

Arabic Music in Indonesia: History and Its Influences

Maman Lesmana

Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia

ABSTRACT: In Indonesia, there are several types of music that are thought to originate from the Arabs. This is because their names use Arabic. However, research needs to be conducted to find out whether this is true. Some say that the first Arabic music that entered Indonesia was Arabic music in the Arabian Gulf. After the rise of mass media in the twentieth century, there were also Arabic music originating from Egypt and the Mediterranean to the East or the Levant which is a legacy of Mesopotamian culture, Persian culture called the golden age of Arab civilisation in the ninth to thirteenth centuries, and succeeding Turkish culture which ruled the Arab countries in the sixteenth century. Another opinion says that one aspect that appeals the interest of certain communities in Indonesian society towards music and songs from Arabia was because the song contents have Islamic teachings. This article attempts to explore the history of the spread of this type of music and its influence in Indonesia.

KEYWORDS: Music, Arab, Indonesia, history

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I. INTRODUCTION

Rasmussen, in his book *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia* (2010: 6) states that the first Arabic music to enter Indonesia was Arabic music in the Arabian Gulf. After the rise of mass media in the twentieth century, there were also Arabic music originating from Egypt and the Mediterranean to the East or the Levant which is a legacy of Mesopotamian culture, Persian culture called the golden age of Arab civilisation in the ninth to thirteenth centuries, and successive Turkish culture ruling the Arab countries in the sixteenth century.

One aspect that causes the interest of certain communities in Indonesian society to music and songs from Arabic, according to O'Connell in his book *Music and Conflict*, is because the contents have Islamic teachings (2010: 157). Most scholars and musicians agree that vocal skills, ranging from reading epic poems to chanting the holy verses of the Quran are the main pillars in this art of music. Rasmussen (2010: 6) according to Randel in his book *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, the style of Indonesian music that is closest to the Arabic style of music is the style of music of the people of Aceh and North Sumatra, even though songs with Quranic nuances also exist in other parts of Indonesia. This is due to Acehnese people practising more of these songs compare to other tribes (2003: 829).

Rasmussen also added that the big difference between Islamic music in the Arab world and in Indonesia led to the creation of a new combination of music art, both in terms of instruments, aesthetics and musical style, which in Indonesian society is called 'Islamic music art'. This combination of two different musical systems is one of the unique aspects in the arena of Islamic music in Indonesia (2010: 6). Among the types of Arabic music which are seen as having relations with Arabic culture are *qasidah* and *gambus* orchestra.

Qasidah comes from a Classical Arabic word which means 'religious epic'. This is usually declaimed by someone, accompanied by percussion and songs. Muslims in Indonesia use this method by improvising their lines in the local language. Its contents talk about contemporary moral issues. Then, this *qasidah* developed into a modern *qasidah* whose shape changed into the form of a pop song, by adding an electric guitar, mandolin, keyboard, violin and flute. The rhythm and melody are taken from *dangdut* and Arabic pop music, while the lyrics usually contain moral advice to young people who are in love, praising a noble life, warning them not to commit corruption and other temptations. Sometimes the lyrics contain environmental issues, such as preventing pollution, using nuclear power or prohibiting smoking. (Backshall, 2003: 1069)

In addition to *qasidah*, Arab communities living in Indonesia, especially those consisting mostly of descendants of Hadramaut migrants, Yemen, usually hold musical performances of the *gambus* orchestra, namely a small group of musical ensembles played with Arabic musical instruments, such as Arabic harps. This show still exists today and is a tradition in certain events, such as welcoming the coming of the month of Ramadan or *halal bil halal*. The lyrics of songs of *gambus* orchestra still often use Arabic. However, there are also *gambus* orchestra that use Indonesian, albeit slightly, namely in the form of rhymes, especially in the performance of modern *gambus* orchestra. (Harnish, 2011: 7)

II THE ORIGIN OF QASIDAH

In Indonesia, there are at least two *qasidah* terms that are known and often heard by Muslim communities. The first is the word *qasidah* in *Qasidah Burdah*, which is a poem filled with praises of the Prophet Muhammad, which is often sung by a village community group in Java in the *Mawlid* of the Prophet Muhammad and second is the word *qasidah* which means vocal group consisting of young women Muslims who sing religious songs using tambourine musical instruments. Meanwhile, long before, in Arabic literature, there was also the term *qasidah*, which means poetry of praise (ode).

Qasidah literally means 'purposeful poem'. In terms of meaning, it is a genre whose form was created in pre-Islamic Arab times, which consisted of 20 to more than 100 stanzas. It usually describes a number of journeys of a poet. In its initial pattern, *qasidah* is divided into three parts. The first part is called *nasib*, which contains about love, then is followed by a description of the poet's journey and the last contains the purpose to be conveyed by the poet, for example asking for help from his supporters, attacking his tribe's enemies, or other purposes.

Meanwhile, in other parts of the Islamic world, what is meant by *qasidah* is poetry that is intended to convey praise (ode) or praise songs, such as praising Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, or remembering martyred heroes. Its initial part is often used to describe nature, to convey wise words, and to show skills in poetry using exaggerated language. However, all of this makes it difficult for the reader to know what the poet wants to say, because the level of knowledge of the readers is different. (Kuiper, 2010: 52)

In addition, there are also those who refer to *qasidah* as a narrative poem which contains one purpose and divides it into two types, the first is conventional *qasidah*, namely *qasidah* which is less diverse, and the second is more diverse *qasidah* (Kalinowska, 2004: 51). There are also those who divide the *qasidah* into three parts, namely *nasib*, which contains a description of the tents that have been abandoned and the lover of the poet who used to live there; *rahil*, description of the poet's journey through the desert and mountains, about the female camel by comparing it with other animals, such as deer, bulls and ostriches, and the last section contains themes, such as *fakhr*, which contain expressions that boast of themselves when hunting, partying, fighting, drinking, or boasting of prosperity, generosity, tribal power, madness, praising the officials in power, or vice versa; and *hija*, namely expressions that contain insults and mockery. (Stetkevych, 1993: 4)

Meanwhile, the word *burdah*, which means 'mantle', is a popular name for a *qasidah* (praise poetry) entitled *Burdat al-Madiih al-Mubaarak*, by Sheikh Muhammad al-Busiri (1211-1294). *Burdah* is divided into ten parts, each of which consists of ten to thirty two stanzas (Kennedy et.al.2005: 40). The contents consist of ten parts. The first part is about kisses and complaints of love, the second part about the warning of lust, the third part of praise to the Prophet peace be upon him, the fourth part about the birth of the Prophet peace be upon him, the sixth part about the glory of the Qur'an and praise for it, the seventh part about the Isra' Mi'raj of the Prophet peace be upon him, the eighth part of the struggle of the Prophet peace be upon him, the ninth part about tawassul and the tenth part about taking a stand and asking for a request (Translation HM Masykuri Abdurrahman, Sidogiri, Pasuruan, in Darul um Rembang.blogspot.com, May 14, 2011).

There is a story that describes the emergence of the term *Burdah*. One day, Ka'ab bin Zuhayr recited a *qasidah* (praise poetry) to the Prophet Muhammad, then the Prophet bestowed on him a *burdah* (mantle). Since then the term *Qasidah Burdah* emerged. Then, the mantle that has become the inheritance of Ka'ab bin Zuhayr was bought by Mu'awiyah, the Caliph of the Umayyads, at a price of 20,000 dirhams and used by the Caliph whenever there was a party.

Although this story is popular, its authenticity is doubted in the historical perspective, because its authority or genealogy is unclear. In fact, a lot of historical events, which are considered to have authority, are equivalent to this traditional story. However, in the aspect of literature, it seems that stories like these still need to be displayed. Giving the mantle as mentioned above must be understood symbolically. Although, in the context of Arabic literature, Brockelmann and Georg Jacob say that giving poets honor to a poet in recognition of his poems was a good habit of Arabs. In another context, giving this mantle can be said to be a symbol of ritual exchange. Giving *qasidah* to the Prophet Muhammad functioned as a symbol of loyalty and giving the mantle to Ka'ab bin Zuhayr served as a reward. Then, the mantle symbol gives the meaning of protection from the Prophet Muhammad, because clothing symbolizes the soul. Likewise, the mantle functions as a symbol of power (Stetkevych, 2002: 76).

III THE ORIGIN OF GAMBUS ORCHESTRA

Gambus is the name of a harp musical instrument made of wood. This instrument is found both in Indonesia and in Malaysia, but in general this term is known as a small ensemble that uses the instrument. The traditional form of musical instruments in Indonesia has 4-6 pairs of wire strings, according to the area and style. The instrument is often assumed to be of Arabic origin, but there is no definitive evidence that confirms that opinion. This assumption arose because of the Arab community who lived in Southeast Asia in the early nineteenth century used these instruments. Scholars still debate about the origin of *gambus*.

JaabKuns said that the name *gambus* originated from East Africa, namely *gabbus*. He noted that there were two forms of musical instruments found in Java at the beginning of the twentieth century. First, it comes from Hadramaut and the second comes from Hejaz. Christian Poche connects the word *gambus* in Indonesia with the word in South Arabic, *qanbus*, the harp with a short handle with three double wire strings and one single wire string. This musical instrument had spread to Southeast Asia and Africa. Curt Sachs and Henry Farmer traced the name *gambus* and *qanbus* in Turkish, and they found it as *qapuz*. Sachs and TilmanSeebass said that the instrument showed marks of influence from China and Portugal. The stringed instrument often used now is similar to the ones used by Egyptians, namely 'Ud. Apparently, all types of *gambus* mentioned above can be found in Indonesia, so it is very difficult to determine where they come from. However, most scholars agree that the spread of musical instruments together with the spread of Islam.

The style of *gambus* music can be divided into two categories, namely the style of regional *gambus* and the style of Arabic *gambus*, which is called the stringed orchestra. Regional instruments and types of *gambus* exist throughout Indonesia. Regional *gambus* music performances are usually accompanied by songs in the form of Malay rhymes and *zafin* dances, such as *gambus* music in Gorontalo, North Sulawesi. Musical instruments in Gorontalo are almost similar to those in Java. Musical instruments in Gorontalo are accompanied by drums which are known by the name *maluwasi* and are accompanied with dances called *dana-dana*. Meanwhile, musical instruments in the *gambus* orchestra or Arabic *gambus* consist of harp and some forms of drums held by the hand, such as *tamtam*, *dumbuk*, and *marwas*, known in Gorontalo as *marwasi*, which in the plural are called *marawis*. Modern ensembles are equipped with guitars, basses and organs. This orchestra is often found in the Arab-Indonesian community originating from Arabic descendants of Hadramaut, Yemen.

The *gambus* orchestra is divided into three types of music and dance, namely *zafin*, *sarah* and *zahefe*. Nor, in his book *Zafin: Folk Dance of the Malay World* (1993), describes the development and influence of *zafin* dance in art in Malaysia. Although it relates to the inheritance of Hadramaut and is generally accepted as a dance style of Arab descent, Nor does not have sufficient evidence to say that the dance originated from the dances of Hadramaut people. In Malaysia, according to Nor, there are two types of *zafin*, namely Malay *zafin* and Arabic *zafin*. The difference between local *zafin* and Arabic *zafin* also exists in Indonesia. *Zafin* dance is usually present in regional *gambus* performances and stringed orchestra. But, in Arabic *zafin*, the dance is only for men. Meanwhile, in an essay about the Arab community in Indonesia in the nineteenth century, Van den Berg said that there was a type of dance in the Arab community in Batavia called *zafin*, but he did not mention that the dance originated in Hadramaut.

Meanwhile, *Sarah* (*Sharah*, *Syarah*) has a faster and more free tempo than *zafin*. In addition, musical instruments used are modern musical instruments, such as guitars, basses and organs. The term *sarah* is used in South Arabia to describe a dance accompanied by music in the Tihamah area. However, descriptions of music and dances as mentioned above are different from those in Indonesia. Although basically *Sarah* dancers only consist of two people, this can be improvised spontaneously, that is more than two people and does not use a small drum held. Meanwhile in *zahefe* (*Dehaifeh*, *Dehefe*), music that is often used has a percussion style that is similar to *dangdut* music. Usually, the tempo is faster and this style is known as the most modern and popular style of *gambus* orchestra. Unlike *zafin* and *sarah*, where the number of dancers is two, *zahefe* has no dancers with the formation of two to one and the dancers are always male. (Harnish, 2011: 7)

II. CONCLUSION

In Indonesia, *qasidah* is divided into two, namely classical *qasidah* and modern *qasidah*. The classical *Qasidah* is very close to the art of reading the Quran, as seen in RafiqohDartoWahab and NurAsiahJamil. The main characteristic of the classical *qasidah* is tambourine music, in contrast to modern *qasidah* which has included elements of pop music, like NasidaRia, and has similarities with *dangdut* music. Modern *Qasidah* was popular in the 1980s. One of the criteria for candidates for modern *qasidah* singers is that they must also be able to sing *dangdut* songs. The criteria were based on the demands of modern *qasidah* fans. In modern *qasidah* performances along the northern coast of Java, the audience often asks the singers to sing *dangdut* songs (Burhanuddin, 2002: 293).

Modern *Qasidah* is a form of pop music played by young women, which is spread through audio-cassette media targeting young Muslims. Both musicians and singers are all women. Modern *Qasidah* first appeared in the early 1970s among traditional Javanese Muslims. This *Qasidah* is influenced by the form of singular music, because both of them are socioreligious, sung by women and have the same character, which is in the form of poetry, both in terms of form and content.

Even though the modern *qasidah* is irregular in its rhythm, each verse of the song generally consists of approximately four words and eight syllables. This is generally shaped as quatrain, which consists of four lines rhyming a-a-a-a. The number of rows ranges from 15-25 lines and is sung in 3-5 minutes duration. Broadly speaking, the contents talk about social life issues in the form of moral advice. The majority of the themes are

about adolescence, which emphasises doing good deeds in youth, including awareness of danger in youth, such as about one's love life and the importance of pursuing religious education. (Abramson, 2006: 92)

Marshall Cavendish in his book *World and Its Peoples: Indonesia and East Timor* (2007: 1376) stated that *gambus* musical instruments in Indonesia are related to Arab countries in West Asia. The character of *gambus* in Indonesia, which is a small musical instrument such as the harp, which is played by plucking, has similarities with ancient musical instruments in Yemen. Now, in Arabia, the instrument is replaced with the name 'Ud, which is a lute musical instrument that has a large shape and resembles a pear. Because *gambus* music is related to Arabs and Islam, the form can be accepted by Indonesians, who are mostly Muslims and avoid secular music entertainment. *Gambus* players, while singing, play a small two-faced drum called *mirwas* which is also found in Yemen and the Gulf of Persian countries. *Qabun* or *sitar* from West Asia and other Arabic drums are also played in Indonesia and some singers in *gambus* in Indonesia also wear headdresses in Arabic. Likewise, the dancers also relate to tradition in Yemen, such as *zafin*, which deals with the *zafin* tradition in Yemen, Kuwait and Bahrain. (Cavendish, 2007: 1376 (Cavendish, 2007: 1376)

Commercially, the music of the *gambus* orchestra is sold in the category of spiritual music or Islamic music. Although often displayed and sold in the Islamic context, the role of the *gambus* orchestra as Islamic music is still ambiguous. Defining the *gambus* orchestra as an Islamic musical art is difficult. However, there are a number of terms that mention the *gambus* orchestra as Islamic nuanced music, spiritual rhythm music, or Islamic breathing music. These terms refer to the stringed orchestra which is in the art of Islamic music in Indonesia. But, there are also some Indonesians who do not categorise the *gambus* orchestra as part of Islamic art. They consider *gambus* orchestra only as entertainment and complementary music in religious music groups. In fact, there are some people who do not like *gambus* orchestra to be included in the category of religious music groups, because it is too fast, hard and noisy, not in accordance with serious Islamic music. Some don't like it because they can't enjoy *gambus* orchestra songs that are sung in Arabic. These songs can only be enjoyed by Indonesian people who can speak Arabic. Then, some others said they saw the *gambus* orchestra not because of the music and the song, but because they saw the *gambus* orchestra as something funny or because of their respect for one ethnic music.

Some people argue that *gambus* is included in Islamic music because according to the players, the *gambus* orchestra is lawful and does not conflict with the teachings of Islam, because it follows Islamic rules. For example, the players wear Muslim clothes. The musicians are mostly male, although sometimes there are also women who act as singers. However, there is a separation between men and women. Although there are song texts in *gambus* orchestra which are not in Arabic, the text must also contain good themes. (Harnish, 2011: 7)

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