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Sufi Education in Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*: The Interplay of *Khauf* and *Raja'* in Zainuddin's Spiritual Formation

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Abstract

Purpose of the Study. This study examines how *khauf* (fear of Allah) and *raja'* (hope in Allah's mercy) are represented in Zainuddin's responses to hardship in Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* and how their interplay informs a Sufi account of spiritual formation. Method. The study employed qualitative content analysis of the 2021 edition of the novel. Narration, dialogue, letters, and actions were examined across episodes of hardship through heuristic and hermeneutic readings using Al-Ghazali's account of *khauf* and *raja'* as the interpretive framework. Interpretations were checked against the surrounding scenes and the wider narrative. Main Findings. Zainuddin's restraint and references to divine accountability provide the clearest evidence of *khauf*, while his counsel to remember Allah in ease and hardship suggests spiritual vigilance. *Raja'* is expressed through worship and remembrance, through his understanding of love as an occasion for sincerity and obedience, and through renewed effort after loss. His reliance on Allah coexists with dependence on Hayati's affection. A turning point occurs when his hope for divine help accompanies his decision to rebuild his life through writing, with Muluk's support. Novelty and Originality. The study distinguishes ordinary distress from God-directed fear and separates hope contingent on Hayati's affection from the expectation of divine mercy. By tracing these distinctions across episodes, it shows how accountability guides restraint and how hope sustains action, offering a reading of spiritual formation as a process marked by tension and change. Contribution of the Study. The findings connect these narrative patterns to *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) and show how selected passages could support guided reflection in Islamic religious education. Learners can examine what Zainuddin fears, where he places his hope, and how both shape his choices under pressure.

Keywords: Hamka, *khauf*, *raja'*, spiritual formation, Sufi education

Introduction

Literary fiction offers a way to explore how moral and spiritual commitments are tested in situations of loss, conflict, and uncertainty. Through characters' choices and their consequences, readers can consider how values acquire meaning in particular circumstances (Vidmar Jovanović, 2024). Research on guided small-group discussions of narrative fiction also shows how examining characters' dilemmas can strengthen aspects of children's collective and individual moral reasoning (Gasser et al., 2026). In Islamic education, this reflective potential is relevant to discussions of character formation and the cultivation of *akhlāq* (moral character). Scholarship on Sufi approaches to Islamic education has connected inner cultivation with social concern and peace (Siregar et al., 2024), while research on the *manaqib* tradition has examined how Sufi values are articulated in religious practice and education (Saepudin et al., 2025). These studies provide a basis for examining how fiction can make the inner work of spiritual formation accessible to readers.

Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* provides a rich setting for this inquiry. Hamka's reformulation of Sufism placed spiritual discipline within the ethical demands of everyday life (Aljunied, 2016). The novel brings those demands into view through Zainuddin, whose paternal ties to Minangkabau fail to secure recognition under its matrilineal customary system. His exclusion shapes his relationship with Hayati and intensifies his suffering after she marries Aziz (Hamka, 2021). Previous studies have examined the novel's tragic structure and social criticism (Asis & Burhanuddin, 2022), its social values (Saifullah, 2023), and the influence of customary authority on the characters' choices (Ardianta, 2024; Manugeren et al., 2023). A psychological reading has also highlighted Zainuddin's inner conflict (Nurhayati et al., 2024). Together, these studies clarify the social and emotional conditions in which his spiritual struggles unfold.

Research on the novel's religious and ethical dimensions has identified patience, reliance on Allah (*tawakkul*), and ethical values expressed through the characters' conduct (Budi et al., 2024; Ismawirna et al., 2025). These studies leave room to explain how the narrative connects such dispositions to changes in what Zainuddin fears, where he places his hope, and how he acts under pressure. For Sufi education, this is a question of formation. Patience and reliance on Allah acquire educational significance through the choices Zainuddin makes when his attachments, expectations, and responsibilities come into conflict. Reading those choices through *khauf* and *raja'* brings the process of spiritual formation into focus.

Al-Ghazali's account in *Ihya' 'Ulumiddin* provides the conceptual framework for this reading (Al-Ghazali, 1994a, 1994b). In this framework, *khauf* is a fear directed toward Allah that gives ethical weight to one's actions through an awareness of accountability. *Raja'* is hope in Allah's mercy and help, expressed through worship, ethical effort, and self-correction. Their relationship matters because awareness of accountability can encourage

restraint and self-examination, while hope can sustain the effort to act well amid hardship. Studies of Al-Ghazali's account of well-being and of Sufi approaches to character education have likewise treated fear and hope as spiritually significant dispositions (Mazaya & Soleh, 2023; Mohd Isa & Utomo, 2024).

The distinction between emotional distress and God-directed fear is especially important in interpreting Zainuddin's letters. His image of a thirsty traveler pursuing a mirage conveys the anguish of repeatedly disappointed expectations (Hamka, 2021, p. 39). The following passage expresses his continuing reliance on Allah and his conviction that ease may follow hardship, giving a clearer textual basis for reading *raja'* (Hamka, 2021, p. 40). Elsewhere, Zainuddin invokes accountability before Allah in addressing Hayati and is described as respecting her marriage despite his continuing affection (Hamka, 2021, pp. 147–148, 216). Read together, these passages allow an interpretation of *khauf* through the relationship between accountability and moral restraint. The novel also depicts Zainuddin making his prospects for happiness contingent on Hayati's affection (Hamka, 2021, pp. 69, 132). This dependence provides a point of comparison for his later expression of hope in Allah's help and his decision to rebuild his life through writing (Hamka, 2021, p. 172). Al-Ghazali's critique of misplaced spiritual hope concerns a distinct disposition, namely expecting divine mercy without the corresponding effort to amend one's conduct (Al-Ghazali, 1994b).

This study uses qualitative content analysis to examine how *khauf* and *raja'* are represented in Zainuddin's speech, actions, and responses to suffering, and how their interplay can be interpreted as a process of spiritual formation. Its contribution is to trace the relationship between moral accountability, changing objects of hope, and renewed ethical effort across specific episodes in the novel. Through the lens of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), the analysis also considers the novel's potential as a resource for guided reflection in Islamic religious education, particularly on how patience, sincerity, and reliance on Allah take shape in response to hardship.

Method

This study employed qualitative content analysis within a library-based research design to examine the interplay of *khauf* and *raja'* in Zainuddin's spiritual formation in Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*. Qualitative content analysis made it possible to identify relevant passages systematically and interpret them in relation to their narrative context (Krippendorff, 2019). The study drew on written sources, consistent with library-based research in Islamic studies (Saefullah, 2024). The primary source was the sixth printing of Hamka's novel, published by Gema Insani in 2021 and comprising 255 pages (Hamka, 2021). The Indonesian translations of Al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulumiddin* and *Raudhah ath-Thalibin wa 'Umdah as-Salikin* (Al-Ghazali, 2009), together with relevant scholarship on Sufism and Islamic education, provided the conceptual and interpretive framework.

The researcher was the primary instrument for selecting and interpreting textual evidence (Sugiyono, 2022). Data were collected through document review and two stages of reading adapted from Hartati (2019). An initial heuristic reading of the full novel established the plot, the relationships among the characters, and the sequence of events surrounding Zainuddin's experiences of hardship. Repeated hermeneutic readings then examined the meanings conveyed through narration, dialogue, letters, and actions. The unit of analysis was a passage involving Zainuddin's response to hardship or his expression of fear, hope, or moral responsibility. Each selected passage was read in relation to the surrounding scene and its place in the wider narrative. This attention to context follows the hermeneutic principle that the meaning of a textual unit depends on its relationship to the larger text (Lyhne et al., 2025).

The analysis followed the iterative stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During data reduction, passages were selected according to their relevance to the research questions and classified using concepts drawn from Al-Ghazali (1994, Vol. 8, p. 4). This classification was theory-guided because the initial categories came from the conceptual framework (Kaur et al., 2025). The interpretation considered both the object of a character's fear or hope and its relationship to conduct. Evidence of *khauf* included references to accountability before Allah and passages that, read in context, connected this awareness to moral restraint. Evidence of *raja'* included expressions of hope in Allah's mercy or help and passages that connected such hope to worship, self-correction, or sustained effort. Passages expressing distress or dependence on Hayati were retained as contextual evidence for interpreting changes in Zainuddin's fears and hopes.

During data display, the selected excerpts and their page references were organized into three areas: representations of *khauf*, representations of *raja'*, and the interplay between the two in Zainuddin's responses to hardship. Comparing passages across episodes helped trace changes in where Zainuddin placed his hope and how those changes were expressed in his choices. In the final stage, the researcher revisited the excerpts and their narrative contexts to verify that each interpretation was supported by the text. The relationship between the two concepts was then interpreted through *tazkiyat al-nafs*, or purification of the soul, to explain its relevance to spiritual formation and to consider the novel's potential as a resource for guided reflection in Islamic religious education.

Credibility was strengthened through repeated readings of the novel, comparison of interpretations with Al-Ghazali's conceptual distinctions and relevant scholarship, and discussion with the thesis supervisor (Sugiyono, 2022). These checks helped establish whether the surrounding narrative and the conceptual framework supported each interpretation. Page references were retained for the excerpts presented in the findings so that readers could trace the interpretations to the edition analyzed.

Results and Discussion

The analysis identified three patterns in Zainuddin's responses to hardship. His restraint and references to accountability before Allah provide grounds for interpreting *khauf*. His letters and conversations show how hope in Allah coexists with dependence on Hayati and gains practical expression as he begins to rebuild his life. Read together, these patterns illuminate spiritual formation as a process in which moral accountability and hope shape how Zainuddin responds to circumstances he cannot control.

Khauf as Moral Restraint and Spiritual Vigilance

Al-Ghazali's account of *khauf* provides a framework for distinguishing fear of divine punishment, concern about losing Allah's mercy, and fear of distance from Allah (Al-Ghazali, 1994a). Although the term can denote fear, worry, or anxiety in ordinary usage (Ikrar, 2019), its Sufi meaning involves orientation toward Allah, awareness of accountability, and vigilance over one's conduct (Arrasyid, 2020; Bayar, 2021). These distinctions guide the interpretation of Zainuddin's conduct, with different levels of textual support for each reading.

The clearest evidence concerns moral restraint. When Zainuddin moves to Padang Panjang, the narrator observes that Batipuh is still close enough for him to visit Hayati and attributes his decision to keep his distance to his good character (Hamka, 2021, p. 72). Later, Muluk tells Hayati that Zainuddin continues to love her and respects her position as the wife of a man who had acknowledged him as a friend, despite the harm he had suffered (Hamka, 2021, p. 216). Both passages portray a character who limits what he is willing to do in response to longing. This restraint is consistent with *wara'*, the moral caution that Al-Ghazali (1994, Vol. 8, p. 4) associates with awareness of the consequences of wrongdoing.

The religious dimension becomes more explicit when Zainuddin asks Hayati whether she fears being questioned by the Lord on the Day of Judgment (Hamka, 2021, pp. 147–148). Because he addresses the question to Hayati, the passage establishes the moral terms in which he evaluates conduct more directly than it establishes his private motive for keeping his distance. Read alongside the narrator's account and Muluk's testimony, it supports an interpretation of restraint informed by divine accountability (Bayar, 2021). This reading also connects with Sufi discussions of *muhasabah* (self-examination), *muraqabah* (awareness of being watched by Allah), and *mujahadah* (striving to discipline oneself) (Al-Ghazali, 1994a; Suharto, 2021; Syakhrani et al., 2023). The social context remains significant. Studies of Minangkabau customary authority help explain the pressures that constrain Zainuddin's choices and give his restraint its narrative stakes (Ardianta, 2024; Manugeren et al., 2023).

A second pattern concerns the effort to sustain one's relationship with Allah in both ease and hardship. Zainuddin advises Hayati, "Worship Him devoutly and remember Him in times of ease, so that He may remember us in times of hardship" (Hamka, 2021, p. 55, translated from Indonesian). The

advice expresses a form of vigilance consistent with *taqwa* because it treats remembrance as an ongoing responsibility. Zainuddin's earlier statement that faith in Allah sustains him and that ease may follow hardship offers stronger evidence of *raja'* (Hamka, 2021, p. 40). In combination, the two passages show how continued remembrance and confidence in divine help can accompany one another. Budi et al. (2024) identify patience and reliance on Allah among the novel's religious values. The present analysis adds that those values become visible through the link between what Zainuddin says about faith and what he asks Hayati to practice.

The third pattern is more tentative. Alone on the veranda of the *surau*, Zainuddin contemplates the night sky and reflects on his misfortune. The narrator describes him as free from immediate fear and portrays him recognizing love as a gift from Allah (Hamka, 2021, p. 43). The passage supports a reading of contemplative attention and gratitude. Its connection to *khauf* at the level of *shiddiq*, understood as fear of losing closeness to Allah, rests on inference. Al-Ghazali's account of turning toward Allah in fear, including his citation of Abu al-Qasim al-Hakim, offers a theological parallel (Al-Ghazali, 1994a, Vol. 8, p. 4; Qur'an 51:50). The episode thus shows how companionship with the divine can be understood as a concern of the character's inner life, while the account of Hamka's modern Sufism helps situate that concern within his wider ethical thought (Azizah & Jannah, 2022; Aljunied, 2016).

Raja' and the Changing Grounds of Hope

Three expressions of *raja'* emerge from the analysis. The first is hope in divine guidance sustained by worship and remembrance. Zainuddin reassures Hayati that Allah will guide her and illuminate a path that appears dark, and he pairs that reassurance with advice about worship and remembrance in times of ease (Hamka, 2021, p. 55). The passage links the object of hope, Allah's guidance, to the conduct through which that hope is sustained. This connection is central to Al-Ghazali's account of commendable hope and to Arrasyid's (2020) discussion of the place of effort in Sufi practice.

The second expression is hope connected to sincerity and obedience. Zainuddin describes love as capable of causing harm or cultivating virtue, depending on the moral disposition of the person who receives it. In a pure heart, he says, love can yield dignity, sincerity, and obedience to Allah (Hamka, 2021, p. 55). His statement articulates an ethical aspiration for love. Read with Al-Ghazali's discussion of the relationship between love and hope, it gives grounds for understanding sincerity as something Zainuddin values and seeks to cultivate (Al-Ghazali, 1994b, Vol. 7, p. 620; Suharto, 2021).

The third expression is hope given practical form through renewed effort. After a period of illness and grief, Zainuddin voices the hope that Allah will gradually heal his heart (Hamka, 2021, p. 172). Muluk's companionship and decision to change his own course are part of the same episode. Zainuddin subsequently moves to Java and develops his work as a writer (Hamka, 2021). The sequence shows how confidence in divine help, support from a friend, and

renewed effort can operate together. His writing gives his renewed agency a concrete form, in keeping with Sufi accounts in which hope sustains striving (Arrasyid, 2020; Syakhrani et al., 2023). Aghababaei et al. (2016) also examine hope in relation to religious attitudes and subjective well-being, while Frumkin (2022) considers the relationship between hope and action in the context of climate-related health concerns. These studies offer broader points of comparison. The connection between hope and renewed action in Zainuddin's case rests on the sequence of events in the novel.

The novel also depicts hope contingent on Hayati's affection. In an earlier letter, Zainuddin places the possibility of hope or despair in Hayati's hands (Hamka, 2021, p. 69). Later, he acknowledges that Allah may leave some wishes unfulfilled, provided that Hayati continues to love him (Hamka, 2021, p. 132). The second passage is especially revealing because acknowledgment of divine will coexists with a condition tied to a desired human outcome. Hayati's marriage to Aziz makes the fragility of that condition visible. This reading complements psychological accounts of Zainuddin's inner conflict and studies of the customary pressures surrounding the marriage (Ardianta, 2024; Manugeren et al., 2023; Nurhayati et al., 2024).

Al-Ghazali's category of blameworthy *raja'* concerns the expectation of divine mercy or forgiveness without corresponding moral effort (Al-Ghazali, 1994b). Zainuddin's dependence on Hayati is therefore analyzed as interpersonal hope. It reveals a tension within his spiritual formation because his declaration of reliance on Allah appears early in the story, even as he later makes his future happiness contingent on Hayati's affection (Hamka, 2021, pp. 40, 69, 132). The shift lies in how he responds when the hoped-for relationship becomes unattainable. His later appeal to Allah for gradual healing accompanies a decision to act under changed circumstances (Hamka, 2021, p. 172).

The Interplay of *Khauf* and *Raja'* in Spiritual Formation

Al-Ghazali's comparison of fear and hope to bread and water suggests that each answers a different need, with its importance varying according to a person's condition (Al-Ghazali, 1994a). This account helps explain why the novel's portrayal of spiritual formation can include grief, moral restraint, dependence, and renewed effort. In the *surau* episode, Zainuddin moves among tears, smiles, and sighs as affection, fear, and frustrated expectations crowd his thoughts (Hamka, 2021, p. 43). These fluctuations establish the complexity of his experience. The interplay of *khauf* and *raja'* becomes clearer across episodes, when moral accountability gives him reason to restrain his actions and hope in Allah gives him reason to continue acting after disappointment. Bayar (2021), Guefara (2024), and Mazaya and Soleh (2023) likewise discuss the complementary roles of fear and hope in accounts of spiritual or psychological well-being.

The novel's image of a heart "washed by the waters of misfortune" offers a way to connect this interplay to *tazkiyat al-nafs*, or purification of the soul (Hamka, 2021, p. 41, translated from Indonesian). Zainuddin uses the image

himself when describing his character to Hayati. It is therefore evidence of how he makes sense of his suffering. The narrative develops that self-understanding through specific conduct. Respect for boundaries illustrates *wara'*. Repeated remembrance suggests *taqwa*. Renewed effort after loss gives form to *sabr* (patience). Zainuddin's account of love articulates *ikhlas* (sincerity) as an aspiration, while his appeal to Allah alongside practical effort provides a basis for reading *tawakkul* (reliance on Allah). His earlier boat metaphor likewise portrays perseverance as continuing to steer amid uncertainty (Hamka, 2021, p. 20). These readings place the educational significance of hardship in the character's responses to it and connect the novel to accounts of Sufi education centered on discipline, purification, and moral practice (Fuadi and Rijal, 2025; Maulana & Noviani, 2023; Muvid, 2019; Shofa, 2023).

This interpretation also connects with recent work on Al-Ghazali and moral education. Wahab (2025) situates spiritual formation within a broader account of moral agency that engages reason, character, and the soul. Jenuri et al. (2025) examine how Al-Ghazali's concepts of the self, heart, spirit, and intellect can inform Islamic religious education. The present findings contribute a literary example of how inward dispositions become open to discussion through a character's language, relationships, and choices. The novel's contribution lies in making those choices available for close reading, including moments when Zainuddin's conduct and stated commitments remain in tension.

For Islamic religious education, the passages can support guided reflection on three questions: What does Zainuddin fear or hope for? What evidence shows where that fear or hope is directed? What action follows from it? Comparing his letters to Hayati with his conversation with Muluk can help learners distinguish distress, divine accountability, and hope expressed through effort. This use of literary evidence complements studies that relate Islamic and Sufi values to character education, religious practice, spiritual counseling, and social concern (Ilmi et al., 2023; Mohd Isa & Utomo, 2024; Saepudin et al., 2025; Siregar et al., 2024). The findings support a proposal for guided literary reflection. Its effects on learners remain a question for classroom research.

Conclusion

This study found that the interplay of *khauf* and *raja'* helps explain how Zainuddin responds to hardship in Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*. Awareness of accountability before Allah gives moral significance to his restraint, while hope in divine mercy and guidance finds expression in worship, remembrance, and renewed effort. His reliance on Allah appears early in the novel and coexists with his dependence on Hayati's affection. The turning point comes when his hope for healing accompanies a decision to rebuild his life, with Muluk's support. This pattern challenges a linear reading

of Zainuddin's spiritual development and shows how grief, attachment, and religious commitment can coexist as his priorities change.

The study builds on earlier readings of patience and *tawakkul* in Hamka's novel by tracing how these dispositions take shape in specific choices. It also refines the application of Al-Ghazali's framework by distinguishing emotional distress from *khauf* and hope contingent on Hayati's affection from *raja'*, which is directed toward Allah. This distinction matters because blameworthy *raja'* specifically concerns expecting divine mercy without corresponding moral effort. By examining how accountability guides restraint and how hope sustains action, the study offers a literary account of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) that connects inner dispositions with conduct.

The analysis focused on selected passages involving one character in a single novel, so its conclusions are specific to that narrative. Future studies could examine a broader corpus of Hamka's fiction, including *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah* and *Merantau ke Deli*, to explore whether similar relationships between fear, hope, and moral action appear in other settings. Teachers in schools and madrasahs could use selected passages for guided reflection on what Zainuddin fears, where he places his hope, and how these commitments shape his choices. Classroom action research could then examine how such discussions help learners interpret and apply these concepts.

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