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Sufism Network in the Malay World: A Historical Overview

Amy Nadirah Yacob *

Ismail Mamat **

Abstract

This article aims to explore on the Sufism network in the Malay world from a historical overview. This is to highlight the development of Sufism and its contributions towards the *da'wah* mission in the Malay world. The author will employ a literature analysis through qualitative method. The finding shows the various networks by the *ṣūfī* in terms of the continuous chain of the Haramayn-Jawi scholars, the establishment of educational institution, the spread of *ṭarīqat* as well as the increasing writings and publications. This shows that the *da'wah* mission of *ṣūfī* scholars expend to the Malay region.

Keywords: Islamic *da'wah*, Sufism, Islamization, Malay world, *ṣūfī*.

Introduction

Islamic worldviews provide a compact answer for the three basic questions in life; “from where we are from?” “to where we will go?”, and lastly, “for what purpose we are here?”. These three questions basically discuss on the purpose of this life and how should we occupy this life with. The answer might be differed for certain religion as it existed that does not believe in Hereafter, does not believe in God, having vague worldview, and for sure cannot fill in these basic questions. So far, with Islamic metaphysics that provide an instrument that more rational and intellectual, free from any superstitious and mystical belief that irrational to accept for a layman.

From a historical story in the time of the Prophet p.b.u.h, it is important to note that the process to engrave the belief system that Islam provide took not a short time; which is over a half from his prophetic time i.e 13 years in Makkah. The rest of the prophetic time is focused on emphasizing on exoteric item of the natives

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affairs. Time over time, the process of Islamization took place in a macro level, done by Muslim presenters and agents.

History jots down that Islam reach the Malay Archipelago as early as the 7th century. The theories of Islamization in the Malay Archipelago simplify the active agents of Islamization are among traders, preachers, royals, travelers and so on.¹ In fact, the arrival of Islam in the Malay world is said to be in line with the development of *taṣawwuf* and *ṭariqat* in the Malay Archipelago.² The mission of *da'wah* that carried out by the *ṣūfī* is done through political means, marriage with the local community, business and trading and so on. It is also mentioned that the *ṣūfī* scholar also gives a great contribution in that process as the role of *taṣawwuf* has risen the spirit of refinement among the native³. Furthermore, Malay Muslim legacy has built the network from Haramayn through pilgrimages and study since the 14th century, then, intensified the spread of Islam in the region⁴. Therefore, the interchangeable of ideas and insights through the network to some extent has changed the pattern of thoughts among the scholars.

This article aims to identify the contributions and networks that *ṣūfī* built in the Malay World as a means of effort of preaching Islam to the Malay nation. To begin with, the discussion will discover on the origin of Sufism and its development.

The Origin of Sufism

To say that the origin of Islamic Sufism from its beginning is to say about the notion of asceticism (*zuhd*) and how it develops. Back then, the history of Sufism grasped its roots during the time of the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. Asceticism (*zuhd*) refers to the practices of the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. and his companions.⁵ It

¹ Khairudin Aljunied, "Islam in Southeast Asia," no. April: 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.658>, 1-2, 2020.

² Martin Van Bruinessen, *Islam Di Nusantara: Kitab Kuning, Pesantren Dan Tarekat* (Selangor: IBDE Ilham, 2018), p. 182.

³ Al-Attas, S. Muhammad Naquib, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of The Islamization of The Malay-Indonesian Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Ta'dib International, 2018), p. 5.

⁴ Rosni Wazir, 'Sorotan Perkembangan Tasawuf di Alam Melayu, Tokoh-Tokoh dan Karyanya', *Jurnal Pengajian Islam Fakulti Pengajian Peradaban Islam*, no. 2001 (2016): 177–94, 2016, <https://doi.org/ISSN 1823-7126 / e-ISSN 0127-8002>.

⁵ The words asceticism and *taṣawwuf* have coincided as it shares the same spirit of spiritual refinement. Asceticism (*zuhd*) connotes the original practices during the

is the practical translation of the Islamic teaching that is prescribed in the Quranic revelation.¹ The essential spirit of asceticism is based on *tawhīd* and the main purpose is to achieve the knowledge of reality (*ḥaqīqah*) as well as to be closer to God. The method to achieve it is through the purification of the soul as well as character refinement that require spiritual struggle such as meditation, fasting and *tadabbur* i.e., exploring the essential meaning of the revelation.

Initially, the practice of asceticism (*zuhd*) from the Islamic perspective is to have a clearer overview of how the life of this world should be in line with the main purpose of the creation of man; God's representative (*khalīfat allāh*) and God's servant (*‘ibād allāh*). The indulgence in this world must not distract the servants to worship the creator and must prohibit themselves from any injustice.² In fact, the asceticism spirit is able to empower the spiritual strength of the believers in making a balance between worldly matters and the Hereafter. It is to make sure that they do not misuse the power that they gain.

The Development of Sufism during the Post-prophetic Time

During the post-prophetic time, Sufism emerged through the new combination of ascetic renunciation with the spiritual development leading toward the union with God.³ Among the prominent *Ṣufī* that famously spoke were Rābī‘ah al-‘Adawiyah (d. 801 A.D), Malik bin Dinār (d. 748), Fuḍayl bin ‘Iyāḍ (d. 803), and Hassan al-Baṣrī (d. 728). These *Ṣufī* figures have developed various theories grasped from their spiritual experiences.⁴ Not to mention, there were several theories that were introduced amidst their spiritual struggle which

prophetic time, while Sufism signifies the later progress in asceticism as a new discipline of knowledge and is familiarly used as the other name of Islamic mysticism. For further details: H. A. Rivay Siregar, *Tasawuf: Dari Sufisme Klasik Ke Neo-Sufisme* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 2002), p. 33. In spite of that, the words “sufism” is more specific in use in Islamic mysticism while “mysticism” generally connotes the mysticism practiced by religions.

¹ Che Zarrina, “An Analytical Study of Rise and Development of Sufism: From Islamic Asceticism to Islamic Mysticism,” *Jurnal Usuluddin*, Akademi Pengajian Islam, Universiti Malaya, 1999, p. 22.

² Abu Wafa’ al-Ghanimi al-Taftazani, *Perkembangan Tasawwuf Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Bahagian Hal Ehwal Islam, Jabatan Perdana Menteri, 1996), p. 67.

³ Che Zarrina, “An Analytical Study of Rise and Development of Sufism: From Islamic Asceticism to Islamic Mysticism”, p. 32.

⁴ Che Zarrina, “An Analytical Study of Rise and Development of Sufism, p. 23.

were Divine love (*ḥubb Allāh*), fear of God (*al-khawf*), hope (*al-raǧāʾ*), poverty (*al-faqr*), and many more.

The following trend was the emergence of philosophical Sufism. The Muslim thinkers and philosophers who were interested in Sufism as a medium to be closer to God have generated a certain conception of the philosophical theory that is arguably discussed from its origin either from neo-Platonic tradition or developed from other religions' mysticism tradition. This new area of study was known as theosophy and among momentous theosophy scholars were Abū Yazīd al-Buṣṭamī (d. 875), Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 920), Ibn Masarraḥ (d. 991), Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl (d. 1182), Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1241), and ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 1429). Not to mention, the famous conception that these theosophies discussed was the theory of emanation which explained the cosmological system.¹ Among the theories under this stream of philosophical Sufism are *al-ḥulūl* (divine incarnation)², *Nūr Muḥammad* (the light of Muhammad)³, *waḥdah al-wujūd*⁴, and many more.

Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) is a *Ṣūfī* scholar who highlighted moderation in *taṣawwūf*. The history mentioned that al-Ghazālī has built his legacy of *taṣawwuf* in line with what *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah* has prescribed. It is known as *taṣawwuf* Sunni. Moreover, this student of devoted *ṣūfī*, Imām al-Haramayn⁵ has put full emphasis on the importance of balance between *taṣawwuf* and Islamic jurisprudence (*sharīʿah*) so that the *Ṣūfī* devotees do not fall into extreme. His prolific masterpiece entitled *Ihyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of the

¹ Siregar, *Tasawuf: dari Sufisme Klasik ke Neo-Sufisme*, pp. 143-144.

² *Al-ḥulūl* is a philosophical notion that introduced by Husayn bin Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 921). This notion believe that the divine spirit (*lāhūt*) incarnate in human (*nāsūt*). Hamka, *Tasawuf: Perkembangan Dan Pemurniannya* (Yayasan Nurul Islam, 1951), p. 113.

³ *Nūr Muḥammad* (the light of Muḥammad) is a notion that believe that the essence of all creations is through the light of Muḥammad. This spirit become the essence of knowledge, wisdom and *nubuwwah* (prophethood). It is also called as *al-Ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyah*. Refer: Hamka, *Tasawuf: Perkembangan Dan Pemurniannya*, p. 115.

⁴ *Waḥdah al-wujūd* is believe in the unity of existence. This notion defines the existence of creation proves the existence of creator. However, the polemic of this believe denotes the similar position of God and his creations. For further details, refer: Hamka, *Tasawuf: Perkembangan Dan Pemurniannya*, p. 145.

⁵ Imām al-Haramayn (the imam of two great mosques of Mecca and Medina) or his real name is Abū al-Maʿālī ʿAbd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (1028-1085) born in Juwayn, Persia. Oliver Leaman and Salman Albdour, ʿAl-Juwaynī, Abu'l Maʿālī (1028-85)', 1998, <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H050>, accessed on July 4, 2022.

Religious Sciences) discussed the journey towards God that requires the physical and spiritual attributes of the human. There are four major topics in this work which are, the matter of worship (*‘ibādah*), customs (*al-mu‘āmalāt*), vices (*al-muḥlikāt*) and virtues (*al-munjiyāt*) acts. Furthermore, he also has gone into depth on the conception of happiness in this life in *Kīmiyyā al-Sa‘ādah* (The Alchemy of Happiness), as the neo-Platonic¹ philosophers have certain preferences on the meaning of happiness in life. Hence, he comes with a particular indicator of happiness based on the Islamic worldview.

The following pattern in Sufism was brought by a scholar who melted a hot pot throughout the discussion related as it circulated around the subject of philosophical Sufism, specifically in *wujūdiyyah* discourse that grasped from the theory of emanation. This ontological and cosmological discussion inspired the Aceh sultanate’s scholars in the 16th and 17th centuries. Ibn ‘Arabī² is a *Ṣufī* scholar and has a high interest in philosophical discourse. The theory of emanation, then, is widely discussed until it is transmitted to Southeast Asia’s counterpart which will be discussed later. This theory then evolved into the concept of *waḥdah al-wujūd*.

Not to mention, throughout history, there were two streams that emerged in the field of Sufism; *sunni* Sufism and philosophical Sufism. Both streams, in fact, acknowledged that their teachings are sourced from the Qur’an, practice Islam consistently, and aimed for ultimate happiness. However, their methods and sources to achieve it differed.³ The following discussion will unveil the networking system that the *ṣūfī* has built in the Malay region.⁴

¹Neoplatonism is an ideology subscribed by a group of philosophers led by Plotinus (d.270CE) who tried to revive some ideas of Plato. It was originally initiated by Philo Judaeus (20CE-50CE) on the concept of God who created this world. I.R. Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1991. 33-43.

² Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī ibn Alī born on 1164 in Murcia, Spain. Refer: Siregar, *Tasawuf: dari Sufisme Klasik ke Neo-Sufisme*, p. 171.

³ Siregar, *Tasawuf: Dari Sufisme Klasik Ke Neo-Sufisme*, p. 55.

⁴ Malay Archipelago as notes in the following discussion refers to the region between Indo China and Australia. It is also known as Malay World, *Nusantara*, Southeast Asia, etc. The country that considered as Malay World includes Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Timor Leste, South Philipines, and South Thailand. Refer, Khairuddin Al-Junied, "Islam in Southeast Asia" *Oxford University Press*, p. 2.

Finding and Discussion

1. *Ṣūfī* experts' networks.

The symbiosis of the *ṣūfī* experts in the Malay world is originally from the Haramayn (Mecca and Medina) where they experienced learning Islamic sciences there. There are two mechanisms that making the linkages of the scholar from Haramayn and the other places is through *ḥadīth isnād*¹ (chains of narrators) and *ṭarīqah* (sufi path) *silsilāh* (sufi linkage).² The students who have undergone their training with the teachers and reach its appropriate level to be a teacher will be accepted the *ijāzah* (permission to practice)³. *Ijāzah* is an authorization for students to transmit the knowledge and practice to others. The continuously pattern of study is shielded through the constant delivery from a new teacher to a new student and so far so forth. Furthermore, the close relationship of teacher-student also enhances the ability to spread the knowledge in the other parts of the world.

As reported, in 16th to 17th century, there are increase of numbers of the Malays that went to the center of Islamic studies in Haramayn for the sake of pilgrimage and for studies. This event has built the chain of scholarly networks between Haramayn and Jawi people. The Jawi or '*aṣḥāb al-Jāwiyīn*' is a call for the Malay people in the Middle East that means people from Java, signify the Malay-Indonesian people in Haramayn⁴. Throughout the process of transmission of Islamic knowledge, it is recognized the gradual momentum of renewal and changes in Islamic intellectual discourse through the concomitance reconciliation of *sharī'ah* and *tasawuf*

¹ *Ḥadīth isnād* is a system of hadith transmission from one narrator to another. The narrator of a *ḥadīth* must follow certain conditions to ensure the authenticity of a *hadith*.

² *Ṭarīqah silsilāh* is a networking system in *ṣūfī* order signify the continuity of its teaching from the Prophet p.b.u.h. It is important for the follower of one *ṭarīqah* to know the *silsilāh* of the *ṭarīqah* to examine the authenticity of the *ṭarīqahs*' teachings. Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2004), 13. Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2004), p. 13.

³ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 31.

⁴ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 3.

(Islamic mysticism)¹. The significant value of this process provides a fresher outlook of Islamic knowledge towards the natives. In fact, this renewal effort has been pioneered by earlier scholars; Abū Hamīd al-Ghazālī and others.

Furthermore, the strange factors that increase the numbers of Malays to reach Haramayn is due to the geographical facts of the Malay Archipelago that contain a great maritime route. It became as the sources of economy activities for the natives and outsiders' traders and travelers. Among the famous center point of maritime ports is Sumatera, Sulawesi, Melaka and many more. These ports have become a gathering place for merchants, sailors, travelers, scholars and preachers, and so on. The interchange of ideas and thoughts has made them accessible towards the new insights towards development and improvements include the thinking skills. The *ṣūfī* travelers also included as the regular comers at the port as they used to travel using the ships. Therefore, the opportunity to deliver Islamic knowledge towards the natives is higher. Syed Naquib al-Attas mentions that the *ṣūfī* metaphysics has given maximum impact to the Malay community in terms of thinking style and religious spirit among the Malays that is more intellectual and rational.²

It is worth to note here that the great teachers that mostly the Malay shares in Haramayn are Al-Kushashī (d. 1661) and Ibrāhīm al-Kuranī (d. 1690). To cite here, the Haramayn scholarship in the Malay Archipelago from 16th century include Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī (d. 1658), Yūsuf al-Makassarī (d. 1699), Abd al-Samad al-Palembanī (d.1789), Muhammad Arshad al-Banjari (d. 1812) and many more. Till the 20th century, there still a continuous chain of scholarly network that been as the sources of renewal and reformation include Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), Haji Abdul Malik Abdul Karim or better known as Hamka (d. 1981) etc. They have been the backbone of independence of freedom of the Malays against colonialist that strive for religious and power's missions.

¹ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*.

² Al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement on A General Theory of The Islamization of The Malay-Indonesian Archipelago*, p. 5.

2. *Ṭarīqah* (Sufi Movement)

Ṭarīqah is an organizational form of *ṣūfī* movement and historically has been institutionalized starting from the late 10th and 11th centuries in the Middle Eastern countries.¹ This group of *ṣūfī* movement consists of a master (*shaykh* or *murshīd*), students (*murīd*), and the system. Moreover, the formation of the *ṭarīqah* is a group of people who were initiated by one Shaykh that then developed certain teachings or guides claimed as the progress to be closer with God (*taqarrub ilā Allāh*) to achieve certain permanent stages (*maqāmāt*).² There are also claims that the *silsilah* of the *ṭarīqah* can be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) so as to authenticate the originality of the rituals and the continuation of the teacher that brought the *ṭarīqah* teaching.

In the Malay world, after Islam has been transmitted in the region through travels and missionaries, there was also the growth of *ṣūfī* orders in the region. The source notes that the first focal point of the spread of the *ṭarīqah* is through the sultanate community and then increased in numbers as the *ṣūfī* scholars were supported by the rulers.³ The Aceh kingdom in the 16th and 17th centuries has recognized the ‘*ulamā*’ as the important figure in the development of the country. Hamzah Fansuri (d. 1590); a follower of Qādiriyyah *ṭarīqah*, Shams al-Dīn al-Sumaterānī (d. 1630); a devotee in Shattāriyyah *ṭarīqah*, and Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī (d. 1658); a follower of Rifā‘iyyah, have been appointed as the advisor of the king of Aceh. Shaykh Yūsuf al-Makassarī (d. 1699), a founder of the Khalwatiyyah order in South Sulawesi was also in the same boat but persistently played a role as an advisor for the Banten sultanate.

There are five most influential *ṭarīqah* in the Malay Archipelago which are: *Ṭarīqah* al-Qādiriyyah founded by ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jaylānī (d. 1166); (2) *Ṭarīqah* al-Naqshabandiyah founded by Bahā’ al-Dīn al-Uwaysi (d. 1388); (3) *Ṭarīqah* Shattāriyyah

¹ Lukmanul Hakim Darusman, *Jihad in Two Faces of Shariah: Sufism and Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh) and The Revival of Islamic Movements in The Malay World: Case Studies of Yūsuf al-Maqassari and Dawud al-Fatani* (Unpublished Doctorate's Thesis: Australian National University Canberra, Australia, 2008), p. 514.

² Lukmanul Hakim Darusman, *Jihad in Two Faces of Shariah: Sufism and Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh) and The Revival of Islamic Movements in The Malay World*.

³ Dudung Abdurahman, “Diversity of Tarekat Communities and Social Changes in Indonesian History,” *Sunan Kalijaga: International Journal of Islamic Civilization* 1, no. 1 (2018): 61–92, <http://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/adab/skijic/article/view/1217>.

founded by ‘Abd Allāh Shatār (d. 1415); (4) *Ṭarīqah* Khalwatiyyah Yūsufiyyah founded by Shaykh Yūsuf al-Makassarī (d. 1699); and (5) *Ṭarīqah* Khalwatiyyah Sammaniyyah founded by Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm Samman (d.1720) in Medina.

The other teaching of *ṭarīqah* was also well-spread in the Malay nation through the representation of the students from Haramayn and through the chain of master (*murshid*). They played the role of the broadcaster of the *ṣūfī* order and also contribute to the Islamisation of the Malay world.¹ It is worth mentioning that the assisting factors of the succeeding *ṣūfī* orders in preaching Islam through an emphasis on the basic and practical aspects of religion do help in the progress of the spiritual refinement of the follower.²

3. Educational Institution

The establishment of an educational institution in the Malay world has undergone an evolutionary process. It took a long time and was a gradual process. The formation of traditional educational centers such as *pesantren*, *pondok*, *surau*, *dayah* and other related names are to spread the Islamic teaching by reading the traditional Islamic text and literature.³ The educational institution at first was held at a mosque which served as the center point for social, intellectual, and religious affairs.⁴

Initially, the set-up of an educational institution in the Malay world was rooted in the initiative of the ruler and their interest and commitment to learning Islam.⁵ The role of the Malay sultans (kings) in nature is not only limited to administrative aspects only but includes religious educational affairs. This can be seen in the first step of the establishment of an educational institution that is

¹ Martin Van Bruinessen, “The Origins and Development of Sūfī Orders (Tarekat) in Southeast Asia,” *Studia Islamika*, 1, no. 1: pp. 1–23, 1994.
<https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v1i1.864>.

² Badlihasham Mohd Nasir, Rahimin Affandi Abd Rahim, and Azura Md Nor, “The Role and Contribution of Islamic Movement to the Development of Malay Civilization,” *Journal of Malay Islamic Studies* 2, no. 2: pp. 75–94, 2018.
<https://doi.org/10.19109/jmis.v2i2.2539>.

³ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Islam Di Nusantara: Kitab Kuning, Pesantren Dan Tarekat*, p. 69.

⁴ Haji Ishak Mohd. Shuhaimi and Chuah Abdullah Osman, ‘Islam and the Malay World: An Insight into the Assimilation of Islamic Values’, *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 2, no. 2, p. 61, 2012.

⁵ Azyumardi Azra, *Islam in Indonesian World: An Account of Institutional Formation*, (Bandung: Pustaka Mizan, 2006), p. 44.

among the royal family. When the sultan agrees to accept Islam as an official religion, in addition to showing a high interest in learning Islam, they appointed the scholars as important people in the administration to ensure that all affairs of the state are in line with Islamic teachings. In addition, the scholars were also assigned to be teachers to the royal family. Furthermore, the learning experiences of '*ulamā*' who studied in Haramayn, in mosques, *madrasahs*, and in the house of teachers provided a symmetrical lesson to build a proper educational institution.¹ It can be said that the factors that quicken the formation of Islamic religious institutions are; direct intellectual and religious contact with the Middle East, the teachers who mostly taught Islamic studies and guided in Quranic recitation were educators from the Middle East and Haramayn; the center of learning. This gave another added value to the Malays in getting experiences from the Middle East graduates and then inspired them in establishing another educational institution in their place.

Historically, in the early days of Islam in the Malay world, the sultanate of Samudera-Pasai and the Sultanate of Malacca gave the best examples in establishing Islamic religious institutions.² The rulers organised religious classes in the form of *halaqah* (study circle) because they also had a high interest in Islamic sciences. Sometime after the collapse of these examples due to colonial placement in 16th century, the Aceh Sultanate flourished. It is important to note the fact that this sultanate was a maritime region that was popularly visited by international merchants and traders. Therefore, the accessibility of Islamic teaching in the maritime region is huge compared to agrarian places due to the exposure of the natives to a cosmopolitan life.³ They were exposed to divergent information and interchangeable idea.

The traditional system of the so-called *madrasah*, in the beginning, was informal, yet have its distribution of levels. *Meunasah* or *binasah* is an elementary school for children to learn Qur'ān and basic Islamic teaching. *Rangkang* is an intermediary school held at the mosque compound. *Dayah* is an advanced religious school that in its later development provided a specification for learning Islamic

¹ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 9.

² Azyumardi Azra, *Islam in Indonesian World: An Account of Institutional Formation*, pp. 50-57.

³ Azyumardi Azra, *Islam in Indonesian World: An Account of Institutional Formation*, p. 45.

disciplines. All these levels of *madrasah* were held around the mosque compound.¹ However, it is important to mention that this *madrasah* does not only focus on Islamic subjects yet also added geography and simple mathematic subjects. In fact, the chances to get an educational connection gave a golden opportunity for the Malays in developing their intellectual and spiritual aspects. In relation to this, in the Islamic tradition, the correlation of knowledge and teaching of Islamic sciences is developed through learning events held by *ṣūfī* masters and disciples.

4. *Da'wah*

The Islamisation process of the Malay Archipelago region was without coercion but with wisdom and a gradual spreading network of the missionaries through direct and indirect *da'wah* activity. It is difficult to deny that in the early stages of Islamisation, the elements and influences of previous religious traditions were ingrained in the souls of the Malays.² The adaptation of most of the population in understanding Islam is to fulfill the material and natural needs and become an additional set of beliefs for certain purposes.³ However, it must be noted that the process of Islamisation of the Malay world took a gradual process until the successful establishment of Islamic institutions in terms of law, politics, education and so on.

The macro sources of *da'wah* activities can be seen in the conversion of the rulers into Islam, marriage, and trading activities. The conversion of the rulers because of *da'wah* activities has boosted the Islamisation process. Furthermore, the coming of Muslim preachers among travelers and merchants, in other terms is to spread Islam to a wider region. In accordance with the fall of the Abbasid caliphate in 1258 A.D. from the Mongol empire, the Muslims approached another alternative of *da'wah* activity by focusing on other regions.⁴ It can be seen after that event, several Islamic caliphates in the Malay world grew, for example, from the Malay Peninsula, Indo-China, Sumatera, Java, Sulawesi, and so on.

¹ Azyumardi Azra, *Islam in Indonesian World: An Account of Institutional Formation*, 61-62. Refer also: Haji Ishak Mohd. Shuhaimi and Chuah Abdullah Osman, 'Islam and the Malay World: An Insight into the Assimilation of Islamic Values', *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 2, no. 2, p. 62, 2012.

² Azyumardi Azra, *Islam in Indonesian World: An Account of Institutional Formation*, p. 46.

³ Azyumardi Azra, *Islam in Indonesian World: An Account of Institutional Formation*, p. 46.

⁴ Abdul Rahman Abdullah, *Sejarah Pemerintahan Islam di Alam Melayu*, p. 104.

There were a few names of rulers who converted to Islam after being approached by a preacher. In the early days of Islam in the Malay world, history noted that two important figures who successfully influenced the ruler to accept Islam are Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh al-Yamānī¹ who came to Kedah dated 1136 A.D. This scholar was able to approach Maharaja Dardar 2 and named himself Sultan Muzaffar Shah. Another significant scholar was Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Arīf, as mentioned in the earlier section who was an earlier writer in speculative theology (*kalam*).² He came to Samudera and approached Maharaja Nūr al-Dīn into Islam, who was then known as Sultan al-Kamil.³ Among them were Raja Merah Silu, a Samudera-Pasai ruler who was then known as Sultan Malik al-Salih. Another ruler is Raja Kecil Besar who was from Melaka and then changed his name to Sultan Muhammad Shah. In Thailand, Raja Phya Tu Nakpa also converted to Islam.⁴ The realisation of the rulers to teach Islamic lessons to their families was by inviting scholars to reveal knowledge. On the other side, for the matter of state, the rulers started to implement Islamic law as a guideline in ruling the government.

Furthermore, the location of the Malay Archipelago as an international route has given a maximum impact on the economy and religion of the Malays. The strategic maritime route gave added value to this kingdom to build the international network of trades and religious broadcasts during the reign of Srivijaya that flourished between the 7th to 13th centuries. This kingdom centred in Palembang’s reign under the influence of Buddhism had been the sojourn for the Chinese Buddhists who transit there on their way to India for pilgrimage.⁵ The Malay Archipelago has become a

¹ Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh al-Yamānī or his other name, Shaykh Qaumirī al-Yamanī is a Muslim preacher from Yaman who came to Melaka with other 11 preachers to spread Islam. He is a student of Shaykh Abdul Qadīr Jailānī, a founder of the Qādiriyyah Order. It is said that he came to Kedah earlier than his student, Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh al-Yamānī with the same purpose. For further details, refer: Khairul Azhar Meerangani, “Peranan Ulama Dalam Penyebaran Ajaran Islam Di Pulau Besar, Melaka (The Role of Muslim Scholars in Spreading the Teaching of Islam in Pulau Besar, Melaka),” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 14, no. 2, 2019, pp. 65–74. <https://doi.org/10.22452/jat.vol14no2.6>.

² Hawash Abdullah, *Perkembangan Ilmu Tasawuf dan Tokoh-Tokohnya di Nusantara*, p. 10.

³ Abdul Rahman Abdullah, p. 103.

⁴ Abdul Rahman Abdullah, p. 105.

⁵ The Authors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Srivijaya Empire,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Srivijaya-empire>.

stopover on the way to China and of course, traders who stop in the archipelago have a network of relationships that are basically built due to the stopover. The easy access to the Malay Archipelago gave the opportunity for the connection with outsiders.



Figure 4.1 The Picture Signifies the Powerful Empire of Srivijaya as the Dominator in Maritime Trades and is Able to Get a Lucrative Economic Resource

As mentioned in the previous section, the Malay Archipelago played a role as a trade port increasing the possibility of spreading Islam. The place became a cultural and knowledge centre for knowledge seekers as it was easy to reach for travelers. Aceh, for example, has been a centre for cultural tradition. During the rule of *Wali Songo*¹, the saints emphasised arts and culture and made it a medium of *da'wah* for the Malays. Meanwhile, it has been a knowledge centre as the scholars and students gathered there. Historically, it is also said that Arab merchants have mixed with the people of Sumatra since the 4th century. Islam was revealed to the

¹ The term *Wali Songo* is given to nine saints that ruled the part of Java from the beginning of the 15th century until the mid of the 16th. They became important people in the spread of Islam there and used various approaches to spread Islam, depending on the socio-culture of the people. For further details, refer to: Abdurrohman Kasdi, "The Role of Walisongo in Developing the Islam Nusantara Civilization," *Addin* 11, no. 1, 2017, p.1, <https://doi.org/10.21043/addin.v11i1.1973>.

last prophet, Muhammad in the 7th century, and business and trade activities were carried out actively as a self-sufficient economic source for the population. Islamic ethical values applied by Muslim agents among those merchants to a certain extent provide a sentimental value towards the natives on the value of honesty and trust in selling and buying activity. Likewise, in presenting speech and behaviour properly, keeping promises, being just in daily affairs, and many more. The ethical presentation of the Muslim traders may be a powerful factor of express the spreading of new teaching. The spirit of trust (*amānah*) in buying and selling, honesty in conversation, keeping promises, fairness and justness in every matter are important elements in Islamic ethics. Therefore, those who experience injustice treatment will slowly be attracted to the ethical code and its sources.

In addition, marriage is also a place for the formation of a mini-Muslim community through the seeding of Islamic beliefs and practices among the family members. In the early time of Islamic rule, the unification of two human beings was done among kings, scholars, and so on. Among the figure who had interconnection through marriage is Shaykh Yūsuf al-Makassarī who married the daughter of the Banten and Gowa sultanates.

5. Writings

The earliest writing that belongs to a Malay *ṣūfī* scholar is kitab *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* which was written by Shaykh *Abdullah al-'Arif* in the 12th century. It is said that he was an outsider who came to Aceh for the purpose of preaching and was the first Islamic state developer in Aceh. It is also said that he was a student of the founder of the Qādiriyyah Order, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jaylānī.¹ The main theme of *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* is the eschatology of *Nūr Muḥammad* (The Light of Muhammad). Basically, the concept of *Nūr Muḥammad* as discussed by the *ṣūfī* philosophical scholar denotes the idea of the first creation that originated from the light of Muhammad and it is the 'essence of nature (*al-haqīqah al-Muḥammadiyah*)'.²

The 16th century in the Malay world showed an increasing number of Islamic literature as a new demand and an exposition of

¹ Hawash Abdullah, *Perkembangan Ilmu Tasawuf Dan Tokoh-Tokohnya di Nusantara*, p. 2.

² Hamka, *Dari Pembendaharaan Lama*, p. 100.

the society itself.¹ There are many versions of the literature including the regeneration of the pre-Islamic faith of Hindu-Buddhism, the story of the prophets as well as non-prophetic stories involving a significant figure in Islamic history. The literature entitled *Hikayat Nūr Muhammad* (The Story of the Mystic Light of Muhammad), *Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain* (The Story of Alexander the Great), *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah*, *Hikayat Tamīm al-Dārī* and other significant stories signify a new trend of literature that meet new demand in the early stages of Islamisation in the Malay world.

Next, a *ṣūfī* scholar and poet, Hamzah Fansuri who was highly affectionate with the *wujūdiyyāh*'s discourse and inspired by *Bahr al-Lāhūt*'s discussion expressed his thought on *waḥdah al-wujūd* through poems entitled *Syair Perahu*, *Syair Burung Pingai*, *Syair Ikan Tongkol*, *Syair Sidang Faqir* and many more. This 16th-century scholar also wrote other important works to speak his thought basically on the theme of metaphysic entitled *Asrār al-ʿĀrifīn* (The Secrets of the Gnostics), *Sharāb al-ʿĀshiqīn* (The Drink of Lovers) and *al-Muntahī* (The Adapt).² The next influential scholar is someone who has the same inclination with Hamzah Fansuri, Shaykh Shams al-Dīn al-Sumaterānī who wrote *Jawāhīr al-Ḥaqāʾiq* (The Jewels of the Facts) and *Tanbīh al-Ṭullāb fī maʿrifah mālik al-Wahhāb* (An Alerts to Students in knowing the Bestower).

Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī, who was known for his magnum opus *Bustān al-Salāṭīn* (The Gardens of Kings) also wrote on Islamic Sufism as an opposition to the heretical idea of *wujūdiyyah*. He was famously known for his written debate as a refutation against any idea that recognised the unity of God and human. Among his works are *Ṣirāt al-Mustaqīm* (The Straight Path), *Hujjāt al-Siddīq li dafʿ al-Zindīq* (The Righteous Argument in refuting the Heretics), and *Jawāhir al-ʿUlūm fī kashf al-Maʿlūm* (The Jewels of Knowledge in revealing to the knower). The following *ṣūfī* scholar's writing is Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raʿuf al-Fansuri's *Sharḥ al-Laṭīf*, a translation of *Sharḥ al-Taftazānī ʿalā al-Aḥādīth al-Arbaʿīn al-Nawawīyyāh* (Al-Taftazānī's Exposition to a Forty Hadith of al-Nawawī) and also wrote *ʿUmdāt al-Muhtājīn* (The support of the Needy).

¹ Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, p. 102.

² Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, p. 106.

Furthermore, the works of *ṣūfī* scholars in the Malay world profoundly influence the attractiveness of Islam. The role of a *ṣūfī* scholar as the advisor of the ruler led to the writings of those *ṣūfī* as an answer for regarded matters. Likewise, those *ṣūfī* scholars also translated selected ancient texts and improvised to make them accessible to the nation, for example, kitab *Sayr al-Sālikīn ilā 'ibādāt rabb al-Ālamin* (The Way of the Seekers in Worshipping God) which is the translation and commentary of al-Ghazālī's book *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. This book is the masterpiece of the 18th-century *ṣūfī* scholar, Shaykh 'Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palembangī (d.1789)¹, who tried to bring back the spirit of Sunni Sufism in the midst of the crucial and polemical issue in Sufism.² He also translated al-Ghazālī's work entitled *Bidāyah al-Hidāyah* (The Beginning of the Guidance) that was then named as *Hidāyah al-sālikīn fī sulūk maslāk al-Muttaqīn* (The Guidance of the Seekers in Following the Path of the Righteous).

As the last phase of the Islamisation process took over in the Malay Archipelago, there was also a continuous chain of Muslim scholars producing writings to the extent that rapid growth of press and publications were noted in the 19th and early 20th centuries.³ By that time, still, the Malay intellects from the Middle East played an important role in writing papers and journals. However, the theme of the presentation and discussions also slightly changed as the socio-background of the Malays were mostly under colonial power. The themes were basically about *jihād* (Islamic struggle), *tajdīd* (reform), nationalism, and so on. Among the figures who were in favour of writing are Tuan Tabal or 'Abd al-Ṣamad ibn Muhammad Sālih al-Kalantani (d. 1891)⁴,

¹ Abd al-Samad al-Palembangi (1704-1789) born in Palembang, Sumatra. He was interested in Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī's influences on moderate Sufism. For further details, refer to: Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, p. 184.

² Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, p. 186.

³ Redzuan Othman, "The Role of Makka-Educated Malays in the Development of Early Islamic Scholarship and Education in Malaya," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Oxford University Press 9, no. 2, 1998, pp. 146–57.

⁴ Tuan Tabal or Abd al-Samad ibn Muhammad Salih al-Kelantani died in 1891 and originated from Kelantan and Patani. His concerned area of writing is on reformed Sufism, reconciling the law and spiritual matters. For further details, refer to: Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, p. 191.

Raja Ali Haji (d. 1870)¹, Muhammad al-Nawawī al-Jāwī (d. 1897)², Ahmad Patani (d. 1906)³, Sayyid ‘Uthmān b. Abd Allah b. Yahya (d. 1913)⁴, Hamka (d. 1981)⁵, and many more.

The list goes on as there are many writings of the Muslim scholars aiming for the perpetuation of the chain of knowledge among the Malays, calling for reforms, independence, stability and change, and so forth. Indeed, these writings undeniably help the approach towards Malays to understand the Islamic teaching as well as provide a wider insight to the Muslims themselves. Not to mention, these publications also gave social awareness and a reformation spirit against heretical thought as well as against colonial power. By then, the steps towards independence are achieved both in the Malay and Indonesia Archipelago.

Conclusion

To conclude, Islamic Sufism has given a mere contribution towards the Malays in establishing educational institutions as a learning place, increase *da’wah* and social activities as well as intensifies publications. These all are the methods that the Muslim preachers used to spread the Islamic worldview towards the natives and to carry out the responsibilities as the representatives in this world (*khalifah*).

¹ Raja Ali Haji (1808-1870) from house of Riau Sultanate. He was also a great writer of the 19th century, covering the subject of theology, law, history, grammar, poetry, and statecraft. For further details, refer to: Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, pp. 188-189.

² Muhammad Nawawi al-Jawi (1813-1897) born in Banten, West Java. He settled down in Mecca in 1855 and became a great teacher there, constantly further studying in Egypt, Syria and Mecca. For further details, refer to: Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, p. 193.

³ Ahmad Patani (1856-1906) was a Patani scholar who learned in Egypt and Mecca. For further details, refer to: Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, p.199.

⁴ Sayyid ‘Uthman b ‘Abd Allah b Yahya (1822-1913) was a Hadhrami immigrant who travelled to the Malay world. He produced about 100 masterpieces and most of his works were in Malay. For further details, refer to: Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, p. 200.

⁵ Hamka or Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (1908-1981) a Minangkabau originated. A modernist and famous writer and editor who wrote many works including novels, journals and books on certain issues in Islamic sciences; theology, Islamic philosophy, Islamic mysticism, and history. For further details, refer to: Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, pp. 216-218.

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