first introduced in Medina and then spread to other regions. The Medina Islamic state had all the instruments of a state, including territory, people, a national language, a divine constitution, a common faith, an administrative machinery, an economic vein, and independence.⁴³

⁴⁰ Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu*, 87.

⁴¹ Khan, *Sovereign Women in a Muslim Kingdom*, 55.

⁴² Syahrizal Abbas, *Corak Pemikiran Hukum Islam Syekh Abdurrauf As-Singkili Studi Terhadap Kitab Mir'at al-Thullab Tentang Hakim Perempuan* (Banda Aceh: Pena, 2003), 29.

⁴³ Burhān al-Dīn Abī al-Wafā Ibrāhīm al-Malikī, *Tabsirat Al-Hukkām Fī Usul al-Aqdiyya Wa Manāhij al-Ahkām* (Riyadh: Dār 'Alim al-Kutub, 2003).

Prophet Muhammad enacted divine law as the law of the land. In Islam, law and state are one. Sharia regulates all components of the state, including the individual affairs of each community. Islam cares for the affairs of the individual as well as the affairs of the state because the state is where a citizen lives, and the law is the rules to form an organized community. The Islamic state under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad was not a theocracy run by priests. The Islamic order did not adopt the *Imamat* system because a Muslim does not require an intermediary to establish a relationship with God. The administrators appointed by the Prophet were not solely theologians, and none of them were Imams. The Islamic Order under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad encompassed both the spiritual and temporal aspects of the life of the Muslim community.⁴⁴

The populace was compelled to adhere to the directives of the caliph. Through the bay'at, the populace bestowed upon the caliph the sultanate. The populace was entitled to hold the caliph accountable for his missteps and to assist the caliph in fulfilling his obligations. Consequently, the caliph would appoint select individuals to form a consultative council, which would deliberate on the challenges facing the state and make decisions based on the outcomes of these discussions. The caliph was vested with all the powers of government: executive, legislative, and judicial. He was able to appoint judges on his behalf and replace them with others at his discretion.⁴⁵

The concept of *khilafah*, as introduced by Prophet Muhammad, is similar to the concept of the Sultan in the kingdom of Aceh Darussalam. Unlike the modern state government system, where the ruler is defined as a person who gets a mandate from the people and is elected based on the most votes, the Sultan in Aceh Darussalam is a leader who gets a mandate from God. Similarly, those who served as judges were said to be Allah's supreme judges.⁴⁶ Malay people considered themselves servants of the king and the law belongs to the king.⁴⁷

The Islamic State of Medina utilized the Qur'an as its constitutional foundation, with the Prophet Muhammad serving as its caliph. However, following the Prophet Muhammad's demise, the Islamic state's constitutional framework, which established the Qur'an and Hadith as its foundational principles, necessitated the involvement of ulama as interpreters. In this instance, Aceh has a unique legal framework based on the Qur'an,

⁴⁴ Işām Sabaru, *Qadi Al-Quda Fī al-Islām* (Beirut: Dar an-Nahda al-Arabiyya, n.d.).

⁴⁵ Yusuf al-Ish, *Ad-Daula al-Umawiyya* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1992).

⁴⁶ Thalal and Kurdi, *Ulama Aceh dalam melahirkan human resource di Aceh*, 33–34.

⁴⁷ Wahidin and Warisman, *Sosiohistoris Islam Asia Tenggara*, 51.

Hadith, *Ijma*, and *Qiyas*, which serve as the primary sources of law for the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam.⁴⁸

The *Kanun Meukuta Alam* was the constitutional document of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam, delineating the fundamental tenets that govern the kingdom. In contemporary parlance, it could be regarded as the country's fundamental law. The *Kanun Meukuta Alam* was frequently referred to in Western literature as the *Adat Meukuta Alam*. The first king to draft it was Sultan Alaiddin Riayat Syah al Kahhar (945-979 H=1539-1579 CE), who was later perfected by Sultan Iskandar Muda Darma Wangsa Perkasa Alam Syah (1016-1045 H= 1607-1636 CE).⁴⁹ In 1645, Sultanah Safiatuddin refined the document and made several changes to organize palace celebrations and ceremonies in greater detail. She also undertook a significant reform of the position of women, establishing a more equitable status for them.⁵⁰

Similarly, the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam implemented the *Hadih-Maja* theory in the distribution of power within the government, as previously described in the *khilafah* theory. The authority was divided into four distinct categories: executive, judicial, legislative, and warfare. The *Majlis Mahkamah Rakyat*, which constituted the judiciary in the government of the Kingdom of Aceh, was not elected by the people; rather, it was constituted by the appointment of individuals from each *mukim* who were deemed to possess the requisite qualifications. The executive power was political power, with the Sultan as head of state. The judicial power was the implementation of the law, which was handled by the *Kadi Malikul Adil*. The legislative power was the authority to make laws, which was in the hands of the people. In a state of war, all power was in the hands of the commander-in-chief of the army.⁵¹

The rulers of Aceh were distinctive in their titles. While they were designated as "Sultan" rather than "Caliph," they exhibited analogous characteristics. Long before the establishment of the Sultanate of Aceh, Aceh had influenced with Middle-Eastern culture. Ibn Battuta visited Samudera Pasai in 1345 on his way to China. He noted that the Sultanate of Samudera Pasai had similarities with the Middle-Eastern Caliphate in some rituals and ceremonies.⁵² Another evidence that shows the influence of Ayyubid is the naming of the Sultan of Samudera Pasai which resembles the names of the Ayyubid Dynasty Caliphs such

⁴⁸ Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu*, 21.

⁴⁹ A. Hasjmy, *Kebudayaan Aceh Dalam Sejarah* (Jakarta: Beuna, 1983), 345.

⁵⁰ Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehnese* (Leiden: Brill, 1906), 5.

⁵¹ Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu*, 122–23.

⁵² R. Michael Feener, Patrick T. Daly, and Anthony Reid, *Mapping the Acehnese Past, Verhandelingen van Het Koninklijk Instituut Voor Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde 268* (Leiden: KITLV press, 2011), 65.

as Malik al-Salih and Malik al-Zahir.⁵³ Sultan Malik Az-Zahir was the one hosting Ibn Battuta at the time, and his wife spoke to Ibn Battuta in Turkish.⁵⁴

The practice of bestowing titles upon rulers continued until the establishment of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam. If Pasai was influenced by the Abbasids in conferring titles upon rulers, the Kingdom of Aceh was influenced by the Ottoman Empire. The title "Zillullah fil 'Alam" had been employed by previous dynasties or kingdoms, one of them using this title was Ottoman Sultans. Due to their authority and vast territories, Ottoman Sultans were bestowed with numerous titles, which served to emphasize the Sultan's power and authority as a powerful ruler and as a religious figure.⁵⁵

Sultan Iskandar Muda was bestowed the title "Paduka Seri Sultan Iskandar Muda Johan Berdaulat Zillullāh fīl 'Ālam." Similarly, Sultan Iskandar Tsani was titled Paduka Seri Sultan Iskandar Thānī 'Alā' al-Dīn Mughāyat Shāh Berdaulat Zill Allāh fī al-'Ālam. In contrast, Sultanah Safiatuddin was titled Paduka Seri Sultanah Taj al-Alam Safiat ad-Din Berdaulat Zill Allah fil 'Ālam. Taj al-Salāṭīn posited that monarchs who pursued the path of the companions of God (wali/saints of Allāh) were deserving of being called khalīfat al-Rahmān (the deputies of the Merciful) and Zill Allāh fī al-'Ālam (the shadow of God on earth).⁵⁶ The term "khilafat al-Rahman" is used to describe the concept of divine sovereignty. This concept posits that the ruler is considered to be God's representative on earth. It serves to reinforce the legitimacy of the ruler and to portray governance as a larger universal order.⁵⁷

The term *berdaulat* is defined as "[the ruler] who has sovereignty," which signifies that a king possesses absolute and legitimate authority. The term "Zillullah fil 'Alam," on the other hand, is understood to mean "God's shadow on earth," and it is believed that this entity is responsible for implementing God's laws and administering the affairs of the people in accordance with God's directives. These titles symbolized a religious meaning in which obeying the ruler was a religious obligation in itself and stood alongside obeying

⁵³ Anthony H. Johns, "Islamization in Southeast Asia: Reflections and Reconsiderations with Special Reference to the Role of Sufism" 1, no. 31 (June 1993): 43–57.

⁵⁴ Bagoes Wiryomartono, *Traditions and Transformations of Habitation in Indonesia: Power, Architecture, and Urbanism* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2020), 42, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3405-8>.

⁵⁵ Dries Raeymaekers and Sebastiaan Derks, *The Key to Power?: The Culture of Access in Princely Courts, 1400-1750* (BRILL, 2016), 108, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004304246>.

⁵⁶ Amirul Hadi, "THE TITLE KHALĪFAT ALLĀH IN 17TH CENTURY ACEH: Concept and Meanings," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 45, no. 1 (August 21, 2021): 63, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v45i1.826>.

⁵⁷ Christopher Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684842>.

God and His Prophet. This finding emphasizes the religious significance of Acehne ruler status, as the quality of being a ruler—whose duty it was to ensure the prosperity of the Muslim community and the implementation of God's religion in the region—entitles them to various noble titles and epithets. In light of al-Raniri's assertion in *Bustan al-Salatin*, it can be inferred that he regarded Aceh Darussalam as a khilāfah state and its rulers as caliphs of God.⁵⁸

In the opening of Mir'at al-Tullab, Abdurrauf al-Singkilī emphasized Safiatuddin's position as a caliphate. He wrote:

الخليفة في تنفيذ أحكام مولاه في الأرض المباركة الجاوية الأشية السلطنة المعظمة الحاقنة المكرمة صفية الدين شاة بردولة ابنة السلطان اسكندر
مود جوهن بردولة

"Khalifah dalam menerapkan hukum-hukum Tuannya di bumi yang diberkahi, bumi Jawi Aceh, Sultanah yang agung dan mulia, Safiatuddin Syah Berdaulat putri Sultan Iskandar Muda Johan Berdaulat".

*"Caliph in applying the laws of his Lord in the blessed earth, earth Jawi Aceh, the great and noble Sultanah, Safiatuddin Syah Berdaulat daughter of Sultan Iskandar Muda Johan Berdaulat".*⁵⁹

Al-Singkilī explicitly mentions the word "*khalifah*" for Safiatuddin, thereby indicating that he is the representative of God who is the leader and in charge of implementing God's law in the land of Aceh.

The designation of the kings as "*Khalifah Allah*" or "God's shadow on earth" signifies the acknowledgment of their right and privilege as God's representatives to rule on earth. Consequently, opposition to the king's rule can be classified as a violation of Islamic teachings, as the Qur'ān commands obedience to Allah, the Prophet, and ulil amri. This concept of the Khalifah Allah is observed in the Malay countries of Brunei, Aceh, Pahang, Kedah, Trengganu, Johor, and the Islamic kings of Yogyakarta.⁶⁰

Safiatuddin held the same title as her predecessors, even al-Rānīrī added a special designation,

*"Syahdan ialah yang sangat tawadunya kepada Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala, maka dianugerainya Allah akan dia lama menyanjung khalifahnya".*⁶¹

⁵⁸ Hadi, "THE TITLE KHALĪFAT ALLĀH IN 17TH CENTURY ACEH," 77–78.

⁵⁹ Abdurrauf as-Singkili, *Mir'ah at-Thullab*, 1672, 3.

⁶⁰ Prof. Dr. Haji Awg Asbol Haji Mail, "KESULTANAN BRUNEI DAN ACEH TRADISIONAL (ABAD KE 14 – 19 MASIHI): SATU PERBANDINGAN KONSEP DAULAT DAN DERHAKA," *RENTAS: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra dan Budaya* 2, no. 1 (July 31, 2023): 139–54, <https://doi.org/10.32890/rentas2023.2.6>.

⁶¹ Ridlo and Rosyidah, *Bustān As-Salāṭīn (ML 422) Nuruddin Ar-Raniry*, 71.

"She indeed was blessed by God with a long reign as His khalifah".⁶²

Safiatuddin was a female ruler of Aceh and was equal to her predecessors. She implemented the basic system of government as the caliphate that had been established since the time the Prophet Muhammad reigned. The term "caliph" is masculine in form and has never been used to refer to a female ruler. Indeed, no female has ever held the title of caliph. The term "Caliph" here refers to a ruler of particular state.⁶³ Safiatuddin's legitimization as caliph is explicitly mentioned by Al-Singkili, although there is no word "caliph" in the prefix of her name. The title "Zill Allah fil 'Ālam" indicates that she was recognized as God's representative in her kingdom.

2.3 Coins

This subchapter discusses the gold coins and royal seal that were in effect during the reign of Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah. Aceh's gold currency is called *deureuham* (dirham). The Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam first issued gold currency during the reign of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah (r. 1537-1568 CE). He requested the assistance of monetary experts from Turkey to create a gold currency, which was subsequently designated as *deureuham*, analogous to the Arabic dirham. Over time, the *deureuham* became known as *meuih*. During the reign of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah al-Mukammal, several forms of currency were in circulation, including gold coins, tin currency designated as *cash*, silver currency referred to as *pardu*, and *tahil*. The value of each currency is as follows: 1600 *casches* equaled 1 *kupang*; 4 *kupang* equaled 1 *deureuham*; 5 *deureuham* (gold money) equaled 4 English schelling; 4 gold money equaled 1 *pardu*; and 4 *pardu* equaled 1 *tahil*. The currency system remained unchanged until the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636 CE). During the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda, a provision was set for gold currency, stipulating that the amount of gold remain unchanged, yet the gold content of one *deureuham* was to be divided into five *deureuham*. Although the actual value of gold had been reduced, its circulating value could still be maintained as before, i.e. 4 *deureuham* of gold remained worth 1 Spanish ringgit in circulation. During the reign of Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah (1641-1675 CE), the daughter of Sultan Iskandar Muda, another reduction in the weight of gold from a *deureuham* was made, and she also reduced the gold content. From the amount of gold needed to forge one Spanish ringgit, she ordered the forging of 6 *deureuham*s by reducing the gold content from 9 to 8 *mutu meuih* or according to Dutch gold counts to 19.2 carats. Nevertheless, the *deureuham* did not change in its circulation value as before. Sultanah Safiatuddin also ordered that all *deureuham* that had been made

⁶² Hadi, "THE TITLE KHALĪFAT ALLĀH IN 17TH CENTURY ACEH," 78.

⁶³ Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 4.

before her reign be collected and then melted down into new *deureuham*. Therefore, *deureuham*s from previous sultans were very difficult to obtain.⁶⁴

In all *deureuham* currency issued by the sultans in the Kingdom of Aceh, the year of manufacture is not stated. This was a deliberate policy designed to ensure the currency's continued circulation value until the reign of the next sultan. After the reign of Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah, there were no more sultans in the Kingdom of Aceh who issued *deureuham* currency.⁶⁵ This shows the ability of Safiatuddin in strengthening the value of her coins during her reign.



Figure 2. 1

The obverse of the gold coin, minted during the reign of Sultanah Safiatuddin, bears the inscription "Paduka Seri Sultanah Tajul Alam," while the reverse side is inscribed with the legend "Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah, Berdaulat." The coin's diameter is 14 millimeters, its weight is 0.60 grams, and its gold content is 17 carats.⁶⁶ In accordance with Tavernier's assertion, the Acehese coin was of superior quality to the Louis currency. One Louis was equivalent to 50 Franks. Tavernier described Aceh's gold coinage as weighing 10 grains, equivalent to 15 sous and 8 deniers (French currency at that time). In contrast, Aceh's tin money weighed 8 grains, equivalent to 16 sous per pound.⁶⁷

The minting of royal coins as a means of buying and selling in the history of the Islamic empire dates back to the time of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. Abd al-Malik b. Marwān minted coins inscribed with pious phrases and Qur'ānic verses with the aim of conveying religious and political messages. The inscriptions on the coins served to assert the sovereignty of the issuing government and to disseminate Islamic teachings. The coins contained the Sura al-Ikhlās, which means an invitation to worship Allah, the One and Only, and that the government is an Islamic government that implements the sharia of

⁶⁴ Sudirman, *Deureuham Aceh Mata Uang Emas Tertua Di Nusantara* (Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2018), 3–6.

⁶⁵ Sudirman, 8.

⁶⁶ Ibrahim Alfian, *Mata Uang Emas Kerajaan-Kerajaan Di Aceh* (Banda Aceh: Seri Penerbitan Museum Negeri Aceh, 1979), 44.

⁶⁷ John Baptista Tavernier, "The Six Voyages of John Baptista Tavernier" (London, 1670), 310.

Allah.⁶⁸ Coins of the Timurid Empire had the ruler's name on the reverse as a sign of the ruler's authority. The design of Timurid coins employed both Arabic and Persian scripts, thereby indicating a political and cultural expression. This meant that the Timurids were an Islamic kingdom that ruled in the Persian region.⁶⁹

The messages conveyed by these coins are analogous to those found on coins minted during the reign of Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah. These coins, which bore the name of the ruling leader, demonstrated the sovereignty of that leader. The use of Arabic letters and the Malay language on the coins indicated that Aceh was an Islamic kingdom that ruled in the Malay lands. The coin, which served as a medium of exchange, conveyed the implicit message that those engaged in commercial transactions within the territory of the Kingdom of Aceh were obliged to utilise coins that had been designated by the ruler, namely Sultanah Safiatuddin, who exercised absolute sovereignty. This was evident from the inscription on the coin.

2.4 Royal Seal

The early Islamic royal seals were influenced by the Byzantine and Sassanian cultures. According to the Prophet Muhammad's letter to the Emperor of Byzantium, only those bearing the official royal seal were to be read. Seals were used by royal officials to signify power and authority, and to certify official documents.⁷⁰ Seals were a significant aspect of Islamic governance from the Early Islam until the 20th century. Seals were even incorporated into rings crafted from carved stone, serving as a means of identification or protection for documents or goods.⁷¹

The royal seal of Aceh has been employed since the reign of Sultan Alauddin (r. 1589-1604 CE). Iskandar Muda was the inaugural Sultan to introduce the seal, which was subsequently designated as *Tjab Sikeureung* or *Tjab Halilintar*.⁷² This seal originated in Hindustan, as mentioned that Acehnese seals were influenced by Mughal emperor.⁷³ While her predecessors had utilized the seal, Sultanah Safiatuddin was the first to design the royal seal by placing her name in the center, followed by her eight predecessors around her, as Gallop mentioned, the earliest known Acehnese ninefold seal was the seal of Sultanah

⁶⁸ Jere L Bacharach, "SIGNS OF SOVEREIGNTY: THE SHAHĀDA, QUR'ANIC VERSES, AND THE COINAGE OF 'ABD AL-MALIK," n.d.

⁶⁹ Sheila S. Blair, "Timurid Signs of Sovereignty," *Oriente Moderno* 76, no. 2 (August 12, 1996): 551–76, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22138617-07602035>.

⁷⁰ Annabel Teh Gallop, "The Early Use of Seals in the Malay World," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 102, no. 1 (2016): 125–63, <https://doi.org/10.3406/befeo.2016.6233>.

⁷¹ Priscilla Soucek, "Early Islamic Seals: Their Artistic and Cultural Importance," n.d.

⁷² J. Leyten, "A Catalogue of The Gold Coins of Samudera Pasai and Aceh," n.d., 107.

⁷³ Teh Gallop, *Malay Seals from the Islamic World of Southeast Asia*, 260.

Safiatuddin which later adopted by all known subsequent rulers of Aceh for the next 250 years.⁷⁴ The next three queens didn't produce a new seal and used the seal of Safiatuddin.⁷⁵ This stamp is round in shape with a circumference. In the center is the name of the reigning sultan. Around it are eight names of the previous ruling sultans. According to Kanun Meukuta Alam, the eight names of the sultans symbolize the four basic laws of the Acehnese state, namely Qur'an, Sunnah, Ijma, and Qiyas, and the four types of laws, namely Law, Adat, Kanun, and Reusam, meaning that the Sultan of Aceh is surrounded by law.⁷⁶

This seal is made of silver, 8 or 10 inches in size, shaped like a mace with an open top. Every foreigner who landed in Aceh had to obtain this stamp to legitimize their trade and merchandise.⁷⁷ In the VOC documents, the royal seal of Aceh was discovered on letters that demonstrated the authority of the Sultanah Safiatuddin.⁷⁸



Figure 2. 2

On the middle part is her name: فادك سر سلطانه تاح العالم صفية الدين بر دولة ظل الله في العالم ابنة:

Paduka Seri Sultanah Tadj al-Alam Safiat Ad-Din berdaulat Zillullah fil 'Alam ibnat.

Translated: Her Royal Majesty, Sultanah Tadj al-Alam Safiat Ad-Din, ruler of the world in the shadow of Allah, daughter of:

As "forefathers" named in the eight seals along the edge are:

⁷⁴ Teh Gallop, 111.

⁷⁵ Teh Gallop, 61.

⁷⁶ Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu*, 131.

⁷⁷ Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal 1669-1679*, 300.

⁷⁸ Takeshi Ito, "Preliminary Material," in *Aceh Sultanate: State, Society, Religion and Trade (2 Vols.)*, ed. Takeshi Ito (BRILL, 2015), 11, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004288829_001.

السلطان راج اسكندر مود	: Sultan Raja Iskandar Muda
جوهن بردولة	: Johan Berdaulat
ابن السلطان علي رعاية شاة	: Ibn Sultan Ali Riayat Syah
ابن السلطان علاء الدين رعایت شاه	: Ibn Sultan Alauddin Riāyat Syah
ابن السلطان فرمان شاه	: Ibn Sultan Firman Syah
ابن السلطان مظفر شاه	: Ibn Sultan Muzaffar Syah
ابن السلطان عنایة شاه	: Ibn Sultan Inayat Syah
ابن عبد الله الملك المبین	: Ibn Abdillah al-Malik al-Mubin. ⁷⁹

Sultanah Safiatuddin positioned her name in the center of the stamp to demonstrate her identity as the ruler of Aceh at that time. In contrast, she placed each of her eight predecessors in the fold of the stamp, all of whom were male rulers. The parallel placement of her name and her male predecessors in this *sikeureung* stamp indicates that Sultanah Safiatuddin was a ruler who was equal to her predecessors regardless of gender. She ruled with the same system and with the same sovereignty.

Following her appointment as Queen Leader of Aceh, Safiatuddin inherited the same absolute sovereignty as her male predecessors. This sovereignty is evident in the use of titles similar to those of previous kings, as well as coins and royal seals that were valid during her reign. Her reign is evidenced by the placement of her name on coins and seals, which demonstrate her equality with her predecessors. In the following chapter, the legal sovereignty of Safiatuddin will be discussed, as well as the factors that contributed to the continuity of her government.

⁷⁹ Leyten, "A Catalogue of The Gold Coins of Samudera Pasai and Acheh," 8.

CHAPTER 3: THE ENDURING LEADERSHIP OF SULTANAH

As explained in the previous chapter, Aceh was a caliphate that applies divine law as its state constitution. Islam has become the way of life for the people of Aceh. Sharia, which is based on the Qur'an and Hadith, is implemented in all aspects of life. One of the interesting religious things is how Aceh views women, which has been an issue in the Middle East for centuries - and sparked the feminist movement in the second half of the 20th century because of the oppression of women. In Aceh, women are very much "free" as a result of the implementation of Islamic law. The Qur'an states that the position of men and women is equal; if there is a difference, it is in the level of piety. The commandment of filial piety towards father and mother is also equal, which means that parents are in the same position regardless of gender. The efforts made by everyone, again regardless of gender, will be rewarded by Allah according to the level of effort. Men and women are also equally obligated to defend the country in case of trouble.⁸⁰

The Qur'an even privileges women in one of the letters that specifically discusses issues related to women, namely Surah An-Nisā. Based on the verses contained in the Qur'an related to the equal position of men and women, the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh's life provides a wide space for women. It is not surprising that many of them held important positions in the Kingdom of Aceh in both civil and military fields, and even became rulers.⁸¹

This chapter examines the policies enacted by Sultanah Safiatuddin during her tenure as ruler of Aceh, which enabled her to retain her position for an extended period. Her astute decision-making abilities and adeptness in navigating the complexities of leadership, interacting with both insiders and foreigners, were pivotal to her success. However, the inevitable decline of her reign was largely shaped by external factors. It can be argued that Sultanah Safiatuddin was adept at maintaining her position. The decline that occurred at the end of her reign was not due to public dissatisfaction with her leadership abilities, but rather to external factors, namely Dutch influence, which managed to gain support from the uleebalang, who sought to break away from the authority of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam. The sub-chapters are organized according to the themes that emerge from an analysis of Sultanah Safiatuddin's approach to leadership.

⁸⁰ A. Hasjmy, *Risalah Akhlak* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1976), 81–83.

⁸¹ A. Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1977), 21–24.

3.1 Sultanah and Education

Aceh has long earned the title of "Porch of Mecca" (*Serambi Mekkah*) because it became the gateway for students or pilgrims who wanted to continue their studies in centers of knowledge such as Mecca, Medina, Egypt, and parts of the Ottoman Empire.⁸² One of the great figures from Makassar, Muhammad Yusuf al-Makassari (d. 1699), first studied in Aceh before continuing his studies in Mecca. He later became the Mufti of the Sultanate of Banten during the reign of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, who had been his friend since his days as crown prince. Aceh and Banten had a relationship at that time.⁸³

The culmination of Islamic cultural progress in the truest sense was in the 17th century, especially when the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam was ruled by Sultan Iskandar Muda (r. 1607-1636), Sultan Iskandar Thani (r. 1636-1641), and Sultanah Safiatuddin (1641-1675). At that time, the centers of Islamic cultural development were spread throughout the kingdom, such as *meunasah* (*meunasah* comes from the Arabic word "*madrasa*", which functions as a hall for deliberation, congregational prayer, and as an educational institution) at the *Gampong* level (the smallest area led by *Keuchiek*), Mosque and *Dayah* (*Dayah* is an institution of higher education, one can start his education first in *Meunasah*, then the middle level in *Rangkak*, and then the high level in *Dayah*) at the *Mukim* level (a combination of several *Gampong* ruled by Imam *Mukim*), *Nanggro* (a combination of several *Mukim* led by a leader mentioned as *Uleebalang*), *Sagi* (a combination of several *Nanggro* led by *Panglima Sagi*), as well as in the capital city of Banda Aceh Darussalam Kingdom.⁸⁴

The purpose of building education in the Kingdom of Aceh was to produce people who could become sultans, ministers, *qadis*, and other officials under certain conditions. The next goal was to produce people capable of performing *amar maruf nahi munkar* (the act of enjoining good and forbidding wrong).⁸⁵ The great awareness and attention paid to education by the leaders, including Sultanah Safiatuddin, stemmed from the principle that a strong navy was one that received a good education. If the navy was strong, a country could survive external threats.⁸⁶

The progress of education since the leadership of Sultan Iskandar Muda is characterized by the number of ulama gathered especially in the royal capital and the efforts to build educational institutions throughout the kingdom. In the capital city of Bandar Aceh

⁸² Wahidin and Warisman, *Sosiohistoris Islam Asia Tenggara*, 67.

⁸³ K Subroto, "Negara Islam di Jawa 1500-1700," March 2017, 22–23.

⁸⁴ *Sejarah Pendidikan Aceh*, 3.

⁸⁵ A. Hasjmy, *Bunga Rampai Revolusi Di Tanah Aceh* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1978), 63–64.

⁸⁶ A. Hasjmy, *Iskandar Muda Meukuta Alam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1975), 93.

Darussalam, there were the Baitul Musyahadah Mosque and the Baiturrahman Mosque along with the Jāmi'ah (as known as *Dayah Baiturrahman*) as a symbol of the center of scientific development.⁸⁷ The Jami'ah can be compared to a modern institute. It is estimated that there were at least 17 institutions there, viz: *Dār al-Ahkām* (law), *Dār al-Kalām* (theology), *Dār al-Nahw* (Arabic Language), *Dar al-Madzāhib* (comparative madhhab), *Dār al-Falsafah* (philosophy), *Dār al-Aqli* (logic), *Dār al-Hisāb* (astronomy), *Dār al-Tārikh* (history), *Dār al-Harb* (warfare), *Dār al-Ṭib* (medicine), *Dār al-Kimiyā'* (chemistry), *Dār al-Siyāsah* (politics), *Dār al-Wazārah* (government), *Dār al-Khazānah Baitul Māl* (government finance), *Dār al-Zi'ārah* (agriculture), and *Dār al-Ardhi* (mining).⁸⁸ It can be posited that the education system in the Sultanate of Aceh was as comprehensive as the Islamic tradition in other Muslim countries.

The educational system that had previously taken place in the Baiturrahman complex of buildings (including mosque, education center, etc.) continued under the leadership of Sultanah Safiatuddin. During Safiatuddin's reign, Banda Aceh became the center of political, economic, and cultural activities in Southeast Asia, while the Jamik Baiturrahman Mosque complex also established *Jami'ah Baiturrahman*, which is the Islamic center in the eastern part of the Islamic world.⁸⁹ The reign of Iskandar Muda and Safiatuddin was a time when most books were written by scholars and poets.⁹⁰

As many as 300 ulama who did not agree with the appointment of Sultanah Safiatuddin as the head of the government, it is assumed, were allowed to disperse throughout the kingdom to establish educational centers like the example of Sheikh Abdul Wahab who established an educational center in Tiro and later became famous. Sheikh Abdul Wahab was the teacher of the famous scholars of Tiro in later times. Safiatuddin did not arrest the scholars who opposed her because she understood democracy and loved science. She also did not punish the followers of *Wujudiyah* as long as they did not commit acts that harmed others, Sultanah Safiatuddin loved science. She built a court library as a development of scientific resources and as an effort to educate the people of Aceh. The library referred to here is that every place that is the center of scientific development certainly has a collection of scientific works in the form of books written by scholars, including mosques, *meunasahs* or *dayahs*, which at that time were the most popular places of learning, certainly in them stored and maintained books that are used as learning resources by students. The Sultanah also provided support in the form of capital to scholars

⁸⁷ Sofyan Arianto and M Pd, "SARWAH, VOLUME IX (4) JANUARI - JUNI 201," 2011, 159.

⁸⁸ *Sejarah Pendidikan Aceh*, 16–17.

⁸⁹ A. Hasjmy, *Risalah Akhlak* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1976), 72.

⁹⁰ Hasjmy, *Kebudayaan Aceh Dalam Sejarah*, 257.

who became experts in the field of education to help the process of writing works that could be read by the public. because of the full support of the Sultanah, many scholars emerged at that time.⁹¹

In addition to building education in the Aceh region, Sultanah Safiatuddin also sought to extend her power and influence to other regions of the archipelago by spreading literature and law. She also sent and promoted students and scholars to study Islam in urban centers in India, Baghdad, Makkah, and Medina to learn a variety of Islamic knowledge in order to expand the spread of Islam in the future. The knowledge and law books written during the reign of Sultanah Safiatuddin were sent to other regions such as Malacca, Johor, Malaya, Kedah, Patani, Pahang, Perak, Serawak, West Sumatra, Kerinci, Banjar, Painan and Tanah Jawa. Because of her love for science, she was nicknamed "Sultanah of Literature".⁹²

Aceh at this point in time might not be as absolute as it was at the time of the Iskandar Muda. Aceh's political, economic and military power was weakened. But on the other hand, Sultanah managed to develop science and culture such as literature and religious knowledge even more advanced than the reign of her father and husband. Many books were written during her reign, both at her request and at the will of the ulama themselves, such as Nuruddin ar-Raniry and Abdurrauf as-Singkili. Aceh became the most advanced center of scientific and cultural activity in Southeast Asia.⁹³

The books written on the orders of Sultanah Safiatuddin include *Hidayatul Iman Bi Fadlil Mannān* by Nuruddin ar-Rāniry, *Mir'at al-Tullāb* by Abdurrauf al-Singkili, *Turjuman al-Mustafid* by Singkili as the first tafsir in Malay language, *Masāil al-Muhtadī* by Sheikh Daud bin Ismail bin Agha Mustafa bin Agha Ali al-Rumī or Teungku Chik Dileupeu Baba Daud, he came from Ottoman Turkey and was Abdurrauf's disciple. He built an Islamic educational center called *Dayah Manyang Leupeu* in Ujung Penayong Banda Aceh, which later produced many great scholars.⁹⁴ He built this *dayah* as an education center together with Abdurrauf as-Singkili.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Nur, "Kiprah Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Dalam Memajukan Pendidikan di Kerajaan Aceh Darussalam."

⁹² Zainuddin, *Srikandi Atjeh*, 22–23.

⁹³ Raiyan, *Sultanah Dalam Kerajaan Atjeh Darussalam (1641-1699 M)*, 63–67.

⁹⁴ Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu*, 117.

⁹⁵ Zulfikar Ali Buto and Hafifuddin Hafifuddin, "DAYAH SANTRI IN ACEH: Early History and Recently Development," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 4, no. 1 (December 31, 2020): 141, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v4i1.8090>.

3.2 Sultanah and Women

Sultanah Safiatuddin was very concerned about women during her reign. She provided equal educational opportunities for men and women. In fact, she required women to study because she believed that education could make a person dignified in all walks of life. In addition to education, Sultanah Safiatuddin also provided equal opportunities for men and women to work in government institutions and the army. She also continued and refined the Keumala Cahaya Division system, which was a palace guard group of women formed during the reign of her father, Sultan Iskandar Muda.⁹⁶ It is said that Sultan Iskandar Muda employed 3000 women in his palace during his reign.⁹⁷ It is assumed that in later developments the women working in the Sultanate's court were at least similar in number.

The role of Acehnese women has been seen since the reign of Sultan Alaidin Riyat Syah al-Mukammil (r. 1589-1604) where women have gained an honorable position in society, even holding important positions in the palace such as Malahayati who became the head of palace protocol and led 2000 female soldiers whose association was called the Inong Balee Armada.⁹⁸

In the political field of the kingdom, Sultanah Safiatuddin renewed the composition of the legislative body in 1649 CE/1059 H. Of the 73 members of the Hall of Assembly of the People's Court (Parliament, as known as *Majelis Mahkamah Rakyat*), the Sultanah placed 16 women to jointly discuss state affairs and research appropriate customs and laws to be distributed to the people in a fair and prosperous manner. The Sultanah believed that justice was the foundation of prosperity for the people.⁹⁹ This was an increase from the previous reign where there were never more than 10 female members.¹⁰⁰

Because of her concern for women, Sultanah Safiatuddin submitted a bill to the *Majlis Mahkamah Rakyat* regarding women's social norms. Before, women had a weak position. When she got married, she went to her husband's house. If there was a dispute between them and it ended in divorce, the woman would be thrown out of her husband's house and would have no power. Therefore, the Sultanah came up with some new proposals which were then implemented in the community to avoid the disadvantages experienced by women. The intention of the law proposed by the Sultanah was that parents should provide a house for their daughter, which would become her property when she got married.

⁹⁶ Hasanuddin Yusuf Adan, *Islam Dan Sistem Pemerintahan Di Aceh Masa Kerajaan Aceh Darussalam* (Banda Aceh: Pena, 2013), 131.

⁹⁷ Dina Afrianty, *Women and Sharia Law in Northern Indonesia Local Women' NGOs and the Reform of Islamic Law in Aceh* (London: Routledge, 2015), 93.

⁹⁸ Thalal and Kurdi, *Ulama Aceh dalam melahirkan human resource di Aceh*, 83.

⁹⁹ Zainuddin, *Srikandi Atjeh*, 44.

¹⁰⁰ Hasjmy, *Kebudayaan Aceh Dalam Sejarah*, 141.

The parents also had to provide a rice field, a garden and a piece of gold. The husband must give his wife a rice field, which becomes her property, and he must give her a piece of gold. The husband must live in the wife's house. As long as their married life is harmonious and peaceful, the ownership status of the house, rice fields, and gardens that come from both parties becomes joint property, while the wealth acquired during the marriage period then belongs half to the husband and half to the wife. When a divorce occurs, the husband must leave his wife's house, and all the things he brought with him when he first married, such as rice fields and gold jewelry, become the property of the wife, while the property acquired during the marriage is divided between the husband and wife. During the iddah period, the husband is responsible for supporting the wife.¹⁰¹

3.3 Sultanah and Diplomacy

3.3.1 Her Hospitality

In 1644, the Dutch commissioner Vlamingh recounted his impressions of his reception in the Kingdom of Aceh. When he arrived, three important people greeted him; *Orangkaya* Bintara Raja, Setia Wangsa and Saudagar Raja. He was escorted by two syahbandars and rode on an elephant, even the letter brought by Governor Antonie Van Deiemen from Batavia was presented on a silver tray. After being escorted to the reception hall, he was greeted by many officials. He was shown an elephant fight show with 60 elephants and was treated to cane sugar drinks and vegetable snacks. The guests were given a change of Acehnese clothes and then served food. When he saw the Sultanah's throne, he likened it to the glare of the sun because it was studded with gold, diamonds, and precious stones that cost 9 million Dutch guilders.¹⁰² Not only did the Sultanah treat foreign guests well, she was also very hospitable to the wife of Jan Harmansz, the Dutch permanent representative in Aceh. She personally invited him to a banquet.¹⁰³

Sultanah Safiatuddin was a leader who was very regal and friendly to guests. VOC envoys who came to Aceh, such as Pieter Sourij Vlamingh, said that when they arrived they were very well received and treated with respect. They were served food on gold and silver trays. They were also shown elephant and tiger fights in the palace courtyard and treated to meat, fruit and nuts. They sat on fine carpets and were given gold boxes filled with betel leaves.¹⁰⁴ However, during Ramadan, the Sultanah did not serve food to her guests during the day because Muslims were fasting, and the Sultanah apologized to her

¹⁰¹ Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu*, 126–28.

¹⁰² Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, 1:386–87.

¹⁰³ Said, 1:387.

¹⁰⁴ Arndt Graf et al., eds., *Aceh: History, Politics and Culture*, 1. publ (Singapore: ISEAS, 2010), 9.

guests. But when night fell, the Sultanah provided more entertainment shows and sumptuous meals. After the banquet, the guests are sent back to their lodgings on elephants and horses.¹⁰⁵

On October 12, 1662, the Sultanah dispatched a missive to Charles II, the recently anointed monarch of England, who succeeded Oliver Cromwell. The Sultanah extended congratulations to Charles II on his accession to the throne and expressed a desire to re-establish the relationship between Aceh and England that had commenced during the Iskandar Muda era. Additionally, the Sultanah granted Henry Gray permission, as evidenced by his letter, to establish a factory in the harbor and to allow three British ships to visit the pepper ports on the west coast of Sumatra on an annual basis. Accompanying the letter were gifts of forest products, including camphor, agila, ambergris, and bezoar stones.¹⁰⁶

3.3.2 *Decision of Iskandar Tsani's Jewelry*

Sultan Iskandar Tsani, the husband of Sultanah Safiatuddin, was a man who loved jewelry. After he died and Sultanah Safiatuddin ascended the throne in his place, the Dutch came with the jewelry that Sultan Iskandar Tsani had ordered. At first, the Sultanah refused to accept and pay for all the jewelry because it was the Dutch's business with her late husband, and the Acehnese assumed that the next leader was not obligated to continue the agreement made by the previous sultan. The reason for the Sultanah's unwillingness to pay for the jewelry was to avoid wasting the kingdom's finances, and the jewelry was specifically designed for men, which would have been inappropriate for the Sultanah. The Acehnese elite also disliked Sultan Iskandar Tsani's lavish spending on diamonds. For them, keeping the country's wealth stable was crucial to maintaining the kingdom's finances. In the case of the jewelry negotiations between Aceh and Commissioner Pieter Sourij in 1642, the Dutch tried to lobby the wealthy to make Aceh pay for the jewelry brought from the Netherlands on behalf of Sultan Iskandar Tsani. The negotiations lasted a long time, through consultations with the *Orangkaya*, and ended with the Sultanah's willingness to pay for the jewelry, but at a price far below the Dutch expectations. Unable to accept the offered price, Sourij continued the negotiations and ended up with a price of 9000 taels instead of the 15,000 taels the Dutch were expecting. The *Orangkaya* played an important role in the price negotiations, as they were the ones who conducted the

¹⁰⁵ Khan, *Sovereign Women in a Muslim Kingdom*, 98.

¹⁰⁶ Feener, Daly, and Reid, *Mapping the Acehnese Past*, 124.

discussions, while the Sultan left the negotiations to the *Orangkaya*. But the final decision remained in the hands of Sultanah Safiatuddin.¹⁰⁷

In 1644, another Dutch envoy, Commissioner Arnold de Vlamingh van Oudtshoorn, came to Aceh on the same business, jewelry. He arrived while the Sultanah was on vacation and made her wait. While waiting, he approached the *Orangkaya* and gave them gifts, hoping they would help him get the Sultanah to buy his jewelry. As before, the jewelry issue was discussed by the *Orangkaya* in the hall while the Sultanah was inside the palace. The first negotiations resulted in a price offer that was far below the Dutch expectations, 3500 taels. The negotiations ended after two months at 6000 taels. This jewelry affair passed through a difficult situation between the two sides, although in the end she managed to escape the tension. Sultanah Safiatuddin's attitude of involving *Orangkaya* in decision-making based on deliberation and two-way communication is a practice of local customs and traditions that was not practiced during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda. Unlike her predecessor, Iskandar Tsani, Sultanah Safiatuddin was more concerned with the stability of her kingdom's wealth, so she did not like luxurious styles. Rulers who favored extravagance were not favored by the rich, as evidenced by Sultan Sri Alam, who died by assassination, and Sultan Iskandar Tsani, who most likely died by poisoning.¹⁰⁸ Sultan Iskandar Tsani was disliked by the royal descendants because they were jealous of the foreigner who held the highest position in the Sultanate of Aceh. But actually, the scholars liked him because he played a big role in the field of science. The problem of Sultan Iskandar Tsani's incompatibility with the royal relatives could be overcome by taking Sultanah Safiatuddin as his wife.¹⁰⁹

Sultanah Safiatuddin was able to prove her competence as the leader of the Aceh Sultanate by keeping the ministers happy and remaining neutral, showing no favoritism among the royal factions and their machinations. She allowed them to pursue their personal commercial interests while ensuring that the kingdom's wealth and revenues remained secure.¹¹⁰

3.3.3 Dutch's Failed Attempts: Manipulation and False Hopes

Sultanah Safiatuddin ascended the throne on February 15, 1641. At the time of her accession, the city of Melaka fell into Dutch hands from the Portuguese, who had previously ruled for 130 years. As the Dutch took control of Melaka, they also took control

¹⁰⁷ Feener, Daly, and Reid, 142–51.

¹⁰⁸ Feener, Daly, and Reid, 151–60.

¹⁰⁹ Raiyan, *Sultanah Dalam Kerajaan Atjeh Darussalam (1641-1699 M)*, 45.

¹¹⁰ Graf et al., *Aceh*, 8.

of its waters. Because the Acehese navy had been decimated after the death of Iskandar Muda and had never been rebuilt and modernized, Aceh no longer had the authority to control the waters that provided access to international trade. Acehese ships were also not as modern and sophisticated as the better-armed Dutch vessels. The weakness of the navy affected the success of the Sultan's diplomacy in negotiations with the Dutch.¹¹¹ The Dutch conducted a blockade of Perak because their desire to obtain monopoly rights was not met by the Sultan of Perak. As a result of this blockade, Malay and Javanese merchant ships could not enter and Perak could not survive. Because of this incident, the Sultan of Perak sent an envoy to Melaka and promised the VOC monopoly rights in exchange for lifting the blockade. Aceh considered the Dutch action a violation of Aceh's sovereignty. Finally, the Dutch decided to ask for negotiations. Sultanah Safiatuddin responded in her own way. For her, diplomacy must be met with diplomacy, so she decided to join the negotiations.¹¹²

3.3.4 VOC Blockade in 1645

In 1645, the Dutch, represented by Arnold de Vlaming van Outshoorn, negotiated with Aceh for trade in Perak. The Dutch wanted the tin trade and the help of the Sultanah so that they could trade easily and be given a low price or equal to traders from other countries such as Java, Bugis, Siam and Malay. This was because the Sultanah charged a higher price for sales to the Dutch, which they felt was unfair and motivated them to smuggle trade goods. Knowing this, the Sultanah took a stand and allowed the Dutch to trade in Perak. But she knew that the people of Perak would oppose the Dutch. Her guess was right, after some time the people of Perak boycotted the Dutch, which resulted in them not getting any tin.¹¹³

Regarding the Dutch blockade of Perak in 1645, Vlamingh said that they acted decisively against Perak because they did not want to lose money and so they tried to get exclusive monopoly rights in Perak. They wanted to get Perak tin for themselves at a low price and prohibited other traders from getting tin from Perak. But the Sultanah was not easily influenced and did not urge Perak to grant the Dutch request to monopolize the tin trade. To solve this problem, the Sultanah played her sharp diplomacy. Although the issue ended with a treaty between Aceh and the Dutch in 1645, Indian Muslim traders continued to enjoy the tin trade with Aceh and the Malay Peninsula. As the Dutch did not like this,

¹¹¹ Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu*, 145–46.

¹¹² Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, 1:385–86.

¹¹³ Zainuddin, *Srikandi Atjeh*, 45.

they prevented the traders from buying tin from Aceh and Perak in 1647, but this ended with the Dutch office in Surat being attacked and closed in 1648.¹¹⁴

After this incident, the Dutch tried to blockade Aceh, but the Sultanah retaliated and the Dutch office in Aceh was closed. Then G.G. van Lijn sent a letter to Aceh asking for the right to trade tin in Perak as much as the Portuguese had. The Sultanah replied that Aceh treated all nations equally and could not grant special privileges to the Dutch.¹¹⁵

3.3.5 VOC Blockade in 1649

In fact, Sultanah Safiatuddin knew from the beginning that the Dutch had bad intentions. They were smuggling and trying to reduce Aceh's hegemony over its subordinate regions. They kept reminding them of their merits for helping Aceh to expel the Portuguese by demanding a lot from the Sultanah with the treaty they made with Sultan Iskandar Tsani, without appreciating all the rights Aceh had given them so that they could trade safely in the Strait of Malacca. In 1649, there was a robbery incident where two French ships used by the Dutch for trade looted ships loaded with pepper, including the Sultan's ship that was returning to Aceh. The Aceh commander in West Sumatra then expelled all Dutch ships and reported to the Sultanah. The Sultanah then sent Maharaja Lela to send warships to the coast of West Sumatra to strengthen the defense. For this incident, the Dutch apologized and got the right to return to take tin in Perak.¹¹⁶

In the same year, the Dutch imposed another blockade on Perak and Aceh to prevent the Sultanate's ships from passing through. The Dutch even fired on merchant ships from Malabar. The Sultanah was certainly not happy about this, as the Dutch were blocking access to ships in Aceh waters that should have been under the control of the Sultanate. However, the Sultanah did not necessarily use harsh methods to deal with this problem, but rather through agreements and negotiations between Aceh, Perak and the Dutch. After the blockade and negotiations, Oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán asked for privileges for the VOC trade in the Aceh region, and the Sultanah refused. Truijtmán thought that the Sultanah was under the control of an anti-Dutch faction and therefore displeased with the Dutch. The anti-Dutch faction, of course, did not want the Dutch to have the prerogative. However, the Sultanah showed her support by allowing the Dutch to obtain tin from Perak, even though the anti-Dutch faction argued that the Dutch had used up their trading privileges and it was time for them to leave. Although the Sultanah did not agree to the

¹¹⁴ Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, 1:387–88.

¹¹⁵ Said, 1:388.

¹¹⁶ Zainuddin, *Srikandi Atjeh*, 46–47.

Dutch request for privileges, she reaffirmed the previous agreement between Aceh and the Dutch that excluded other traders in Perak.¹¹⁷

Along with her agreement to allow the Dutch to trade in Perak, the Sultanah also warned the Dutch that the people of Perak would definitely oppose their trade there, but the Dutch did not respond. The Sultanah sent a message to the Sultan of Perak about the Dutch trading in Perak. As expected, they were not happy, which led to the murder of the Dutch Company guards. Finally, on December 15, 1650, the Dutch, through their envoy Truijman, managed to obtain tin trading privileges in Perak through a successful agreement signed by Sultanah Safiatuddin as the leader of Aceh and Sultan Muzaffar Syah II as the Sultan of Perak, who was a subordinate of Aceh. This privilege allowed the Dutch to monopolize the tin trade and prohibited Muslim traders from India and other European traders from buying tin in Perak. The people of Perak did not like this because they did not want to sell their tin to the Dutch. Eventually, the Dutch resorted to violence to get their way, which led to a Perak uprising led by the Tumenggung and Syahbandar. They stormed the Dutch lodge and defenses, and several Dutch officials were killed.¹¹⁸ Some of the Dutch fled to Java and Aceh. After this incident, the Dutch refused to pay taxes to Aceh. Because it was detrimental to Aceh, the Sultanah ordered that tin be brought to Aceh first before being taken by traders to Calcutta and the Persian Gulf, so that the Dutch did not get any tin at all.¹¹⁹

As a result of the killing of Dutch officials by the Perak people, the Dutch sent Johan Truijman to find out who was behind the killings. If it was the order of Sultanah, it was a declaration of war. But if the Perak people did it on their own, it was a sign of defiance against the Sultanate of Aceh and a formalized hostile relationship between Perak and the Netherlands. For this incident, the Dutch demanded that the people of Aceh provide guarantees to the VOC in the form of the release of Dutch prisoners, compensation for losses, the killing of the Perak killers and their accomplices, and the resumption of trade relations with the Dutch. Sultanah Safiatuddin agreed to the demand. She intended to release Dutch prisoners, remove Dato' Temenggong and Syahbandar and replace them with *Orangkaya* Besar, execute their followers who had killed Dutch officials, punish Acehnese Boedjang who persecuted Dutch traders with amputation of hands and feet, and compensate for damage to the company's huts. But the Sultanah asked that the Sultan of Perak not be punished - if he had anything to do with these events. The Sultanah sent the matter to Perak,

¹¹⁷ Khan, *Sovereign Women in a Muslim Kingdom*, 99–108.

¹¹⁸ Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, 1:389.

¹¹⁹ Zainuddin, *Srikandi Atjeh*, 48.

not to comply with the VOC's request, but to ensure that the settlement of matters affecting the people of Perak remained under Aceh's control. The Sultanah wanted those guilty of the killings to be punished under Acehnese law; she did not want to hand over her people to the Dutch. Sultanah insisted that no war should be waged by the Dutch in Perak because Perak was her land. After Truijtman arrived in Perak, the people of Perak again attacked the Dutch officials and Truijtman eventually returned to Aceh. The outcome of the trial did not please the Dutch. The Sultanah did not punish the Temenggong and Syahbandar, did not punish the guilty, only minor officials were punished, and did not compensate the Dutch for their losses. Everything looked the same as before and the Dutch were able to continue their trade. The reason for this inaction was that the Dutch had long tormented the people of Perak by blocking the Perak River, disrespecting the Acehnese authority, smuggling cannons ashore, and building castles and forts stronger than houses, which eventually provoked the Perak elites and people to commit murder.¹²⁰

In 1652, when the Dutch thought they would be able to get the treaty back as they had in 1650, Truijtman was instead arrested by the Sultan of Kedah and the Dutch had to spend a lot of money to free Truijtman.¹²¹

On December 15, 1653, Truijtman tried again to obtain the monopoly rights, but ended in the same failure. On December 7, 1655, the treaty was again signed by Sultanah Safiatuddin. Aceh promised to compensate the Dutch for the damage caused by the resistance of the Perak people, and they were given land up to the cannon fire. But the hatred of the Perak people for the Dutch ran deep. They again attacked the Dutch office in Perak until it was forced to close. The agreement signed by the Sultanah did not take effect because Perak continued to send tin to Aceh and sell it to other traders. Finally, the Dutch sent Truijtman to tighten the blockade of the waters between Aceh and Perak. Aceh could not cope with this and the Sultanah suggested negotiations. Two Dutch warships "Domburg" and "Concordia" and an Aceh delegation sailed to Batavia for negotiations. However, Aceh could not give in to the Dutch wishes because the people of Perak hated the Dutch.¹²²

The Dutch blockade continued until 1659 and resulted in a reduction in the number of Indian ships bringing textiles to Aceh.¹²³ In May 1659, Kadi Malikul Adil led a delegation of Acehnese officials to negotiate in Batavia. The negotiations resulted in an

¹²⁰ Khan, *Sovereign Women in a Muslim Kingdom*, 112–23.

¹²¹ Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, 1:389.

¹²² Said, 1:389–91.

¹²³ Anthony Reid, *Asia Tenggara Dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1690*, vol. 2 (Jakarta: Pustaka Obor, 2014), 36.

agreement that the division of Perak tin between Aceh and the Dutch would be 1:2 and that no one else would be allowed to buy and issue tin in Perak. Citing the 1650 uprising of the Perak people, the Dutch demanded that Aceh reimburse them 50,000 *ringgit* for their losses. They also demanded that the Tumenggung be killed and the treasurer removed from office. However, the Sultanah did not do this and only tried the Tumenggung in Aceh and according to Acehese law, and did not dismiss the treasurer.¹²⁴

The Dutch used various cunning methods to get what they wanted. They once made a rumor that Sultanah Safiatuddin wanted to marry a Dutchman in order to dethrone the Sultanah, as this would certainly not be approved by the nobles. But the dirty tricks never worked, so they built many ships to blockade Aceh.¹²⁵ Meanwhile, the Sultanah with her ingenuity and wisdom managed to save Aceh from the trade chaos caused by foreign intervention. Although Aceh's naval forces were in decline at the time, Aceh's strong defense showed the justice of the Sultanah. This was evident in the desperation of the Dutch and their futile attempts to intervene in Aceh's governance.

The Sultanah had no intention of surrendering to the VOC. As the Dutch became increasingly arbitrary towards the Acehese, the Sultanah contacted the British Trade Union and asked for arms supplies. When the Dutch learned of this, they changed their attitude and proposed negotiations again. The negotiations resulted in an agreement that the VOC would stop blockading Perak, would not establish an office in Perak, and would provide arms to Aceh in the form of cannons, rifles and gunpowder. But a few years later they broke this agreement and even extended the blockade to the west coast of Sumatra. They were desperate to control the gold and pepper trade. With the fleet weakened, the Sultanah had little power to lift the blockade, so she made the harsh decision to allow the VOC to take pepper from the Minangkabau and forbid other nations to trade on the west coast of Sumatra.¹²⁶ In 1662, the Minangkabau kings clashed with Aceh to claim authority over the west coast of Sumatra. The Dutch seized the opportunity to help them in return for permission to establish lodges in areas such as Padang, Tiku and others.¹²⁷

3.4 Long-Reigning of Sultanah: Result of Wisdom

The length of Safiatuddin's reign, which reached almost 35 years, could not be separated from the wisdom and abilities she possessed. During her reign, she was constantly undermined by court figures who still disagreed with the leadership of a woman,

¹²⁴ Reid, 2:392.

¹²⁵ Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, 1:402.

¹²⁶ Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Kepemimpinan Ratu*, 149–51.

¹²⁷ G.J.F. Biegan, *Hikajat Tanah Hindia* (Batavi: Goerbernemen, 1894), 92.

but in the end, after her death, her successor was also a woman named Sultanah Nurul Alam Naqiatuddin Syah.¹²⁸

3.4.1 *Sultanah and Moderation*

One of Safiatuddin's efforts to reduce the conflict between the *Wujudiyah* and the *Ahlussunnah* was to appoint one of the *Wujudiyah* scholars as *Kadi Malikul Adil* two years after he came to power. This person was Saiful Rijal. With the appointment of the new *Kadi Malikul Adil*, Nuruddin ar-Raniry was forced to leave the position he had held since Sultan Iskandar Muda came to power. This was not because Sultanah Safiatuddin recognized *Wujudiyah* as the most correct sect, but she did it to reduce the conflict that had been heating up for a long time. The proof is that after the Saiful Rijal period, she again appointed a moderate ulama who shared the same views as Nuruddin ar-Raniry, namely Abdurrauf as-Singkili. Despite his similar views, As-Singkili was not averse to the *Wujudiyah* followers.¹²⁹

However, according to Drewes' version, Safiatuddin did not appoint Saiful Rijal as *Kadi Malikul Adil*. At first, Saiful Rijal had the support of *Orangkaya* Maharaja Lela, someone who had great influence in the palace, and because of this, Nuruddin ar-Raniry chose the safe way by leaving the palace without first completing his essay *Bustān al-Salāfīn*. Pieter Sourij also says that until then Nuruddin ar-Raniry had chosen to take a hard line against the *Wujudiyah* school. The debate between Nuruddin Ar-Raniry and Saiful Rijal lasted several days and was won by Saiful Rijal in August. But even though Saiful Rijal won the debate, he was not automatically appointed as the palace mufti. The debate continued because Safiatuddin did not agree with Maharaja Lela. In 1661, Safiatuddin appointed a new *Kadi Malikul Adil* in the person of Abdurrauf as-Singkily, a scholar of the same school as Nuruddin ar-Raniry.¹³⁰

3.4.2 *Sultanah and State's Economy*

The economy in Aceh was not just about men. According to Coolhas, the women who held the throne in Aceh, Jambi, and Indragiri played an active role in trading activities like men. They were persistent and knew the market well.¹³¹ Acehnese women, with their freedom of movement, could play the role of an aristocrat involved in political affairs or a

¹²⁸ Rusdi Sufi, *Aceh tanah rencong*, Cet. 1 (Banda Aceh: Pemerintah Provinsi Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, 2008), 25.

¹²⁹ Irfanullah and Fuad, "Jejak Moderasi Beragama di Kesultanan Aceh di bawah Pemerintahan Sultanah Safiatuddin."

¹³⁰ Imran Teuku Abdullah, *Hikayat Meukuta Alam* (Perpusnas Press, 1988), 635.

¹³¹ Anthony Reid, *Asia Tenggara Dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1690*, vol. 1 (Jakarta: Pustaka Obor, 2014), 190.

merchant involved in international trade. During the reign of the first Sultanah of Aceh Darussalam, many foreign traders visited Aceh because of its fair government, affordable food prices, rich land and peaceful society.¹³² Proof of Aceh's prosperity can be seen in the houses of the rulers and nobles, built of sturdy brick in the mid-17th century.¹³³

In the 1640s, before the Dutch blockade of Aceh's waters, the Aceh region was once a large market for the rice trade. Three thousand tons of rice were shipped from Deli, a region in northeastern Sumatra, to the city of Aceh. This shows that Aceh's economy was doing very well. After the Dutch blockade, in the 1650s new rice fields appeared in the Aceh region.¹³⁴

Aceh, with its sovereignty during the Sultanah's time, could export and import and conduct the country's trade without foreign intervention. In 1642, twelve Javanese boats reached Aceh with their main cargo of foodstuffs such as salt, sugar, beans, nuts and other foods.¹³⁵ When the Dutch blockaded Aceh in the 1650s, Aceh was still able to transport its coal from the west coast and import tin from Perak to Banda Aceh and maintained its position as a major port on the eastern part of the Bay of Bengal.¹³⁶

In the 17th century, Acehnese gold was part of a consistent value system where 1 tahlil (silver weight) was worth 16 mas, and 1 mas was worth 4 kupang, 4 kupang being worth 1,600 cash.¹³⁷ Cash was a currency of tin while mas was a currency forged from gold.¹³⁸ As mentioned earlier, with her ingenuity, Sultanah was able to reduce the weight and gold content of the coins she made during her reign, but the value of the gold remained the same.

Aceh had wealth that came from gold. Gold from Minangkabau was brought to Aceh through the ports of Tiku and Pariaman after Melaka fell to the Portuguese. Aceh controlled the gold mines in Minangkabau and had a reputation as the wealthiest city in the region by the end of the 17th century.¹³⁹ Weaving gold and silver threads was popular in Aceh. Foreign envoys who came to Aceh were presented with beautifully crafted garments made of gold thread. Aceh also occasionally imported gold from Gresik in East Java.¹⁴⁰

¹³² Reid, 1:197–98.

¹³³ Reid, 1:78.

¹³⁴ Reid, 1:28–29.

¹³⁵ Reid, 1:37.

¹³⁶ Reid, *Asia Tenggara Dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1690*, 2014, 2:359.

¹³⁷ Reid, 2:118.

¹³⁸ Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, 1:142.

¹³⁹ Reid, *Asia Tenggara Dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1690*, 2014, 1:110.

¹⁴⁰ Reid, 1:113.

Based on the information described above, it can be concluded that during Sultanah Safiatuddin's reign in Aceh, the country's economy was in good condition and trade was running smoothly. Sultanah Safiatuddin's reign showed progress in the economic field.¹⁴¹

3.4.3 Stories of Goodness

Nuruddin ar-Raniry's *Bustān al-Salāṭīn* mentions that Sultanah Safiatuddin was a pious person. She always prayed five times, recited the Qur'an, called for goodness, and forbade evil deeds, as Allah had commanded the Prophet Muhammad. Because of her righteousness and piety, many people prayed and studied. She reigned for 35 years, 8 months and 26 days and died on Wednesday, 3 Sha'ban 1086 AH.¹⁴² In the story of Pieter Sourij, who visited Aceh during Ramadan, it is mentioned that the Sultanah did not serve food during the day. By not serving food to the guests during the day in Ramadan, Sultanah Safiatuddin was subtly asking the guests to respect her religion and the fasting Muslims by not eating in front of them. Sultanah Safiatuddin demonstrated the religious identity maintained in the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam. In the hands of a religious leader, it is not surprising that his people also practice things related to piety.

In the Islamic kingdom, the Shari'a intervened in state law, although it could never completely replace customary law. Most of the laws were taken from the Shafi'i books.¹⁴³ Crimes against the sovereignty of the kingdom were severely punished. In 1642 a man was sentenced to death for stealing a horse.¹⁴⁴ In the same year, two Englishmen had their hands amputated for trying to make wine. Throughout the 17th century, there were Islamic courts in Aceh that punished thieves with amputation.¹⁴⁵

In the manuscript of *Hikayat Meukuta Alam*, Safiatuddin's attitude toward enforcing Islamic law in his kingdom is described in poetry:

*"Tajul Alam Safiatuddin, itulah pengganti raja
Itulah raja seorang putri, memerintah negeri memegang neraca
Lebih tertib hukum dijalankan, keteledoran sedikit pun tiada
Yang berzina dikebiri, yang mencuri dicongkel matanya".*

Translation:

*"Tajul Alam Safiatuddin, this is the successor of the king.
This is the king of a princess, ruling the country, holding the balance sheet.
The law is executed in a more orderly manner, the slightest negligence is absent.*

¹⁴¹ Sufi, *Aceh tanah rencong*, 25.

¹⁴² Ridlo and Rosyidah, *Bustān As-Salāṭīn (ML 422) Nuruddin Ar-Raniry*, 70–71.

¹⁴³ Reid, *Asia Tenggara Dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1690*, 2014, 1:163.

¹⁴⁴ Reid, 1:161.

¹⁴⁵ Reid, 1:164.

The adulterer is castrated, the thief has his eyes gouged out".¹⁴⁶

The Sultanah's style of government was unique compared to her predecessors. During the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda, the death penalty was used for people who were not loyal. This harsh style of leadership continued until the reign of Iskandar Tsani. But by the time of Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah, this style had changed to a more lenient one. Many sources say that during the time of Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah, Aceh became very orderly and prosperous. Female rulers seemed to be a very different and attractive political system for the leading elites in the capital.¹⁴⁷ This different way of doing things became apparent when one of the great wealthy men, Maharadja Sri Maharadja, had hoarded the best land for himself and left the bad for the Sultanah. The Sultanah had him interrogated and tried in front of all the important ministers. Maharadja Sri Maharadja cried and begged for mercy, he stood for two hours with his hands on his head. This act was an insult to the pride of the *Orangkaya* and was considered more effective than bloodshed.¹⁴⁸

Ar-Raniry in *Bustan al-Salatin* mentioned that under the leadership of Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah, the country became prosperous like a fertile plant and blooming flowers. Sultanah Safiatuddin has a loving nature, fair, wise, patient, tawakkal and does not tolerate wrongdoing. She was very respectful to the scholars and descendants of Prophet Muhammad who came to Aceh Darussalam. Sultanah Safiatuddin was a very meticulous, generous king, not inferior to the male king. It is said that she ruled her country like a mother who loves her children.¹⁴⁹ In the case of the jewels, Sultanah Safiatuddin showed how she ruled her country like a mother who loves her children. She refused to pay for all the jewelry ordered by her late husband in order to maintain the stability of the country's finances. She was reluctant to use state money for something that was of little benefit to the state. Additionally, she demonstrated a protective stance by preventing the Dutch from interacting with her people following the deaths of Dutch officials at the hands of the Perak people.

During Iskandar Muda's reign, a massive procession was held every Friday to escort the Sultan to the mosque for Friday prayers. The ceremony was even more festive when entering the beginning of Ramadan, the 17th of Ramadan, which coincides with the revelation of the Qur'an, *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*. The largest ceremony was that of *Eid al-Adha*, as described by Peter Mundy that on this day in 1637, 500 cows were slaughtered and thousands of horsemen, soldiers and elephants marched in procession. These

¹⁴⁶ Abdullah, *Hikayat Meukuta Alam*, 806.

¹⁴⁷ Reid, *Menuju Sejarah Sumatera*, 140–41.

¹⁴⁸ Graf et al., *Aceh*, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Ridlo and Rosyidah, *Bustān As-Salāṭīn (ML 422) Nuruddin Ar-Raniry*, 56–57.

ceremonies were performed during the reigns of the first four rulers of Aceh in the 17th century and were discontinued during the time of Sultanah Tajul Alam.¹⁵⁰ This is another example of how the Sultanah's policies used the kingdom's wealth.

In the case of the murder of a Dutch official by the people of Perak, the Sultanah did not allow the Dutch to prosecute her people in Perak for the murder of a Dutch officials. She ensured that the wrongs committed by the people of Aceh would continue to be tried by their own courts. One of her ways of caring for her people was to promote education so that the people, both men and women, would have enough knowledge to make their country a dignified country, because for her, dignity came from having knowledge. Her patience can be seen in how she dealt with everything in a more lenient manner than his predecessors. She preferred educational and reforming methods to cruelty and bloodshed, such as how she dealt with Maharadha Sri Maharadja's offenses. She also allowed the *Orangkaya* to discuss matters concerning royal decisions, although the final decision remained in her hands. However, this shows that the Sultanah listened to the input of her officials so that the final decision was not the result of her personal wishes, but rather the welfare of the people.

But despite the Sultanah's many achievements and virtues, this does not mean that her reign was without blemishes. As mentioned above, her style of governance was softer than that of her predecessors, Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Tsani. Iskandar Muda had a harsh ruling style and he could get what he wanted. As stated by Anthony Reid, the period of *Orangkaya* rule in the Sultanate of Aceh ended during his reign. During Iskandar Muda's time, the sultanate became strong and the *Orangkaya* had little influence. But when it changed to female rule, this phase weakened a little. This was due to the concessions the Sultanah made to the *Orangkaya*. In the case of a land dispute, the Sultanah decided that the *Orangkaya*'s legal land was based on what had been divided and given by his father, Sultan Iskandar Tsani. In this case, the Sultanah seemed less assertive in making her own decision because she carried the name of her father, who was a victorious Sultan in his time.

The Sultanah's gentleness eventually led regional leaders to want to break away from Aceh. By establishing a relationship with the VOC, the regional *Orangkaya* asked for help in making their territories independent of Aceh's authority. But in return, the VOC wanted the privilege of trading in the region. One by one, the regions broke away from Aceh. Although the Sultanah had tried to maintain her vassalage since her father's reign, the concessions made to the *Orangkaya* made them feel entitled to their own authority. The

¹⁵⁰ Reid, *Asia Tenggara Dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1690*, 2014, 2:212.

sultanate's authority diminished as the Sultanah adopted a gentle and polite manner that was not coercive.

The gentle style established by the Sultanah caused problems later, but the researcher prefers to call this style an advantage of the Sultanah over her predecessors. Violations were common because the rules were not so binding. However, the loyalty shown by the Sultanah's followers was one that grew out of their respect and recognition of the Sultanah, not out of fear of punishment by a leader who was worried about losing his followers, so loyalty to the leader was given involuntarily, not voluntarily. Some examples will be discussed in the next chapter.

Thomas Bowrey, an English merchant who traded in the Dutch East Indies, said that during the time of the tyrannical king before the reign of the queen, the submission of the people was as if they were slaves. The king inflicted cruel punishment even for small mistakes, their hands and feet were cut off. Major mistakes would not be treated humanely. A small mistake could result in a person being dragged into the palace courtyard and made to hold a pot of rice and water over a fire so that his hands would be burnt. Many inhuman cruelties were reported by one of the royal officials.¹⁵¹ Cheah Boon Kheeng also claims that Aceh had been under despotic kings for 50 years, and Iskandar Muda was the most tyrannical. He killed all his sons who were suspected of plotting a coup. The transfer of power to a female king signaled the end of despotic rule.¹⁵²

3.5 Did Aceh Decline During Her Reign?

The period from Sultan Alaidin Ali Mughayat Syah to Sultanah Safiatuddin was the age of glory. Sultan Alaidin Ali Mughayat Syah, Sultan Al Qahhar Iskandar Muda and Sultanah Safiatuddin were the most important leaders in the history of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam.¹⁵³ As mentioned by Andaya, who asserts that despite the opposition of numerous Muslim scholars to Safiatuddin's ascension to the throne, her adroit diplomatic maneuvers proved instrumental in mitigating tensions between Aceh and VOC and safeguarding Aceh's autonomy. Safiatuddin demonstrated remarkable resilience in navigating the shifting political and economic landscape.¹⁵⁴

The beginning of Aceh's trade decline was the Dutch Company's interest in Perak, Aceh's tin-producing vassal. Initially, tin from the Aceh Sultanate was exported to India by

¹⁵¹ Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal 1669-1679*, 296–97.

¹⁵² Cheah Boon Kheng, "POWER BEHIND THE THRONE: THE ROLE OF QUEENS AND COURT LADIES IN MALAY HISTORY" 66 (2024), https://www.jstor.org/stable/41486187?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents.

¹⁵³ Hasjmy, *Kebudayaan Aceh Dalam Sejarah*, 61.

¹⁵⁴ Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1400-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 198.

Gujarati merchants until the mid-17th century. Seeing this and realizing that the Aceh Sultanate was not as strong as it once was, Governor General Maetsuyker seized the opportunity. He used rather harsh means to gain a monopoly on trade. He renewed the trade agreement between Aceh and the Company. At the same time, he ingratiated himself with the small regional rulers under Aceh's rule, promising to help them break away from Aceh. On July 6, 1663, the Company's efforts resulted in the Treaty of Painan, which placed the regions of Indrapura, Tiku, and Padang under the Company with a guarantee of independence in exchange for the Company's absolute trade monopoly.¹⁵⁵ But in fact, according to Zainuddin, although the Sultanah was unable to expand her territory, she was able to defend the existing areas. With the power of her government, she was able to capture Dutch fortresses in the areas of Tiku, Pariaman, Padang, Salindo, Painan and Inderapura. What caused these areas to be controlled by the Dutch was that the regional leaders wanted to escape the Sultanah's authority and side with the Dutch.¹⁵⁶ Under female rule, the Acehnese elites took the opportunity to forge friendships and alliances with Dutch traders.¹⁵⁷ Under the leadership of Sultanah Safiatuddin, the authority of the sultanate declined significantly. Many regions in the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra separated from Aceh. Thus, it can be said that the politics of the sultanate had declined.¹⁵⁸

The leading *Orangkaya*, who had no influence in the palace because their authority had been removed by Iskandar Muda, re-emerged as four of them and formed an executive council that made many political decisions. Not only that, but they changed the flow of tribute and tax revenue from Aceh's subordinate territories from going to the palace to going to the *Orangkaya*. This shows that Sultanah Safiatuddin made concessions to the *Orangkaya*, so that whatever power remained for the sultanah was the fruit of her ability to position herself in the middle of the two major palace groups.¹⁵⁹

There was once a conflict between the palace *Orangkaya*. Maharaja Sri Maharaja was accused by his rivals of having acquired his land in a rice-growing region by fraud during the reign of Iskandar Tsani. Then Sultanah Safiatuddin solved the problem by using her father's division that the land they were entitled to was land based on Iskandar Muda's division. After some time, ownership of land in agricultural areas became more important than positions in the palace. The *Orangkaya* began to claim permanent rights to the land

¹⁵⁵ Bernard HM Vlekke, *Nusantara: A History of Indonesia* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2008), 90–91.

¹⁵⁶ Zainuddin, *Srikandi Atjeh*, 23.

¹⁵⁷ Graf et al., *Aceh*, 10.

¹⁵⁸ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia* (Crow's Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2004), 79.

¹⁵⁹ Reid, *Menuju Sejarah Sumatera*, 141.

and ran businesses that made huge profits. As a result, trade, which had previously been the key to the kingdom's prosperity, began to decline as commerce turned to individual interests. Pepper and tin exports disappeared during the reign of Tajul Alam Safiatuddin as a result of the relaxation of the *Orangkaya*.¹⁶⁰ But although Aceh's international trade may have declined in the late 17th century, Aceh was still able to demonstrate that it had a formidable regional port with many Muslim and non-Muslim traders frequenting its harbor.¹⁶¹ Aceh was the only port in the archipelago that was never influenced by Westerners, and although its power waned in the second half of the 17th century, the kingdom remained an important power.¹⁶²

Aceh's influence in the West Sumatra region faded not because of popular dissatisfaction with its leaders, but because of the avoturers who wanted the Dutch in as soon as possible. Aceh's influence was based on the development of religion and sympathy for the ulama, without which Aceh's power on the coasts of West Sumatra would have disappeared before the time of the Sultanah. Because Islam in West Sumatra came from Aceh, Aceh had great authority and was not easily fragile, so the Dutch had to fight first to eliminate Aceh's influence.¹⁶³

At first, the people of Aceh were unsure of their female leader and chose her because there was no other choice. But over time, Sultanah Safiatuddin proved herself as a leader. She was able to defend the destiny of her people, which earned her the respect of her people. On the other hand, there were people in the conquered territories who felt that they were not sufficiently protected. This was due to the Dutch provocations and disturbances that occurred during his leadership.¹⁶⁴ Safiatuddin not only managed to survive the difficulties that hit his kingdom, but she was also able to make reforms by expanding the meaning of democracy, which was less realized by the people before. It is estimated that his leadership was more successful than some weak and oppressive men.¹⁶⁵

During Safiatuddin's reign, there was indeed a setback in several aspects. However, the decline was not due to her incompetence alone. The decline of the fleet did not begin during Sultanah's reign, but the decline of the military had actually begun before she ascended the throne, right after her father's death. After that, the military did not receive any guidance or renewal. Thus, it can be concluded that the military's decline did not occur during the Sultanah's time, but began when Iskandar Tsani led Aceh. Aceh's economy was

¹⁶⁰ Reid, 141–44.

¹⁶¹ Graf et al., *Aceh*, 247.

¹⁶² Reid, *Asia Tenggara Dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1690*, 2014, 2:247.

¹⁶³ Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, 1:389–401.

¹⁶⁴ Adan, *Islam Dan Sistem Pemerintahan Di Aceh Masa Kerajaan Aceh Darussalam*, 216.

¹⁶⁵ Adan, 217.

still strong when the new Sultanah took over. With her ingenuity, she managed to evade the Dutch intervention and gave them a headache as their tricks to get trade privileges and monopolies did not work. The economy went into a slump at the end of the reign as many petty kings sided with the Dutch to break away from Aceh. The reason these regions broke away from Aceh was not because of dissatisfaction with the Sultanah's leadership, but because the petty kings wanted a helping hand from the Dutch and allowed the Dutch to intervene in trade in the coastal areas of Aceh, especially the west coast of Sumatra.

Map of Aceh Kingdom in the 17th century



Figure 3. 1

Source: <https://www.kompas.com/stori/image/2023/07/26/100000379/wilayah-kekuasaan-kerajaan-aceh?page=1>

3.6 Concluding remarks: Reexamining Anthony Reid's Account

Anthony Reid argues that the glory of the Aceh Sultanate lasted only from 1520-1641, ending with the accession of Sultanah Safiatuddin.¹⁶⁶ This is the opposite of Lombard's opinion that the decline of Aceh since the death of Iskandar Muda in 1636 is unjustified. During the reign of Iskandar Tsani, Aceh was still a great power, and during the reign of Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin, she collected taxes mercilessly, proving that Aceh was still powerful and respected by foreigners. The Europeans treated Aceh with

¹⁶⁶ Anthony Reid, *Blood of The People* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979).

respect and humility.¹⁶⁷ With so much evidence of Aceh's progress under the leadership of the Sultanah, the glory days of the Sultanate of Aceh should have been prolonged. In the queen's hands, education flourished, the country's economy remained strong until the end of her reign, and Aceh's port remained a destination for foreign traders because of its prosperity. Many local and Western manuscripts have recounted the glory of Aceh during the time of Sultanah Safiatuddin. Nuruddin ar-Raniry clearly describes the prosperity of Aceh. Thomas Bowrey mentions that the Acehnese ruler had enough power to allow or forbid foreign traders to do business in her country; if she had not been so powerful, trade licenses would not have been subject to her decision.

Reid argues that the power of the queen of Aceh had three shortcomings: that her power was so limited that she could not mediate the disputes of the domestic political and economic elites; that she was not strong enough against foreigners to prevent the VOC from controlling her conquered territory, which was rich in pepper and tin; and that her rule, which was never considered legitimate by the ulama, was not an ideal model for the next generation. The Acehnese clerics' opposition to the Sultanahs of Aceh was finally successful after they received a letter from Mecca stating that women's rule was contrary to religion.¹⁶⁸

Reid's first and second shortcomings about the Sultanah's inability to mediate between the political and economic elites can be refuted by looking at how she dealt with the VOC when they tried to monopolize the tin trade in Perak. With her ingenuity, the VOC's many attempts failed time and again, and they lost a lot of money. The kingdom's economy was also doing well at the beginning of their reign. Aceh was able to engage in import-export activities. They imported gold from Minangkabau and Gresik, rice from Deli, and other goods from foreign traders. The port of Aceh also continued to exist without foreign intervention. The Sultanah also managed to reduce the quality and weight of gold coins without reducing their sale value. The Sultanah's inability to mediate between political elites can be refuted by the fact that she granted trading rights to the VOC without being influenced by anti-Dutch factions in the court. The Sultanah managed to place herself in the middle, as Reid argues in *Towards a History of Sumatra* that the Sultanah was able to rule for a very long time because of her ingenuity in placing herself in the middle of a large group of palaces. Sultanah was able to prove her competence as the leader of the Aceh Sultanate by keeping the ministers happy and remaining neutral.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Denys Lombard, *Kerajaan Aceh Jaman Sultan Iskandar Muda 1607-1636* (Balai Pustaka, 1991).

¹⁶⁸ Reid, *Asia Tenggara Dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1690*, 2014, 2:xxvii.

¹⁶⁹ Reid, *Menuju Sejarah Sumatera*, 141.

The ceding of the west coast of Sumatra to the VOC did occur in 1662, but this was caused by small kings who wanted to break away from Aceh and welcome the VOC's helping hand in exchange for sacrificing the trade monopoly to the VOC. Reid's opinion is not entirely wrong, but the glory of Aceh at the beginning of Sultanah Safiatuddin's reign cannot be denied. The shortcomings mentioned should be re-examined by adding a certain period of time.

The third shortcoming mentioned by Reid regarding the legitimization of women's rule by the ulama will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: THE SUPPORTERS OF SULTANAH SAFIATUDDIN

This chapter examines the factors that contributed to the consolidation of Sultanah Safiatuddin's position on the throne for nearly three decades. The support of the orang kaya and ulama played a pivotal role in enhancing the legitimacy of the Sultanah's leadership. The challenges posed by the opponents of the Sultanah's leadership were effectively countered until her demise, largely due to the pivotal role of key figures within the court.

Historically, a leader of an Islamic state has always had a close relationship with the Qadi or Mufti. This relationship has been in place since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, with the exception that at that time the position of ruler and jurist was held by the Prophet Muhammad as well as the bearer of God's revelation to spread the renewal of the message. The Prophet Muhammad was the leader (Imam) of the Islamic state of Medina al-Munawwara. The duties of the Imam and Qadi were, of course, distinct. The Imam was responsible for leading the country, gathering soldiers, killing rebels, managing finances, and conducting wars. In contrast, the Qadi's role was that of a legal advisor to the state.¹⁷⁰ As the Prophet Muhammad was the caliph, he fulfilled two roles: *imarah*, which meant leader of the state, and *imamah*, which meant leader of religion.¹⁷¹

From the time of the Prophet Muhammad leading the Islamic state of Medina until the time of al-Khulafā ar-Rashidun, the duties of the caliph included matters of imamate and imarah. However, during the Abbasid period, Harun al-Rashīd introduced the position of Qadi as a legal advisor to the state for the first time. Harun al-Rashīd determined this course of action because he perceived a necessity to differentiate between the authority to issue decrees and the authority to execute them.¹⁷² The Qadi served as the executor of the imam's orders and the head of his authority. Consequently, an imam should continuously monitor the performance of the Qadis. The Imam and the Qadi should engage in discourse regarding the rulings of qada'. The Imam must select the Qadi from among those who are pious, honest, trustworthy, and do not engage in fraud because the Qadi is concerned with the public good.¹⁷³

Given the close relationship between *imamah* and *imarah*, it can be argued that the ruler of the Islamic state, or caliph, is inseparable from the ulama, who act as his companion in implementing the state government. In the Aceh region, the relationship between ulama

¹⁷⁰ al-Imām al-Qarāfi, *Al-Ihkam Fi Tamyizil Fatawa an al-Ahkam Wa Tasarrufat al-Qadi Wa al-Imam* (Aleppo: Dar al-Bashāir al-Islamiyya, 1967).

¹⁷¹ al-Ish, *Ad-Daula al-Umawiyya*.

¹⁷² Sabaru, *Qadi Al-Quda Fi al-Islām*.

¹⁷³ al-Qarāfi, *Al-Ihkam Fi Tamyizil Fatawa an al-Ahkam Wa Tasarrufat al-Qadi Wa al-Imam*.

and sultans has been a long-standing and intertwined one, dating back to the Islamic Kingdom of Perlak and continuing through the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam. The sultan in Aceh's royal system is defined as a leader who is elected and has a mandate from God, which is analogous to the caliph. Similarly, the position of jurist or royal cleric was considered the supreme judge chosen by God to be the legal advisor of the state.¹⁷⁴

The cleric was a highly significant figure in the kingdom of Aceh. The ulama were not only the Sultan's legal advisors but also played a pivotal role in the advancement of science and the dissemination of Islam across the archipelago, including the West and East coasts of Sumatra, Java, Ternate, Sulawesi, Malacca, and Malaysia. Despite their influential position as advisors to the Sultan, the ulama were able to exercise a degree of restraint and control over his authority. The ulama were only granted judicial authority upon assuming the role of royal judges.¹⁷⁵

Religion is one of the most powerful elements in Aceh, even beyond its customs. People tend to prioritize religion over adat. Acehnese people defer to the word of the ulama as religious leaders and have great respect for them.¹⁷⁶ Not only did the Acehnese rulers earn the respect of the people, but they also always honored the religious leaders and verbally gave them the highest appreciation and gave them the opportunity to sit in the representative council. The ulama were accorded special treatment within the palace.¹⁷⁷ The close relationship between the clerics and the rulers in Aceh exemplifies the implementation of *imarah* and *imamah*, which must be present in every government, as Hasjmy asserted, “*Ulama dengan raja tidak boleh jauh atau cerai, sebab jika jikalau cerai ulama dengan raja niscaya binasalah negeri*” (Ulama and the king must not be far away or divorced, because if the ulama and the king are divorced, the country will perish).¹⁷⁸ Given the profound influence of Islam in Aceh, the Ulama were able to effectively disseminate anti-Dutch sentiments among the population. Although the VOC was the most powerful trading and naval power, the Dutch lacked effective control over Aceh's waters and trade. Hostility towards the Dutch was intensified by the population, one reason being that antagonizing the Dutch as "infidels" is found in Islamic terms.¹⁷⁹

The ulama's pivotal role within the royal government system, coupled with the mutual support between the ruler and the ulama, resulted in the ulama's endorsement of the

¹⁷⁴ Thalal and Kurdi, *Ulama Aceh dalam melahirkan human resource di Aceh*, 33–34.

¹⁷⁵ Graf et al., *Aceh*, 192.

¹⁷⁶ Muliadi Kurdi, *Abdurrauf As-Singkili Mufti Besar Aceh Pelopor Tarekat Syattariyah Di Dunia Melayu* (Banda Aceh: Penerbit Lembaga Naskah Aceh, 2017), 25.

¹⁷⁷ Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, 7.

¹⁷⁸ A. Hasjmy, *Bunga Rampai Revolusi Di Tanah Aceh* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1978), 64.

¹⁷⁹ Reid, *Asia Tenggara Dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1690*, 2014, 1:70.

Sultan having a profound impact on the people's acceptance of their leader. Given their esteemed position, the ulama were able to defuse the uproar caused by those who sought to seize power.¹⁸⁰ During the Sultanah's tenure, disputes did not solely arise between the affluent at court; the Uleebalang, the hereditary leaders of Aceh's minor districts, also sought to challenge the court's authority. Their primary obstacle was the religious leader, the ulama, or imam.¹⁸¹

The coronation of Safiatuddin as the new Sultanah, succeeding her husband, was met with significant opposition. The Ulama played a pivotal role in calming the tumult. With the Ulama's legitimacy and support, Safiatuddin ascended to the throne and ruled for a considerable period until her natural death. During his reign, two eminent scholars provided their endorsement and exerted a profound influence on public acceptance. These were Nuruddin ar-Raniry (d. 1658) and Abdurrauf as-Singkili (d. 1693). Not only during her tenure, but almost a century after her death, a scholar who became a Qadi in the Kingdom of Aceh, which had been replaced by a male ruler in the mid-18th century, helped legitimize women's leadership in the kingdom, Jalaluddin al-Tursany (d. 1770). The following discussion of legitimacy and the ulama also refutes Anthony Reid's opinion on the shortcomings of Sultanah rule in Aceh, namely that women's rule was never legitimized by religious leaders.

Prior to discussing the support of influential individuals for the legitimacy of the Sultanah's leadership, it is important to note that an Acehnese manuscript that had been composed before the coronation of the Sultanah as the leader of Aceh had already legitimized the leadership of a woman in a country. In *Tajussalatin*, book of political and governmental ethics inspired by the Persian-Islamic tradition of Mirrors of Princes (completed in 1603), it is stated that a leader must fulfill ten criteria, namely: *akibaligh* (puberty), knowledgeable, good-looking, generous, remembers those who do good and returns the favor, brave, knows his kingdom and can recognize good and bad people, male, avoids associating with women, and employs knowledgeable ministers. The author of *Tajussalatin*, Bukhari al-Jawhari, mentions that a king should be a man, because women are less intelligent. However, in the subsequent paragraph, the author posits that women may be appointed king in the event of a crisis of succession, whereby the previous king has died. In the absence of a male successor, either from the ruler's descendants or relatives, a

¹⁸⁰ Kurdi, *Abdurrauf As-Singkili Mufti Besar Aceh Pelopor Tarekat Syattariyah Di Dunia Melayu*, 25.

¹⁸¹ M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1200*, 3. ed (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 38.

woman may be appointed as a king. This is preferable to the country being without a leader, as it may lead to *fitnah*.¹⁸²

4.1 Support of Ulama

Following the demise of Sultan Iskandar Tsani, considerable opposition emerged from those who espoused the view that female leadership was unacceptable. Their objections were based on religious grounds, with the argument being made that, according to Sharia law, women should not serve as imams in prayers where there is a male *ma'mum*. Additionally, women were deemed to be ineligible to act as guardians in marriage contracts. Consequently, a person who was prohibited from serving as an imam in prayer and a guardian in marriage was also deemed to be unsuitable to assume the role of head of government in a large country. However, these religious justifications were ultimately invalidated through the support of religious authorities, who also provided theological justification for women's leadership. At the time, religious leaders recognized women as legitimate leaders of the kingdom, provided that they retained control over marriage and religious affairs in the hands of *Kadi Malikul Adil*.¹⁸³

Before Sultanah Safiatuddin ascended the throne, there were some other queens in Islamic history. Queen Radiyya was a queen in India (r. 1236-1240), Shajarat al-Dur was a Queen of Mamluk Dynasty in Egypt (r. 1250), Queen Arwa (r. 1067-1138) was the queen of Sulayhi Dynasty in Yemen.¹⁸⁴

Nuruddin ar-Raniry was a significant figure within the palace, as the Sultanah had not yet ascended the throne. He served as Syaikh al-Islam during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Tsani, replacing Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani (d. 1630), who had held that position during the time of Sultan Iskandar Muda and was of the *Wujudiyah* school. The position of *Syaikhul Islam* was the highest in the Sultan's court, even more so than the other two official positions, *Kadi Malikul Adil* and *Orangkaya Maharadja Sri Maharadja*. Nuruddin ar-Raniry also held the position of *Kadi Malikul Adil*. In addition to religious affairs, Dutch records indicate that Nuruddin ar-Raniry also handled economic and political affairs. When Gujarati traders dominated trade in Aceh, the Dutch protested, but their efforts were unsuccessful. This was due to Nuruddin ar-Raniry's communication with Sultanah Safiatuddin, which resulted in policies that favored Gujarat and harmed the Dutch. With

¹⁸² Jumsari Jusuf, *Tajussalatin Nuruddin Ar-Raniry* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1979), 37–38.

¹⁸³ Raiyan, *Sultanah Dalam Kerajaan Atjeh Darussalam (1641-1699 M)*, 59.

¹⁸⁴ Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, 16.

his important position in the Sultanate, he engaged in a conflict with the *wujudiyah* propagated by Hamzah Fansuri (d. 1590) and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani (d. 1630).¹⁸⁵

The previous chapter examined the figure of the Sultanah in *Bustān al-Salaḥīn*, a text written by Nuruddin ar-Raniry. Ar-Raniry describes Safiatuddin's justice and wisdom and the prosperity of Aceh under her leadership. He frequently praises the Sultanah in his sentences, indicating that he supports and legitimizes her authority. It is clear that Nuruddin ar-Raniry was indeed involved and instrumental in the appointment of the Sultanah. Indeed, it has even been suggested that it was only ar-Raniry's strong support and influence that legitimized the appointment of Iskandar Tsani's widow as Sultanah. This then became a great opportunity for Safiatuddin's three female successors. It is likely that her role was significant, given that she held a prominent position in the palace during Iskandar Tsani's tenure. She was eventually replaced by Saiful Rijal during Safiatuddin's reign, which prompted her departure from Aceh.¹⁸⁶ Nuruddin ar-Raniry was the scholar who crowned Safiatuddin as Sultanah.¹⁸⁷

Approximately two decades after Safiatuddin assumed power, Abdurrauf as-Singkili, a scholar who played a pivotal role in the continuity of women's governance in Aceh, returned to the region after completing his education in Arabia. It is estimated that he returned to Aceh in either 1661 or 1662 CE.¹⁸⁸ As-Singkili was not involved in the process of changing power from Iskandar Tsani to Safiatuddin. However, his position as *Kadi Malikul Adil* enabled him to create political stability during Safiatuddin's reign until the next three queens, except that he died when the last queen, Kamalat Syah, had not long reigned. He died in 1693.¹⁸⁹

Upon his return to Aceh, As-Singkili's expertise was made known to Sultanah Safiatuddin. He was not only versed in fiqh but also proficient in kalam and Sufism. Recognizing his abilities, the Sultanah offered him the position of *Kadi Malikul Adil*. Initially, he declined, but upon reflection, he accepted the position to succeed Saiful Rijal. Abdurrauf's acceptance of the position of *Kadi Malikul Adil* offered by the Sultanah can be seen as an indication of his endorsement of the Sultanah's authority. His willingness to become one of her officials suggests that he is satisfied with her leadership and recognizes her as a superior who can order him.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*, 59.

¹⁸⁶ Reid, "Female Roles in Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia."

¹⁸⁷ Thalal and Kurdi, *Ulama Aceh dalam melahirkan human resource di Aceh*, 87.

¹⁸⁸ Kurdi, *Abdurrauf As-Singkili Mufti Besar Aceh Pelopor Tarekat Syattariyah Di Dunia Melayu*, 15.

¹⁸⁹ Thalal and Kurdi, *Ulama Aceh dalam melahirkan human resource di Aceh*, 82–83.

¹⁹⁰ Thalal and Kurdi, 73–87.

Kadi Malikul Adil has been a highly respected position since the early 17th century. Apart from his position as *Kadi Malikul Adil*, As-Singkili did have high popularity in the eyes of the Acehnese people at that time. The people of Aceh have a popular expression, "*Adat bak Poteu Meuruhom, Hukom bak Syiah Kuala*" (custom in Aceh comes from Sultan Iskandar Muda, while Islamic law comes from Abdurrauf as-Singkili). The law referred to here is of course sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith.¹⁹¹ Islamic law was applied very strictly in Aceh. The law was the responsibility of the king. There were two law person in charge in the Aceh Kingdom: *Kadi Malikul Adil* as the law-maker, and Sultan as the law-giver. If someone violated the law that had been written in the statutes made by the king and his representatives, then he was declared guilty and treasonous. It is clear that Islamic law, leaders and the *Kadi Malikul Adil* had a very close relationship in Aceh. If As-Singkili legitimized a woman as the leader of a country, then the chaos that occurred outside the palace related to disputes over the legitimacy of women as leaders, he could quell it with his image and authority that was respected by the people.

In the opening of *Mir'at al-Tullab*, As-Singkili wrote:

الخليفة في تنفيذ أحكام مولاها في الأرض المباركة الجاوية الأشية السلطنة المعظمة الحاقنة المكرمة صفية الدين شاة
بردولة ابنة السلطان اسكندر مود جوهن بردولة أدام الله دولتها القاهرة ورفع درجتها في الدنيا والآخرة ونصرها على
أعدائها الظاهرة والباطنية وصرف عنها شر كل حاسد وحاسدة إلى خير ما لا يملكه غيره في الحال والآنية

"Khalifah dalam menerapkan hukum-hukum Tuannya di bumi yang diberkahi, bumi Jawi Aceh, Sultanah yang agung dan mulia, Safiatuddin Syah Berdaulat putri Sultan Iskandar Muda Johan Berdaulat. Semoga Allah mengekalkan negerinya yang perkasa dan meninggikan derajatnya di dunia dan akhirat, serta menolongnya dari semua musuh baik yang jelas tampak dan tidak jelas, serta memalingkannya dari kejelekan semua orang dengki kepada kebaikan yang tidak dimiliki selainnya baik di masa ini maupun akan datang."

*"Caliph in implementing the laws of her Lord in the blessed land, the land of Jawi Aceh, the great and noble Sultanah, Safiatuddin Syah Berdaulat daughter of Sultan Iskandar Muda Johan Berdaulat. May Allah preserve her mighty land and exalt her rank in this world and the next, and help her from all enemies both apparent and invisible, and turn her from the evil of all the spiteful people to the good that no one else has both now and in the future."*¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Thalal and Kurdi, 91.

¹⁹² as-Singkili, *Mir'ah at-Thullab*, 3.

فإنها قد سألتني من شدة حرصها في الدين أن أكتب لها ما يحتاج إليه من تولى في أمر القضاء من الأحكام الشرعية

المعتمدة عند العلماء الشافعية بلسان الجاوية السمطرية

“Sesungguhnya Sultanah Safiatuddin yang memiliki semangat besar terhadap agama telah memintaku untuk menuliskan kitab berbahasa Jawi Sumatra yang dibutuhkan oleh orang yang menjabat sebagai Qadi. Sebuah kitab yang memuat hukum-hukum syariat yang diakui oleh para ulama syafii.”

*“Indeed, Sultanah Safiatuddin, who had great zeal for religion, had asked me to write a book in Jawi Sumatra that was needed by the person who served as Qadi. A book containing the laws of Shari’ah recognized by the Shafi’i scholars”.*¹⁹³

The mention of Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah with praise and prayer is Abdurrauf as-Singkili's acknowledgment that Safiatuddin is the leader of Aceh. The writing of the *Mirat al-Ṭullab* book was a request from Sultanah Safiatuddin to Abdurrauf as-Singkili as someone who served as Qadi of the kingdom of Aceh Darussalam so that there was a reference book for ruling on a problem and as a guide for judges. In fact, this book also became a reference and law in the Mindanau Kingdom in the Philippines.¹⁹⁴

The implementation of book writing carried out by Abdurrauf as-Singkili at the request of Sultanah Safiatuddin is a form of obedience to the leader. Obedience to the leader means recognizing the legality and authority of the Sultanah, so that implicitly he does not question women's leadership over a country. Not only calling her a *"khalifah"* which means the leader of Allah on earth (a legitimized ruler of Aceh Kingdom), As-Singkili also mentions "who has a great passion for religion" which is a compliment to the Sultanah. This is also confirmed in *Bustan al-Salatin*, that the Sultanah was a pious and religious leader. There is much evidence that religious knowledge flourished during her reign.

The Sultanah's proximity to Sheikh Abdurrauf as-Singkili exemplifies one of the prerequisites for a king who is on the throne, namely, a close relationship with the ulama. As documented in the *Adat Aceh* manuscript, this is exemplified by:

“Adapun kehendak raja memberi titah kepada pendeta yakni hendakkan raja bertanyakan pada agama sesuatu masalah yang memberi faedah dan siapa kasi akan agama dan siapa lebih akan agama, syahdan membedakan dari pada halal dan haram dan makruh dan mebah, mengatakan fardu dan sunat,

¹⁹³ as-Singkili, 3.

¹⁹⁴ Kurdi, *Abdurrauf As-Singkili Mufti Besar Aceh Pelopor Tarekat Syattariyah Di Dunia Melayu*, 103.

mengesahkan dan membatalkan supaya tiada lupa pendeta akan agama, maka bertambahlah majlis raja pada sekali semayam itu.”¹⁹⁵

“With regard to the king's intention to issue directives to the priest, it can be stated that this represents the king's desire to inquire about matters pertaining to religion that confer benefit and to distinguish between those matters that are permitted, those that are prohibited, and those that are discouraged. This inquiry is intended to clarify the distinction between obligatory and recommended acts of worship, as well as to confirm and revoke directives previously issued. The objective is to ensure that the priest remains informed and does not neglect his religious obligations. As a result of this discussion, the king's majlis was expanded during that particular session.”

He reiterated his previous assertion:

“Adapun segala syarat Qadi itu maka yaitu seperti kata Syaikh Zakaria al-Ansari dalam kitab Fath al-Wahhab hendak ada ia Islam lagi akil baligh dan merdeka lagi adil dan mendengar lagi melihat dan tahu berkat kata lagi memadai pada pekerjaan hukum dan mujtahid yakni orang yang tahu akan segala hukum Qur'an dan hadits dan qiyas dengan segala baginya dan yang tahu akan segala hal orang yang mengriwayatkan hadits pada kuatnya dan daifnya dan yang tau akan lughah pada nahwu dan sarafnya dan balaghahnya. Maka jika tiada diperoleh akan orang yang menghimpunkan segala syarat yang tersebut itu maka dijadikan mufti oleh raja-raja yang keras akan Qadi seseorang Islam yang tiada patut sebab tiada ia menghimpunkan segala syarat yang tersebut itu seperti orang yang fasik dan orang yang taklid dan kanak-kanak dan perempuan upamanya niscaya sah dan lulus karena darurat.”

“The conditions for the Qadi, as outlined by Shaykh Zakaria al-Ansari in Fath al-Wahhab, include that the individual must be a Muslim who has reached the age of puberty and is free and just. Additionally, the Qadi must be able to hear, see, and understand the word, as well as possess the requisite competence in legal work. A mujtahid is defined as an individual who is versed in the rulings of the Qur'an and the hadith, as well as the principles of qiyas and the nuances of hadith narrators. Additionally, a mujtahid must possess a comprehensive understanding of the lexicon, including its nahwu, nerves, and grammar. In the event that no individual can be identified who meets all of these criteria, the muftis of harsh kings may

¹⁹⁵ Ramli Harun and Tjut Rahma, *Adat Aceh* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1985), 15.

*appoint a qadi from among Muslims who do not meet all of the aforementioned conditions, including those who are wicked, unbelievers, children, or women. The validity of their hadiths will be upheld due to the necessity of their appointment.”*¹⁹⁶

Abdurrauf as-Singkili enumerates several requirements for the position of Qadi, yet does not stipulate that only men may assume this role. He even posits that women may assume the role of Qadi in an emergency, when no suitable male candidate is available. This is analogous to the record in the *Tajussalatin* manuscript, which permits women to ascend to the throne in an emergency.

Mirat al-Ṭullāb is a translation of Fath al-Wahhāb, a book by Zakāriā al-Ansārī (d. 1520). Zakāriā al-Ansārī, as mentioned by his student Ibn Hajar, was a brighter dynamic scholar and the highest rank among the chain-holding jurists (*musannidīn*).¹⁹⁷ Fath al-Wahhāb is his work commentaring his another work, Manhāj al-Ṭullāb.¹⁹⁸ In Fath al-Wahhāb, Zakāriā al-Ansārī mentions a man as one of the requirements for judges. However, in his translation and interpretation, Abdurrauf as-Singkili did not include a specific gender as a requirement. This was subsequently cited as an act to satisfy the ruling leader and an attempt to compromise with the sultanah's government. However, regardless of the circumstances, this action can be interpreted as a middle way in making legal decisions. While the law does stipulate that men are preferred over women for leadership roles, it is essential to consider local social and cultural nuances to ensure that gender is no longer an absolute requirement.¹⁹⁹ Abdurrauf posits that judges are appointed by the leader of the state. If female judges are to be legitimized, let alone the one who appoints them, the Queen, it is necessary to consider the legitimacy of the appointment process itself.

Qadi is one of the categories of ulul amri, as elucidated by Shaykh Wahbah az-Zuhaili. *Ulul amri* encompasses judges, war leaders, and scholars who compile sharia laws. Ibn Arabi posits that *ulul amri* are scholars and leaders.²⁰⁰ It can be concluded that there is no specific gender requirement to be an ulil amri, either as *ulama'* or *umara'* (leaders), according to Abdurrauf as-Singkili. Abdurrauf as-Singkili thus played a significant role in his position as Qadi, contributing to the continuity of Sultanah Safiatuddin's government. He was able to create political stability and religious life.

¹⁹⁶ as-Singkili, *Mir'ah at-Thullab*, 6.

¹⁹⁷ Mahmood Kooria, *Islamic Law in Circulation, Shafi'i Texts across the Indian Ocean an the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 179.

¹⁹⁸ Kooria, 144.

¹⁹⁹ Kurdi, *Abdurrauf As-Singkili Mufti Besar Aceh Pelopor Tarekat Syattariyah Di Dunia Melayu*, 24.

²⁰⁰ Wahbah Al-Zuhailī, *Tafsīr Al-Munīr*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2003), 132.

In the view of Ayzumardi Azra, Abdurrauf as-Singkili's opinion regarding the requirements for judges that do not include men as a mandatory requirement allows for the accusation that he compromised his intellectual integrity with the authorities because he did not address the issue of public confusion regarding the legitimacy of women as leaders. However, this could also be interpreted as as-Singkili's personal sense of tolerance.²⁰¹ However, the notion that he legitimized women only because of his personal political leanings towards Safiatuddin can be easily refuted. This is because if this were the case, the three queens after him could not have succeeded him in succession. His legitimization of women leaders was based on the socio-historical conditions of the kingdom itself, which is in line with the assertion by Ibn Qayyim al-Jauzy (d. 1350) that laws can change due to changes in time, place, circumstances, and customs.²⁰²

Abdurrauf as-Singkili approaches the question of women leaders from a different perspective. He believes that this is a matter of *ijtihadi*, where the room for interpretation is wide open to religious texts. He considers that there is no definite prohibition or text that explicitly shows the prohibition. In fact, he adds that if there is a situation of necessity, a non-Muslim can also become a leader. The objective of politics is to achieve the benefit and prosperity of a country. If women are able to realize this goal with their strength and expertise, there is no sharia prohibition that prevents women's leadership.²⁰³ Abdurrauf did not legalize the throne of Sultanah Safiatuddin solely due to an emergency or solely because he supported her as a leader. Rather, he saw the condition of women at that time as capable and feasible to handle state affairs. The role of the head of state is significant, as it entails representing the interests of numerous parties and fostering a prosperous country. He recognized the potential of women to fulfill this role.²⁰⁴ Historically, women in the sultanate of Aceh have been trained to oversee state affairs, dating back to the leadership of Iskandar Muda, where they have been actively involved in state affairs. It is not surprising that women were subsequently featured and demonstrated competence in the leadership of his daughter.

The Sultanah in the Kingdom of Aceh was not only legitimized by *Kadi Malikul Adil*, who served during the reign of the queen, but also by *Kadi Maikul Adil* in later generations. Jalāluddin al-Tursani served as *Kadil Malikul Adil* during the reigns of Sultan Alaidin Maharaja Lela Ahmad Syah (r. 1735-1760 CE) and Sultan Alaidin Johan Syah

²⁰¹ Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*, 79.

²⁰² Thalal and Kurdi, *Ulama Aceh dalam melahirkan human resource di Aceh*, 91.

²⁰³ Abbas, *Corak Pemikiran Hukum Islam Syekh Abdurrauf As-Singkili Studi Terhadap Kitab Mir'at al-Thullab Tentang Hakim Perempuan*, 35.

²⁰⁴ Abbas, 102.

Pouteu Uk (r. 1735-1760 CE). In *Safīnah al-Hukkām*, a book he composed on the orders of Sultan Johan Syah Poteu Uk as an easier version of Abdurrauf as-Singkili's *Mir'at al-Ṭullāb*, he explicitly states that it is permissible for a woman to be king. A review of his writings in *Safīnah al-Hukkām* reveals that he was profoundly influenced by Abu Hasan Ali bin Muhammad bin Habib al-Basharī al-Baghdadī al-Māwardī (d. 450 AH) and Abu Ya'lā Muhammad bin Husain al-Farra (d. 458 AH) in the field of constitutional law. However, in a manner similar to that of As-Singkili, At-Tursani presents his own *ijtihad* regarding women leaders. In contrast to al-Māwardi and Abu Ya'la, they only recognize male leaders.²⁰⁵

At-Tursany's endorsement of women leaders, as evidenced in *Safīnah al-Hukkām*, demonstrates that scholars are not constrained by the whims of the ruling leader and are able to act independently. During his tenure as *Kadi Malikul Adil*, the ruling government was a dynasty that overthrew the reign of the queen. Nevertheless, the ulama were still willing to express their opinions, despite potential conflict with the ruler. As previously discussed, the ulama held a highly esteemed position in Aceh even before the leaders.²⁰⁶ This refutes Snouck Hurgronje's assertion that ulama were commonly tasked with the compilation of religious and legal manuals, or in other words, that a king would commission a religious leader to write these books with the content determined according to the king's wishes.²⁰⁷

4.2 Support of *Orangkaya*

The term "*Orangkaya*" is used to refer to individuals who held significant positions of authority. During the 17th century, Europeans interpreted "*Orangkaya*" as a term for nobility. According to François Martin, the wealthy often extended their thumb and little finger nails as a sign that they did not engage in manual labor, thereby distinguishing themselves from the common people. The *Orangkaya* were wealthy, possessed beautiful homes, employed slaves to serve them, and held authority that could potentially endanger the king.²⁰⁸

The *Orangkaya* constituted an elite group whose support was of such importance to the sultanate that it was often necessary to resort to harsh persuasion in order to gain that advantage. Iskandar Muda employed harsh measures to supervise the *Orangkaya* and to ensure their submission to his authority.²⁰⁹ This is corroborated by Zainuddin, who asserts

²⁰⁵ Hasjmy, *Risalah Akhlak*, 114–26.

²⁰⁶ Hasjmy, 125–26.

²⁰⁷ Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, 7.

²⁰⁸ Reid, *Menuju Sejarah Sumatera*, 96–97.

²⁰⁹ Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1200*, 39.

that the highest Sultan was Iskandar Muda, as he was the only one who could get things done his way.²¹⁰ Conversely, the *Orangkaya* regarded the sultan as a threat because of his authority, which could restrict their mobility. The *Orangkaya* held a fiefdom over the land they owned, and the inhabitants of the area were generally obliged to comply with the system established by the *Orangkaya*. In addition to their authority over the land they own, the *Orangkaya* also exert influence over the control of natural resources and international trade. It is common for other *Orangkaya* to provide support to facilitate the political activities of their colleagues.²¹¹

Orangkaya consented to the appointment of Iskandar Muda's daughter as the new monarch. The restrictions placed upon Tajul Alam were as follows: she was prohibited from marrying, no man in the kingdom was permitted to gaze upon her after she was crowned queen, no officials or judges were allowed to act in relation to the law without first obtaining the queen's approval, and the queen's followers were to number at least 500 women and eunuchs.²¹² The appointment of Tajul Alam as ruler of Aceh by the *Orangkaya* was an implicit endorsement of the continuation of the royal dynasty. During his 34-year reign, no *Orangkaya* attempted to usurp the throne.²¹³

Four positions exerted considerable influence on the sultanate were those of the prime minister, *Kadi Malikul Adil*, *Wazīr al-Harbiyyah* (minister of warfare), and *Kerikun Katibul Muluk* (palace scribe). The prime minister, whose title was *Orangkaya Seri Maharaja*, was a noble who was held in high esteem by the sultan, ministers, and other nobles. *Kadi Malikul Adil* was a scholar who oversaw the affairs of the royal court and held a highly influential position within the kingdom. *Wazir al-Harbiyyah* was the individual responsible for the kingdom's defense affairs and led the Acehnese army, which was titled Admiral. Meanwhile, *Katibul Muluk* was the secretary of state who was responsible for the royal correspondence related to trade and the inauguration letter of the sagi commander.²¹⁴

In the period following the death of Sultan Ali Riayat Syah on June 28, 1589, the orang kaya was the party that determined the election of the sultan. They offered the supreme power to an elderly man with the expectation that it could be controlled by them so that the kingdom could be run according to the wishes of the orang kaya and could soon die. The individual who ascended to the throne at that juncture was Sultan Alaidin Riayat Syah.²¹⁵

²¹⁰ Zainuddin, *Srikandi Atjeh*, 19.

²¹¹ Raiyan, *Sultanah Dalam Kerajaan Atjeh Darussalam (1641-1699 M)*, 47–48.

²¹² Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal 1669-1679*, 298–99.

²¹³ Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, 1:54.

²¹⁴ Adan, *Islam Dan Sistem Pemerintahan Di Aceh Masa Kerajaan Aceh Darussalam*, 137.

²¹⁵ Raiyan, *Sultanah Dalam Kerajaan Atjeh Darussalam (1641-1699 M)*, 36.

Reid categorizes the issue of royal authority in Aceh into three distinct phases. Prior to 1589, the *Orangkaya* exercised considerable influence, holding the power to depose the king if they deemed it necessary. A king who managed to retain power for an extended period was beholden to the *Orangkaya* for their support. The subsequent phase was characterized by the ascendance of the king, who held uncontested authority within the kingdom. This period, which lasted from 1589 to 1636, commenced with the ascension of Sultan Alaidin Riayat Syah (d. 1605) and marked the end of the unstable period during which the throne was a mere plaything for the *Orangkaya*. This period concluded with the death of Iskandar Muda. The third period was the waning of the kingdom and the gradual rise of the three *sagi*, beginning with Iskandar Tsani's accession to the throne.²¹⁶ The three *sagi* represented the division of the Aceh Darussalam kingdom into three states. Each region was led by a Panglima Sagi. The three *sagi* were Sagoe Tengoh Lheeplooh (Sagi XXV), which consisted of 25 mukim; Sagoe Duaplohnem (Sagi XXIV), which consisted of 26 mukim; and Sagoe Duaplohdua (Sagi XXII), which consisted of 22 mukim.²¹⁷

During his tenure, Safiatuddin appointed Panglima Polem as the leader of Sagi 22, Panglima Sri Imam Muda as the leader of Sagi 26, and Panglima Teungoh Lhee Plooh as the leader of Sagi 25. These Sagi Chiefs played a pivotal role in maintaining Safiatuddin's rule for almost 35 years. In the *Qanun Meukuta Alam*, it is stated that the military forces of the Panglima Sagi were instrumental in overcoming obstacles and challenges during Safiatuddin's tenure.²¹⁸ In 1656, the Dutch attempted to incite the minor leaders in West Sumatra, who were Aceh's subordinates, to betray. However, the Aceh Commander was able to overcome this by storming the Dutch fortress. The loyalty demonstrated by the Aceh Commander and his subordinates reflected their respect for the Sultanah, which was inseparable from the Sultanah's exemplary leadership during her tenure.²¹⁹

In her administration, Sultanah Safiatuddin was assisted by four main *orang kaya*, namely Lebai Kita Callij, Maharadja Sri Mahrada, Kasim Raja Adonna Lilla, and Laksamana Paduka Tuan. It is important to note that other *orang kaya*, such as the Syahbandar, also played a role. Pieter Sourij asserts that the Sultanah was a commendable and admirable leader, yet she consistently sought counsel from her *Orangkaya*.²²⁰ Bowrey (d. 1713) also observed and documented this phenomenon, stating, "The individuals occupying positions of authority during the Queen's reign were entitled to the following

²¹⁶ Reid, *Menuju Sejarah Sumatera*, 95–103.

²¹⁷ Raiyan, *Sultanah Dalam Kerajaan Atjeh Darussalam (1641-1699 M)*, 62.

²¹⁸ Mohd. Kalam Daud and TA Sakti, *Qanun Meukuta Alam* (Banda Aceh: Universitas Syiah Kuala Press, 2010), 99–100.

²¹⁹ Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, 1:392.

²²⁰ Graf et al., *Aceh*, 8.

titles: The Meer Raja, who was the Lord Treasurer, the Leximana, who was the Lord General, and the great Orongkays constituted the lowest echelon of officials. These individuals were subservient to the queen and were not permitted to take action without first obtaining her approval. With regard to the Sultanah's permission, as previously stated, even the *Orangkaya* had established their own regulations from the outset, stipulating that no decisions should be made without the Sultanah's approval.²²¹

It was prohibited for officials or foreigners to view the Sultanah. Should a foreign counselor wish to propose an offer or enter into an agreement, an official would be present at the palace and would act as the communication link between the Sultanah and the counselor. Should the Sultanah approve the offer or agreement, she would affix her royal seal through the official. However, if the Sultanah did not approve, the counselor should refrain from further discussion of the proposed business agreement, as the Sultanah would not grant her seal.²²² As evidenced by the willingness of the ulama to accept Safiatuddin's offer to become *Kadi Malikul Adil*, the palace officials demonstrated their loyalty and legitimacy to a woman leader by accepting her authority and subordinating themselves to her.

In 1650, following an unsuccessful attempt by the Dutch to blockade Perak and Aceh, despite their forced acquisition of half of the tin mines in Perak from the Queen and her officials, the Dutch concluded a treaty with Aceh that was widely seen as meaningless. The VOC's failure was due to the actions of anti-Dutch groups. In 1651, the admiral seized power and replaced Bendahara Sri Maharaja as prime minister, shooting his son-in-law, who had been his main backer. After assuming power, the anti-Dutch group carried out a purge on the West coast by eliminating officials who were allied with the Dutch and the English.²²³

In 1675, Bowrey was in Aceh when the elderly Sultanah Safiatuddin died. At her death, thousands of people recognized that they had had a queen for many years and were generally satisfied that she had ruled them for so long and in peace. The men mourned by wearing old clothes and abstaining from sports and games.²²⁴

The queen fell ill for five weeks. During this period, there was a pervasive atmosphere of suspicion and fear of rebellion among the Acehnese. However, the nobles intensified the security measures at the palace, with the city being guarded at a heightened level, particularly in the vicinity of the palace, which was under the watch of thousands of

²²¹ Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal 1669-1679*, 299.

²²² Bowrey, 300.

²²³ Reid, *Asia Tenggara Dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1690*, 2014, 1:70.

²²⁴ Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal 1669-1679*, 312.

soldiers and 600 elephants. Additionally, the soldiers were provided with opium thrice a day to maintain their vigilance. The few men who were firm and favorably disposed towards the government were placed in state offices and forts situated a few miles to the east of Aceh.²²⁵

The *Orangkaya* have demonstrated considerable loyalty since the Sultanah's accession to the throne until her death. Apart from their satisfaction with the Sultanah's leadership, this loyalty indicates that they have no issue with the gender of their leader. If a woman were considered problematic, they would not have willingly been under the Sultanah's command. According to Reid, appointing women as kings in Aceh was a deliberate and strategic move. Of the four queens, only the first queen employed the measure of descent. Despite the political and military collapse that occurred during the reign of the queens, they managed to maintain Aceh as the most independent port in Southeast Asia. During the reign of the first queen, Sultanah Safiatuddin, Aceh was frequented by foreign merchants because the government was fair, food was cheap, the land was prosperous, and everyone lived in peace. One of the ways in which the nobles gave importance to commerce, limited the king's despotic power, and made the country safe for international trade was by establishing a system of women's rule.²²⁶

4.3 Support of Sufis During Safiatuddin's Reign

Nuruddin al-Raniry was a scholar who served as Syaikh al-Islām during the leadership of Sultan Iskandar Tsani. At that time, he attempted to eradicate the *Wujudiyah* school, which held the notion that "God was our soul and being, humans were His soul and being." He emerged triumphant in a debate with Kamal al-Din, a follower of Hamzah Fansury and Shams al-Din al-Sumantrani, which resulted in Kamal al-Din's execution. Nuruddin al-Raniry also burned books containing *Wujudiyah* to prevent its dissemination among the populace.²²⁷

It is possible that Nuruddin al-Raniry was trained from birth to be a missionary in the East Indies. He wrote numerous works on Islam in the Malay language, which were disseminated across a vast geographical area. These writings were produced with the intention of replacing the pantheistic teachings of Hamzah Fansury in the Kingdom of Aceh with the synthetic tariqa and hadith studies that had flourished in Mecca and Medina during

²²⁵ Bowrey, 312.

²²⁶ Reid, *Asia Tenggara Dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1690*, 2014, 1:197–98.

²²⁷ Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 14.

the 16th century. With the support of Sultan Iskandar Tsani, he was able to gain the religious authority to execute those he deemed heretical.²²⁸

Following the ascension of Iskandar Tsani's widow to the throne in 1641, Nuruddin ar-Raniry sought to maintain his influence over Sultanah Safiatuddin. In 1642, he published a book entitled *Akhhbār al-Ākhirah fī Ahwāl al-Qiyāmah*. In August 1643, Nuruddin al-Raniry confronted a new challenge. A disciple of Kamal al-Din, a follower of the previously executed Hamzah Fansury, arrived in Aceh after completing his education in Surat. He was Saiful Rijal, who hailed from Minangkabau. Nuruddin al-Raniry denounced Saiful Rijal as a heretic, but subsequently Saiful Rijal gained the support of *Orangkaya* Maharaja Lela. On August 27, 1643, Saiful Rijal emerged triumphant in a debate with Nuruddin al-Raniry, forcing the latter to return to Gujarat.²²⁹ Upon returning to the capital of the Kingdom of Aceh, Saiful Rijal promptly endeavored to establish the foundations of piety in accordance with the precedent set by his mentor, Kamal al-Din, and also sought to garner support for his mission.²³⁰

Upon ascending to the throne, the Sultanah was confronted with challenges from the *Wujudiyah*, who asserted that women were not legitimate heads of state.²³¹ However, after Saiful Rijal sought assistance to continue the work of his predecessor and was subsequently supported by Maharaja Lela, he was able to gain the Sultanah's assistance, effectively defusing the challenge posed by the *Wujudiyah*.

In 1661, Saiful Rijal was replaced by Abdurrauf al-Singkili shortly after his return from Mecca. As previously stated, al-Singkili became *Kadi Malikul Adil* at the Sultanah's request. His return to Aceh also brought the *Syattariyah tariqa* that he had learned from his two teachers during his stay in Mecca, namely Shaykh Ahmad al-Qushashi (d. 1661) and Shaykh Ibrahim al-Kurani (d. 1690).²³² *Syattariyah* in Aceh was influenced by two distinct schools of thought: the *Wujudiyah* teachings of Hamzah Fansury and the *Syuhudiyyah* teachings of Nuruddin ar-Raniry. *Syattariyah* served as a moderating force, reconciling the sharp differences between the two schools. As-Singkili did not align with the teachings of *Wujudiyah*, yet he also differed from Nuruddin ar-Raniry's approach. Abdurrauf

²²⁸ Gibson, *Islamic Narrative and Authority in Southeast Asia from the 16th to the 21st Century*, 56.

²²⁹ Gibson, 59–60.

²³⁰ Jan van der Putten and Mary Kilcline Cody, *Lost Times and Untold Tales from the Malay World* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 143–44.

²³¹ M. Yunus Jamil, *Tawarikh Raja-Raja Kerajaan Aceh* (Banda Aceh: Adjam Iskandar Muda, 1968), 46.

²³² Kurdi, *Abdurrauf As-Singkili Mufti Besar Aceh Pelopor Tarekat Syattariyah Di Dunia Melayu*, 30.

approached the *Wujudiyah* with a non-violent approach, in contrast to Nuruddin ar-Raniry, who considered the *Wujudiyah* a deviant sect and therefore required a firm response.²³³

With the religious authority bestowed by the Sultanah, Abdurrauf as-Singkili's teachings, which were more tolerant than Nuruddin al-Raniry's, became the official creed of Aceh during the reign of four sultanahs until his death.²³⁴ Under the patronage of the Sultanah, Abdurrauf was able to disseminate his religious ideas with relative ease. Abdurrauf also appears to have been a suitable mediator for the religious conflicts that arose as a result of the lengthy debate between the adherents of the *Wujudiyah* doctrine of Hamzah Fansuri and Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani with the orthodox Muslims led by Nuruddin al-Raniri. The socio-religious context in Aceh had a significant impact on Abdurrauf's religious thought and practice, including the approach he took to formulating his teachings. Abdurrauf's approach to formulating his *Syattariyah* tariqah teachings, in particular, was reconciliatory, attempting to reconcile two conflicting views.²³⁵ The order did not merely develop within the Kingdom of Aceh; it also spread to West Sumatra and Java through as-Singkili's students.²³⁶ It is evident that the role of the leader in the spread of this *tariqa* is of significant importance. Without the authority granted by the leader, an ulama is unable to freely channel his knowledge and teachings. In particular, if a teaching has been designated as the official doctrine of a nation, it will be able to disseminate rapidly due to the considerable influence of the ulama and leaders.

It can be argued that the Sultanah permitted Saiful Rijal to emerge triumphant in the debate not because she recognized Saiful Rijal's Sufi order, but rather to forestall further bloodshed resulting from Nuruddin al-Raniry's vehement opposition, which could have destabilized her rule. Conversely, the Sultanah was also attempting to surmount the challenge posed by the *Wujudiyah* adherents' refusal to legitimize her leadership. This was evidenced subsequently when the Sultanah resolved to replace Saiful Rijal with the ahlussunnah scholar Abdurrauf as-Singkili in 1661, who was less hostile to the *Wujudiyah* sect than Nuruddin al-Raniry. However, if Saiful Rijal had held the position of *Kadi Malikul Adil* under Sultanah Safiatuddin, this demonstrates the *Wujudiyah* adherents' legitimization of women leaders despite their rebellion early in the Sultanah's reign. Following the Sultanah's replacement of Saiful Rijal's position, As-Singkili's teachings

²³³ Kurdi, 74.

²³⁴ Gibson, *Islamic Narrative and Authority in Southeast Asia from the 16th to the 21st Century*, 60.

²³⁵ Oman Fathurrahman, *Tarekat Syattariyah Di Minangkabau: Teks Dan Konteks* (Jakarta: Prenada Media Group, 2010), 34.

²³⁶ Kurdi, *Abdurrauf As-Singkili Mufti Besar Aceh Pelopor Tarekat Syattariyah Di Dunia Melayu*, 58.

effectively superseded Saiful Rijal's mission, as Michael Laffan notes, given the Sultan's apparent intention to monopolize the esoterica of the tariqas.²³⁷

The intertwined relationship between politics and creed has been a prominent feature of Islamic history since the Abbasid period. Caliph al-Ma'mun established the mutazilah as the official creed of the state, while Harun al-Rashīd subsequently replaced it with the Hanafi madhhab. The founder of the Hanafi madhhab, Abu Hanifah (d. 767), was subjected to torture at the hands of Caliph al-Mansur for his rejection of mutazilah, which became the official creed and was legitimized by the then-Caliph.²³⁸

Milad Milani defines political Sufism in two distinct ways. In its broadest sense, it is the spontaneous role of Muslim institutions in government that serves to underscore the synaptic relationship between religion and politics in everyday life. In its narrowest sense, it is political Islam, which denotes the use of mysticism to shape the political system. Sufism has its own postulations, which emphasize the dependence of rulers on the advice of Sufi leaders. Typically, Sufis engage with exoteric religious scholars and vie for a place in the political arena.²³⁹ In Aceh, political Sufism may be understood as Saiful Rijal's efforts to gain the ruler's support for the success of his doctrine.

In conclusion, a tariqa requires governmental authority to fulfill its role. Absent such authority, the tariqa can only exist, but cannot expand and become implemented in daily life. Furthermore, government leaders may require the support of a certain religious group to maintain stability. This phenomenon is exemplified by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (d. 1792), who assisted Muhammad bin Saud (d. 1765) in seizing control of Saudi territory, with the understanding that Salafi-Wahabi would become the official madhhab of the state he would establish.²⁴⁰

This chapter examines the support of palace officials and eminent scholars who played a pivotal role in the longevity of Sultanah Safiatuddin's leadership. The willingness of the *Orangkaya* to become subordinates of Sultanah Safiatuddin reflected their legitimacy and recognition that the Sultanah was the leader of Aceh Darussalam. This was evidenced by the loyalty given by the *Orangkaya*, as well as their respect for the Sultanah. The willingness of the ulama to hold the position of *Kadi Malikul Adil* under the leadership of a woman was also evidence that they legitimized it. It is possible that they held a different interpretation than other ulama regarding the suitability of women as rulers. However, this

²³⁷ Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past*, 158.

²³⁸ al-Ish, *Ad-Daula al-Umawiyya*.

²³⁹ Milani, *Sufi Political Thought* (London: Routledge, 2019), 65.

²⁴⁰ Tamim Ansary, *Destiny Distrusted History Of The World Through Islamic Eyes* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009).

assumption is not supported by evidence, as different interpretations can be influenced by varying customs in different regions.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Conclusion

Chapter 2 examines the political biography of Sultanah Safiatuddin. The appointment of Tajul Alam as the successor of Iskandar Tsani was briefly caused by the crisis of the crown prince. The elites agreed to place her on the throne because they saw her as the most deserving. *Tajussalatin*, a manuscript that had been written long before Safiatuddin ascended to the throne, explains that although women were not prioritized as leaders, certain crisis circumstances allowed the country to be led by women to fill governmental vacancies. In her inaugural actions, Safiatuddin was validated by the Acehese manuscript. However, the underlying rationale behind the crisis of the crown prince was the elites' decision to appoint a woman as their leader. Iskandar Muda's era was arguably the most challenging for the elites. Iskandar Muda managed to gain Orangkaya's unwavering loyalty and exercised authority over the country according to his own vision. In contrast to the previous period, during which Orangkaya held considerable power to depose a king, Reid asserts that Orangkaya deliberately appointed women to end the tyrannical rule and bring about an end to the challenging period.

Islam was deeply embedded in Acehese society. The implementation of the Islamic state as the model of Aceh's governance system led to the perception that the sultan was a leader chosen and mandated by Allah, or analogous to the concept of caliph during the dynastic period. Sultanah Safiatuddin was bestowed with a distinctive title, "*Paduka Seri Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiat ad-Din Berdaulat Zillullah fi al-Alam*". This title indicates that Safiatuddin was the sovereign leader of the Kingdom of Aceh and was God's representative on earth. This title was also found on the royal coins and seal, serving as a sign that Safiatuddin was the legitimate leader in power at the time. The royal coin served as a means of buying and selling, and during Safiatuddin's time, she managed to reduce the gold content of the coin while still maintaining its selling value. The royal seal was employed to dispatch official missives and to grant licenses for trade and agreements between Aceh and foreign countries. Safiatuddin demonstrated considerable authority during her tenure. The argument is put forth that Safiatuddin occupied a comparable position to that of her predecessors, as evidenced by the titles, coins, and seals that were in effect during her reign.

Chapter 3 discusses about Sultanah's leadership. The longevity of his reign was due to her effective leadership style. During her reign, she demonstrated her capacity to lead effectively. She was able to establish Aceh as a center of education and culture in Southeast Asia, elevate the status of women, protect his country from foreign intervention,

and utilize diplomacy in a strategic manner. His wisdom was also evident in her decision not to punish his subjects who had committed crimes and instead protected them under Aceh's laws.

At the outset of her tenure, the kingdom's economy was thriving. She successfully maintained the port of Aceh as the most autonomous among other ports situated to the east of the Bay of Bengal. Foreign merchants flocked to Aceh due to its flourishing economy under the rule of Sultanah Safiatuddin. However, towards the conclusion of her reign, the economy began to falter as numerous Aceh vassal regions permitted the Dutch to exercise exclusive control over trade within their jurisdictions. This may be attributed to the fact that the Sultanah granted the *Orangkaya* a certain degree of autonomy, in contrast to her father's leadership style, which had been successful in subduing the *Orangkaya*.

The Sultanah's leniency towards the *Orangkaya* ultimately resulted in shortcomings. However, the Sultanah's gentleness of leadership style afforded her a distinct advantage over her predecessors. The loyalty of Iskandar Muda's followers was likely motivated by fear of being considered a traitor, whereas the Sultanah's subordinates demonstrated respect for her. From the time of her appointment until her death, it was observed that she had loyal followers.

It can be argued that Safiatuddin's leadership style was a significant contributing factor to the longevity of her reign. Her more conciliatory approach to leadership created opportunities for some of the wealthier individuals to align themselves with VOC, while simultaneously fostering a sense of loyalty and respect among her own troops.

Chapter 4 discusses about the supporters of Sultanah. In addition to her prudent governance, Sultanah Safiatuddin enjoyed the support of prominent figures during her tenure. Upon assuming the throne, she faced opposition from scholars who believed that women leaders were not aligned with Islamic principles. However, when two prominent ulama, Nuruddin ar-Raniry and Abdurrauf as-Singkili, endorsed her leadership, the challenge posed by the ulama's rejection was effectively addressed. The legitimacy of the ulama towards women's leadership did not only occur during the reign of the four Queens of Aceh; Jalaluddin Tursany, who became *Kadi Malikul Adil* after the reign of the queens, also legitimized women to become leaders.

The Sufi movement and the governing authorities also had a reciprocal relationship. Initially, the followers of the *Wujudiyah* sect in Aceh opposed Sultanah Safiatuddin serving as queen. However, after Saiful Rijal won the debate against Nuruddin ar-Raniry and was appointed Syaikh al-Islām in ar-Raniry's place, the *Wujudiyah* challenge subsided. By appointing Saiful Rijal, Sultanah Safiatuddin did not intend to

recognize *Wujudiyah* as an official sect. Rather, her objective was to reduce dissension and maintain political stability. This was evident when Abdurrauf as-Singkily immediately replaced Saiful Rijal as Shaykh al-Islam. The *Syattariyah* teachings brought by Abdurrauf as-Singkily were officially recognized as the creed of the state and subsequently disseminated beyond Aceh, in part due to the Sultanah's endorsement.

In addition to the support of the ulama, Safiatuddin also received support from her loyal subjects. The *Orangkaya* participated in protecting the Sultanah from traitors and assisted the Sultanah in ruling the country. As long as the Sultanah was on the throne, no orang kaya seized the throne.

In addition to her prudent leadership style, the support of prominent figures within the kingdom was a significant contributing factor to the stability of Sultanah Safiatuddin's tenure. The *sufi* adherents, who initially posed a challenge at the outset of her ascension, were eventually subdued through the appointment of Saiful Rijal as *Kadi Malikul Adil* did not necessarily indicate the Sultanah's support for the *Wujudiyah*, but rather represented one of her strategies to mitigate the disruptive influence of *Wujudiyah* followers who opposed her leadership.

5.2 Research Suggestion

This research has discussed the factors that contributed to the long tenure of Sultanah Safiatuddin in power, both in terms of the individuals and figures who supported her and the influential people who provided her with their backing. Further research is recommended on the following topics: the role of Sufi orders in supporting teachers and their disciples, particularly within the context of the Sufi Shattariyah Tarekat and its teachings on the legitimization of women's leadership. This research should aim to determine whether Abdurrauf as-Singkily's approach to women's governance was also espoused by Shattariyah scholars in other regions or was limited to Aceh.

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