

SUFISM AND ISLAMIZATION IN MALAYSIA-HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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Abstract

This article discusses the role of Sufism in Malaysia's Islamization, tracing its historical development, cultural influence, and integration with local religious traditions. Sufism is an Islamic mystical practice that emphasizes divine proximity, spiritual transformation, and inner peace. Thus, it was pivotal to the gradual adoption of Islam in Malaysia. This research studies the religious landscape of the region before Islamization, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous beliefs. The influence of Sufism was brought about by the arrival of Islam and facilitated by trade routes and scholarly exchanges. This helped to ease the transition by incorporating local spiritual practices. Early Sufi figures, such as Sheikh Ismail al-Khalidi al-Rumi, Sheikh Nuruddin al-Raniri, and Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani, were instrumental in spreading Sufi teachings and establishing a lasting presence in Malaysia's religious environment. This study sheds light on the significance of the inclusive spirituality and cultural adaptability of Sufism in promoting a harmonious integration of Islamic principles within Malaysia's unique cultural texture. By focusing on personal transformation and devotion, Sufism not only contributed to the Islamization process but also enriched Malaysia's Islamic identity by blending tradition with mysticism to present a unique form of spiritual expression.

Keywords: Sufism, Islamization, Mystical practices, Spiritual transformation, religious integration

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INTRODUCTION

Sufism is known as an Islamic systemic or asceticism which believes and practices Islamic elements that help Muslims attain nearness to Allah. The main idea of Sufism relies upon the idea of the soul, divine proximity, and divine love to Allah. Sufism is described as a mystical dimension of Islam. It is considered an “*Islamic mysticism*” and “*Asceticism*.” which has a special place in the philosophy of eastern mysticism in the 11th century, and it has been noticed that the Sufism reflects the in-depth knowledges in Malaysia (Baharudin and Ismail, 2019).

Sufism in Malaysia has a rich history and continues to play a significant role in the religious, cultural, and social fabric of the country. In this research, we will delve into the world of Sufism in Malaysia, exploring its historical background by examining the situation of the local religious background and its influence on the pre-Islamic era. We will also navigate the path of transformation in the process of Islamization in the country. Finally, we investigate the transformative role of Sufism in Malaysia's Islamization Journey.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this study is both inductive and analytical. It involved a literature analysis through qualitative methods tracing the origins and history of Sufism, as well as some Sufi paths in Malaysia.

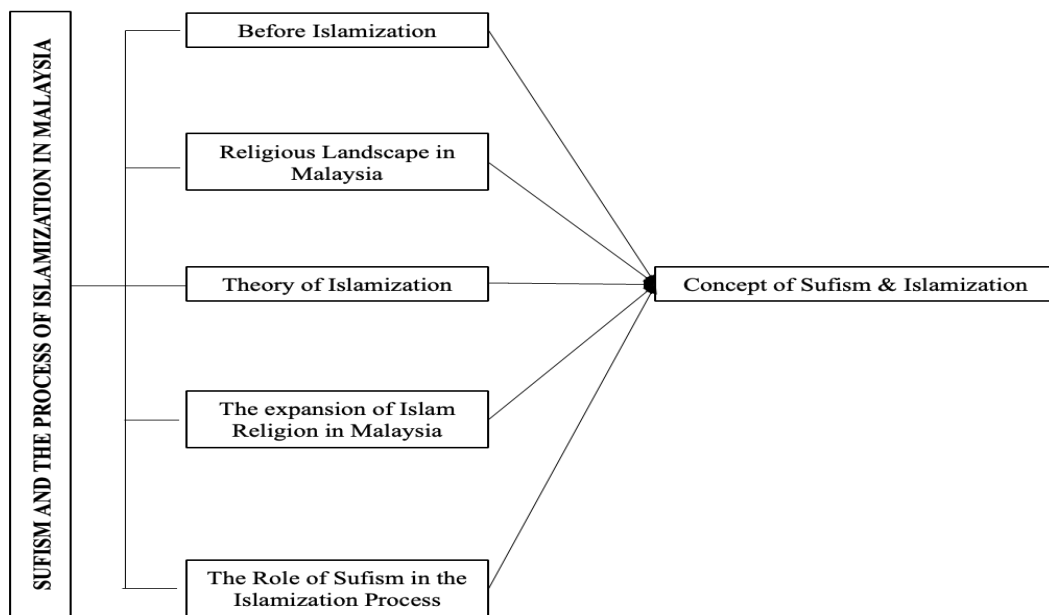


Fig.1: Sufism and the process of Islamization in Malaysia

PRE-ISLAMIC-THE SITUATION OF LOCAL RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCE

The Nusantara, also known as the Malay Archipelago, stands as a diverse and sprawling region comprising modern-day Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, the southern Philippines, and parts of Thailand and East Timor. The Nusantara is an extensive collection of islands which had a diverse array of faiths and spiritual customs prior to the emergence of Islam (Abbas, 2020). The complex topography shown in this artwork is imbued with the influences of Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous customs, together contributing to the diverse tapestry of cultural and spiritual legacy that has profoundly influenced the identity of the area.

During the pre-Islamic period, the Malay Archipelago served as a significant hub for several civilizations, attracting traders, travellers, and academics who brought with them a wide range of religious concepts. The teachings of Buddhism, which emphasize the attainment of enlightenment and inner tranquillity, resonated with the local population. The presence of Buddhism was shown by the existence of ancient temples like Borobudur in Java and the relics of stupas on the plains of Sumatra. Hinduism also had a lasting impact on the spiritual terrain. The Prambanan and Angkor Wat temples are renowned examples of architectural excellence, serving as remarkable structures that honour deities like as Shiva and Vishnu. The incorporation of the Ramayana and Mahabharata storylines into the fabric of local folklore has served to captivate the imaginations of successive generations (Abdul Hamid, 2002).

However, amid the introduction of these foreign religions, the original and native beliefs of the many groups in the area remained dominant. The practices of animism and ancestor worship had significant cultural significance and were integral components of the everyday routines of individuals within the community (Abdul Hamid, 2002). The spirits associated with the terrestrial and aquatic domains were held in high esteem, and ceremonial practices served as significant markers of the cyclical nature of life. The Peninsular Malays, the Dayaks of Borneo, and the many ethnic groups across the archipelago show a deep respect for the natural environment and their ancestors.

These religious currents exhibited a lack of isolation and instead displayed complex intermingling and interweaving. The prevalence of syncretism and hybridity contributed to the emergence of a distinct spiritual atmosphere. The amalgamation of Hindu and Buddhist doctrines with indigenous beliefs resulted in the emergence of a unique cosmological framework. The batu bersurat, which is a stone engraved with writings discovered in Terengganu, Malaysia, serves as evidence of the syncretism that existed in the region. These inscriptions include a combination of Sanskrit language and local cultural aspects. (Aljunied, 2019)

The creative manifestations seen in the cultural environment were affected by the faiths. The artistic expressions of intricately carved sculptures, bright paintings, and dance forms served as mediums through which narratives of devotion and transcendence were conveyed. One example of a localized manner of conveying epics, such as the Mahabharata, is using wayang kulit shadow puppetry. This traditional form of art effectively engages the populace through moral stories (Aljunied, 2019).

As the process of Islamization gradually expanded across the area, the pre-existing beliefs and customs did not undergo an immediate disappearance. Consequently, these

individuals became integral components intricately interwoven into the very essence of the Islamic faith. The syncretic nature of the setting provided a fertile foundation for the flourishing of Sufism, which places significant emphasis on spirituality and mysticism. Sufi groups often assimilated local practices and beliefs, so promoting a more seamless transition for the indigenous people in their adoption of Islam (Aljunied, 2019).

In summary, the religious milieu of the Nusantara/Malay Archipelago prior to the advent of Islam was characterized by a cohesive amalgamation of Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous belief systems. The wide array of faiths presents in the region had a significant impact on several aspects of society, including art, culture, and intellectual pursuits, so moulding the spiritual legacy of the area. The pre-existing currents would persist in exerting their effect on the way Islam was both practiced and comprehended, so signifying the creation of a distinctive Malay Islamic identity that wholeheartedly accepted its varied historical background.

The Nusantara/Malay Archipelago's Pre-Islamic Landscape: A Tapestry of Beliefs and Cultures

The Nusantara region, characterized by its extensive network of islands and trade routes, served as a significant hub for a variety of civilizations and spiritual practices far in advance of the introduction of Islam (Abdullah et al., 2017). The diverse array of beliefs, customs, and civilizations intricately intertwined to form a complex tapestry, which in turn contributed to the vibrant depiction of the pre-Islamic period throughout the archipelago (Humaiz Shaikh et al., 2021).

The indigenous beliefs and animistic rituals, which had a profound connection with the natural world, played a pivotal role in shaping the spiritual environment. Throughout the archipelago, spanning from the verdant woods of Borneo to the meticulously cultivated fields of Bali, many cultures established a profound connection with the ethereal entities that dwell inside the mountains, rivers, and oceans. Ancestral veneration had significant importance, as seen by the performance of rites and ceremonies that served to reinforce the connection between the living and the deceased (Affandi, 2012).

The influence of Hinduism, disseminated by marine merchants and visitors, bestowed a radiant illumination onto the islands. The architectural wonders of Borobudur and Prambanan temples have been regarded as majestic structures, embodying narratives of creation, devotion, and transcendence that are intricately inscribed into the surrounding physical environment. The Ramayana and Mahabharata, when translated into regional languages, served as catalysts for imaginative exploration and had a significant role in shaping cultural narratives (Ahmadi, 2017).

The teachings of Buddhism, which emphasize compassion and enlightenment, were well received by the inhabitants of Nusantara (Adam and Lallmamode, 2009). The landscape was adorned with monasteries and stupas, providing havens for introspection and scholarly pursuits. The influence of Buddhist philosophy was pervasive in local ideologies, exerting a significant impact on several aspects such as art, literature, and the pursuit of individual enlightenment.

The archipelago's geographical position in relation to the sea enabled a vibrant interplay of many cultural influences. Merchants and travellers hailing from China, India, and the Middle East navigated along its maritime routes, facilitating the exchange of commodities as well as intellectual concepts. The indigenous civilizations assimilated and amalgamated these external influences, resulting in the emergence of distinctive manifestations of spirituality and artistic expression (Arifianto, 2017).

In the face of a significant increase in the adoption of foreign belief systems, indigenous spirituality continued to maintain a profound and enduring presence. The amalgamation of Hindu, Buddhist, and indigenous traditions gave rise to syncretic rituals and beliefs that deeply influenced the fabric of everyday existence. The sacred locations and ceremonies exhibit evidence of this fusion, indicating a symbiotic cohabitation of many spiritual components (Ali, 2015).

The pre-Islamic era saw a significant proliferation of creative expression. The presence of intricately carved statues, rich jewellery, and vivid fabrics serves as a monument to the profound veneration of the divine (Amin, 2018). The integration of dance, music, and theatre into everyday rituals served as a means of incorporating spirituality, since these art forms brought to life many myths and narratives that facilitated a connection between the mortal and the heavenly realms.

In summary, it can be said that the Nusantara/Malay Archipelago during the pre-Islamic period was characterized by a diverse amalgamation of indigenous spiritual beliefs, Hinduism, Buddhism, and cultural interactions. The archipelago's future was shaped by its rich legacy, which blended its Islamic identity with a diverse array of beliefs, customs, and creative manifestations, resulting in a lasting impact that transcends generations.

The Multifaceted Religious Landscape of Pre-Islamic Malaysia: Examining the Impact of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Indigenous Traditions

Located in the central region of the Malay Archipelago, Malaysia has seen a fascinating interaction of several religious traditions that have significantly influenced its cultural and spiritual fabric prior to the process of Islamization. The intersection of several civilizations in this region saw the prosperous development of Buddhism, the radiant growth of Hinduism, and the lasting influence of indigenous beliefs, all of which have left a profound and lasting impact on the geographical area and its inhabitants (Ammar and Xu, 2017).

The teachings of Buddhism, which emphasize compassion and inner enlightenment, encountered a receptive environment within the Malaysian context (Barraclough, 1983). The monastic institutions that were dispersed across the region served as not only focal points for religious devotion, but also as important centres for intellectual pursuits and introspective reflection. Sacred locations were embellished with majestic stupas and ornate sculptures, serving as visual representations of the profound spiritual quest for enlightenment that deeply resonated with devout individuals.

The reverberations of Buddhist ideology extended beyond the confines of religious institutions. The ideals of mindfulness and ethical behaviour were deeply ingrained in the fabric of daily life, exerting a profound influence on many aspects such as social interactions, commercial practices, and government (Bennett, 2021). The far-reaching influence of

Buddhism transcended the boundaries of personal experience, making significant contributions to the establishment of a collective ethical framework and fostering a feeling of unity throughout communities.

Hinduism, renowned for its diverse pantheon of deities and complex cosmological framework, has a captivating influence on the Malaysian cultural milieu (Buehler, 2011). The temples exhibited a grandeur that seemed to transcend earthly boundaries, as their lofty spires aspired to establish a connection with the divine. The storylines of Ramayana and Mahabharata have been intricately integrated into the cultural tapestry, serving as a source of inspiration for many forms of artistic expression, including literature, drama, and visual arts.

The calendar was marked by the presence of rituals that paid homage to deities such as Shiva and Vishnu, effectively blending spiritual devotion with collective festivities. The rites, which are imbued with symbolism and devotion, serve to emphasize the mutual reliance between the material and the divine, establishing a link between the physical world and the spiritual universe (Buehler, 2011).

Within the context of imported ideas, it is noteworthy that the indigenous populations of Malaysia had a profound and enduring bond with the land and its spiritual entities. The belief system of animism was deeply ingrained in the everyday lives of individuals, as many rites were conducted to pay homage to the spiritual entities inhabiting natural elements such as mountains, rivers, and woods. Ancestral reverence served as a means of establishing a connection between the living and the deceased, so strengthening a feeling of ongoing lineage and collective belonging (Amrizal, 2018).

These spiritual rituals were closely interconnected with the cycles of existence. Harvest festivals, which serve as a commemoration of the natural cycles, resonate with sentiments of thankfulness and respect. Sacred locations, characterized by the presence of elaborately carved stones and ceremonial gifts, served as tangible evidence of the ongoing bond between individuals and their natural surroundings (Amrizal, 2018).

The amalgamation of Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous beliefs resulted in the emergence of a unique cultural synthesis (Burhanuddin, 2023). The convergence of elements from several traditions resulted in a synergistic amalgamation that materialized in the realms of art, architecture, and religious observances. Temples are adorned with elaborate sculptures that show many mythological scenarios, so symbolizing the peaceful cohabitation of numerous belief systems (Bustamam, 2008).

In summary, the pre-Islamic era in Malaysia exemplified the rich variety and interplay of several religious traditions. The religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous beliefs intertwined, creating a diverse and culturally significant fabric. The ultimate process of Islamization had a significant part in establishing the distinct trajectory of Malaysian Islam, imbuing it with the many elements and historical influences of its rich heritage.

THE PROCESS OF ISLAMIZATION IN MALAYSIA: NAVIGATING THE PATH OF TRANSFORMATION

The term “Islamization” in relation to Malaysia has undergone a long development. According to Georg Stauth, three meanings should be emphasized in this context (Georg Stauth, 2002): The first is the socio-historical meaning, which refers to the question of how Islam gained a

foothold in Southeast Asia. In this sense, Islamization describes a specific pattern of civilizational exchange between the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Sociologically, it can also refer to the transformation of pre-Islamic religious institutions and religious behaviours into what are claimed to be “authentic”, “genuine” or “pure” expressions of Islam and the influence of these ideas on social and political spheres of society. The second meaning is to be seen in connection with the “Conference on Islamic Education” in Mecca in 1977. At the time, the term “Islamization” was interpreted both as a programmatic restructuring of education and science based on Islamic values and methods and as the propagation of an Islamic world view, particularly at universities. In principle, this second interpretation of “Islamization” is a criticism of the Western world. It represents a method of “de-Westernization” which, however, is also intended to adopt Western science and technology. The third meaning is shaped by the Iranian revolution in 1978/79, where “Islamization” was understood as a cultural process and a social transformation. Such a process results in the expansion of the religious sphere into the public sphere. Islam can thus play an important role in the restructuring of Islamic society.

According to Stauth, “Islamization” is, among other things, to be understood as a continuous process that is not only about quantity but is primarily about how the ideal values of Islam can become important factors for the entire life of Muslim society itself. For Muslims in Southeast Asia, the early phase of Islamization of the region is important so that they can be perceived as part of the Muslim world.

The Arrival of Islamization: Examining its Legacy and Transformation

The introduction of Islamization ushered in a distinct era in the history of the archipelago (Annalakshmi, 2011). The advent of Islam was characterized by a gradual transition rather than a sudden rupture. Sufi mystics adeptly integrated Islamic teachings with pre-existing beliefs, showcasing a profound focus on inner spirituality and a commitment to inclusion. The amalgamation in question helped to retain the cultural distinctiveness of the archipelago while also adopting the principles and doctrines of Islam.

Sufism's Arrival in Malaysia: A Spiritual Influence Journey

The voyage of Sufism to Malaysia's shores was marked by the confluence of historical factors, academic exchanges, and the migration of Sufi luminaries (Osman, 2017). This story reveals the roots, prominent individuals, and timing of the establishment of Sufism in Malaysia.

Tracing the Footprints of Origins and Pathways

Sufism's arrival into Malaysia was assisted by many channels:

Maritime Trade Routes: The maritime trade routes that linked the Malay Archipelago to the rest of the Islamic world served as conduits for the spread of Sufi teachings. Traders, intellectuals, and travellers brought the spiritual teachings of Sufism with them, strengthening Malaysia's intellectual and cultural environment (Aljunied, 2020).

Scholarly Exchange: The migration of intellectuals and mystics across areas was important in spreading Sufi ideas (Nagata, 2004). The movement of Sufi luminaries from nearby areas had a significant influence on Malaysia's spiritual environment.

Pioneering Sufi Figures: Transformational Catalysts

Several important Sufi figures were essential in the early introduction of Sufism in Malaysia:

Sheikh Ismail al-Khalidi al-Rumi: Sheikh Ismail al-Khalidi al-Rumi was born in the Ottoman Empire and came in the Malay Archipelago in the 16th century. His Mevlevi order membership and intellectual studies made an indelible mark on the Sufi heritage in the area. Sheikh Nuruddin al-Raniri: A notable Sufi scholar from Aceh, Sumatra, Sheikh Nuruddin al-Raniri resided in Aceh and had a major effect on the growth of Sufism in Malaysia during the 17th century. His Qadiriyya order membership and prolific works led to the richness of local Sufi discourse. Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani: Born in Patani, modern-day Thailand, Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani was a prominent Naqshbandi Sufi teacher. His travels and contacts across the area, especially Malaysia, aided in the spread of Sufi beliefs and practices (Ozalp, 2022).

Sufism's Invasion: Timelines of Influence

Sufism's arrival in Malaysia dates back many centuries:

Sheikh Ismail al-Khalidi al-Rumi's entrance in the Malay Archipelago in the 16th century was one of the early imports of Sufism to the Malay Archipelago (Rashad, 2013).

17th century: Sheikh Nuruddin al-Raniri's teachings and works resonated strongly, leading to the eventual integration of Sufism in the area.

18th century: Sufism's influence grew, with academics such as Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani encouraging the spread of Sufi ideology and practices.

The influence of these early Sufi luminaries lasted well beyond their lives, providing a legacy that continues to affect Malaysia's spiritual environment. Sufism arrived in Malaysia because of interwoven historical currents and the presence of significant Sufi figures. These luminaries' teachings, practices, and spiritual depth acted as catalysts for the progressive integration of Sufism into Malaysia's cultural and religious fabric, leaving an indelible stamp on the nation's Islamic identity (Stapa, 2016).

Understanding Islamization: A Kaleidoscope of Perspectives

The concept of Islamization is characterized by its diverse nature, including an intricate process through which cultures experience a shift from their pre-existing cultural, theological, and socio-political frameworks to adopting Islamic principles, beliefs, and behaviours. Various academics have contributed diverse viewpoints on the process of Islamization, so enriching our comprehension of this complex phenomenon.

The Theoretical Perspectives on Islamization in Malaysia

1. The Theory About the Timing of the Coming of Islam in Malaysia

Historians and academics disagree on when Islam first arrived in Malaysia. Several hypotheses have been proposed to explain the emergence of Islam in the region:

Trade Routes: Traders and merchants from the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian subcontinent may have brought Islamic beliefs and practices to the Malay Archipelago through maritime trade routes. Islam spread without violence thanks to peaceful cultural interchange (Aljunied, 2019).

Traders from Arabia and India: Arab and Indian merchants, as well as early Muslim missionaries and thinkers, are often credited with helping to spread Islam across the area. Their connections with local groups helped pave the way for Islam's eventual adoption via commerce and cultural exchange (Aljunied, 2019).

The Mystical Role of Sufism: It's possible that the spirituality and openness of Sufism helped to make Islam more appealing to the local community. It was not uncommon for members of Sufi groups and mystics to act as intermediaries between traditional beliefs and Islamic teachings. Although it is impossible to determine a certain date for the introduction of Islam to Malaysia, historical evidence shows that the religion first established itself there some time in the 13th century. It was a slow and peaceful transition, with Islam coexisting with local religions for a while (Alam, 2016).

Islamization, as viewed by different scholars, refers to the process of incorporating Islamic principles, practices, and beliefs into various aspects of a society or culture. It involves the gradual adoption and implementation of Islamic teachings in areas such as law, governance, education, social customs, and lifestyle. The perspectives of various scholars on Islamization vary depending on their historical, sociological, and theological backgrounds. In the context of Malaysia, Islamization has been a significant topic of discussion due to the country's multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition (Alam, 2016).

2. Agreement Among Malaysian Scholars on Syed Muhammad Haguib al-Attas's Theory

Malaysian Muslim scholar Syed Muhammad Haguib al-Attas is well-respected for his work in the fields of Islamic philosophy and education. Many Muslims in Malaysia and worldwide have been affected by his writings. Syed Hasan Askari, Hazrat Abdul Quddus Gangohi, and Khairudin Aljunied are some Malaysian academics who agree with his beliefs to some extent (Aljunied, 2019).

Syed Muhammad Haguib al-Attas, in his book "The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri," delves into the work of the influential Malay Sufi poet and mystic, Hamzah Fansuri. While not directly focusing on Islamization, al-Attas contributes to the understanding of Islamic mysticism and its impact on the spiritual and intellectual development of the Malay world. Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, has played a role in shaping the religious consciousness and practices of Muslims in Malaysia and has been a part of the broader process of Islamization (Al-Attas, 2005).

In understanding al-Attas' perspective, it is essential to acknowledge the role of Sufism in Islamization. Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, has been instrumental in shaping the religious consciousness of Muslims in Malaysia and has contributed to the broader process of Islamization by emphasizing spirituality, introspection, and the pursuit of a closer relationship with God (Al-Attas, 2005). While al-Attas' work may not directly discuss the overall theory of Islamization in Malaysia, it contributes to the understanding of how spiritual and mystical elements within Islam have played a part in the Islamic transformation of the region. Sufi ideas and practices have influenced the spiritual life of Malaysians and have become integral to the expression of Islam in the country (Al-Attas, 2005).

3. Khairudin Aljunied's Writing About Islamization in Malaysia and the Role of Sufism

Khairudin Aljunied, in his book "Islam in Malaysia: An Entwined History," explores the historical development of Islam in Malaysia and its interactions with local cultures and traditions. He discusses how Islamization in Malaysia has been a dynamic and intertwined process, where Islamic elements have amalgamated with existing cultural practices. He emphasizes the importance of understanding Islamization as a complex, negotiated process that considers both religious and cultural factors (Aljunied, 2019).

Aljunied highlights the inclusivity of Islamization in Malaysia, where Islamic elements have blended harmoniously with existing cultural practices. The process involved the assimilation of Islamic teachings into local customs, rituals, and languages, resulting in a unique expression of Islam that resonates with the local population. This inclusive approach to Islamization has allowed Malaysian Muslims to maintain a sense of cultural identity while embracing their Islamic faith (Aljunied, 2019).

One key aspect of Aljunied's theory is the recognition of cultural accommodation within Islamic practices. He emphasizes that the acceptance of local customs and traditions, if they do not contradict Islamic principles, has played a significant role in the growth and acceptance of Islam in Malaysia. This approach has enabled the coexistence of Islam with various ethnicities and has contributed to Malaysia's religious diversity (Aljunied, 2019). Aljunied described how Malay nations and communities managed to exist under colonial administrations that exacerbated ethnic and religious differences, as well as how Muslims reacted to these divisions via both violent and reformist movements. Although there have been conflicts and skirmishes between Muslims and non-Muslims in Malaysia, the two groups have generally learned to co-exist peacefully, resulting in the formation of a society that is made up of a number of unique demographic groups (Aljunied, 2019).

In conclusion, both Khairudin Aljunied and Syed Muhammad Haguib al-Attas offer valuable insights into the theories of Islamization in Malaysia. Aljunied's work emphasizes the inclusive and adaptive nature of Islamization, where Islamic teachings have interwoven with local cultures. On the other hand, al-Attas' exploration of Sufism illustrates how mystical dimensions of Islam have influenced the spiritual and intellectual aspects of Malaysia's Islamic history. Together, these perspectives enrich our understanding of the diverse and intricate process of Islamization in Malaysia. Sufism do give influences on the inclusive and adptive nature in the country.

Religious, Economic, Social, and Political Quotients of Islamization

The process of Islamization extends beyond religious aspects and has significant impacts on economic, social, and political domains (Arif, 2013). Religious establishments emerged as focal points of authority, beyond their role in providing spiritual direction to have significant influence over legal, ethical, and moral frameworks. The governing system was inspired by Sharia law and Islamic jurisprudence, leading to the establishment of codified principles that aligned with Islamic ideals. The economic aspects exhibited the influence of Islamization, as commerce, banking, and business operations conformed to Islamic ethical principles. Zakat, a kind of charitable giving, serves as a manifestation of the integration of economic and spiritual endeavours, functioning to relieve poverty while also nurturing social connections.

The social revolution was of comparable magnitude. The social standards within Islamic communities are characterized by the manifestation of key concepts such as generosity, modesty, and communal welfare (Barraclough, 1983). The Islamic teachings in Malay culture resonated with the broad familial networks, so reinforcing a collective sense of community obligation. The integration of Islam and governance was seen in the political sphere. Rulers, recognizing the uniting capacity of Islam, adopted the role of guardians of the religion, therefore infusing their governance with religious legitimacy. The convergence of political power and spiritual authority resulted in the creation of a distinctive framework of government that combined Islamic principles with indigenous traditions (Barraclough, 1983).

Islam's Path to Pre-eminence: Unveiling Malaysia's Transformation

The rise of Islam to become the predominant religion in Malaysia was a complex interaction of several social, cultural, and spiritual elements (Bahauddin and Ahmad, 2018). The resonance of Islamic teachings has been seen throughout many populations, providing a sanctuary of spiritual peace in the face of life's intricacies. The integration of people into the Islamic community was helped by the Sufi orders, which played a significant role due to their emphasis on accessibility and inclusion. This allowed for a gradual and peaceful process of integration.

Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge the intersection between politics and Islamization. The insightful recognition by rulers of the uniting potential of Islam led to its strategic use as a powerful instrument for consolidating authority and fostering societal cohesiveness. Moreover, the presence of economic incentives associated with Islamic networks served as catalysts, motivating individuals to convert and cultivating a feeling of affiliation (Bahauddin and Ahmad, 2018).

In conclusion, the Islamization process in Malaysia encompasses a complex interplay of religious, economic, social, and political factors. The viewpoints of scholars provide valuable insights into the complex journey of Islam's rise to a majority position, shedding light on the complicated interplay between religion and society that has influenced Malaysia's dynamic story.

Mapping for the scholars' writing

In the domain of academic investigation, a group of respected scholars has studied Sufi literature, delving into its historical importance and unravelling the complex fabric of pre-Islamic Malaysia. The groundbreaking endeavours of these individuals have revealed new perspectives, illuminating the intricate dynamics between Sufism and the contemporary cultural context. Syed Hasan Askari, an esteemed intellectual originating from Patna, is recognized as a pioneering figure in his pursuit of exploring Sufi literature (Damanhuri et al., 2017). The author's influential piece of literature goes on an intellectual exploration that spans across several historical periods, uncovering valuable insights hidden within these revered written records. Askari demonstrates the significance of Sufi literature as a crucial resource for unravelling the mysterious past of medieval Malaysia via a careful and thorough methodology. Askari's research methods are characterized by innovation and the use of historical methodologies such as '*makbt*' and '*malfit*.' This approach allows him to provide a unique opportunity for future historians to delve into the depths of Sufi manuscripts and uncover its hidden mysteries.

The academic works of Hazrat Abdul Quddus Gangohi shed light on the historical significance of hagiographical literature and Sufi writings throughout the Sultanate Period. Gangohi's thorough research reveals the several levels of significance contained within these works, providing a valuable collection of insights into the spiritual and socio-cultural context of the era. The researcher's study explores the complex relationship between hagiography and history, specifically focusing on the role of Sufi tales as valuable sources for understanding the historical context of medieval Malaysia (Ismail et al., 2021). These narratives provide insights into the spiritual influences that had a significant role in shaping the society during that time.

In this scholarly article, Professor Muhammad Habib delves into the historical trajectory of Chishti mystics, providing a comprehensive analysis of their journey. Professor Muhammad Habib's academic journey delves into the historical documentation of Chishti Mystics (Imam and Sakr, 2022). The author's investigations delve into the complexities of Sufi texts, with a special focus on the Early Medieval Period. Professor Habib offers a perceptive examination of the historical authenticity of early Chishti literature originating from Malaysia. The author's research not only enhances our comprehension of the historical significance of Sufism but also fosters a sophisticated discourse on the intricate dynamics among spirituality, culture, and history. In his work titled "Weaving Malaysian History from Sufi Sources," Khaliq Ahmad Nizami explores the historical narrative of Malaysia through the lens of Sufi literature and teachings.

Khaliq Ahmad Nizami's academic pursuits reflect the path paved by his forerunners, as he embarks on the enormous goal of synthesizing Malaysian history by interconnecting the nuanced elements of Sufi literature and other archival resources (Ismail et al., 2022). The author's rigorous academic research is a valuable source of guidance, leading readers through the complex network of historical documents and Sufi literature, ultimately presenting a coherent account of the past. Nizami's literary contributions serve as an illustrative demonstration of the potential of Sufism to uncover obscured aspects of Malaysia's historical narrative, enabling the exploration of the journeys undertaken by those who embraced the spiritual trajectory.

In this article, the focus is on the use of *Malf* literature to narrate history, with specific attention given to the contributions of Muhammad Aslam. Muhammad Aslam directs his academic attention to the intriguing realm of *malf* literature, recognizing its capacity to serve as a medium for recounting the historical events of medieval Malaysia. Aslam's analytical perspective reveals the way these literary works function as portals to historical periods, providing an exceptional standpoint for investigating the cultural, spiritual, and social aspects of pre-Islamic Malaysia. The author's work encourages readers to see medieval literature not only as written texts, but also as gateways to a past period (Damanhuri et al., 2017).

In this study, Jyoti Gulati Balachandran examines the social status as shown in *Tadhkirah* literature. Jyoti Gulati Balachandran's academic investigation provides a compelling exploration of the complex realm of *tadhkirah* literature. The author's investigation surpasses the limitations of written material, skilfully crafting a storyline that unveils the societal standing and intellectual prowess of medieval Malaysia. Balachandran's comprehensive research demonstrates the significant role of *tadhkirah* literature in shaping the social structure of the period, providing valuable insights into the lives and ambitions of the prominent cultural and intellectual figures who influenced Malaysian society (Aljunied, 2019).

Collectively, these historians have meticulously examined the manuscripts containing Sufi texts, so illuminating their significant historical worth as priceless portals to the past. The combined efforts of these individuals have facilitated a more profound knowledge of the pre-Islamic environment, enhancing our awareness of the interdependent connection between spirituality, culture, and history within the framework of Malaysia's dynamic historical background.

The Transformation of Malaysia: How Islam Ascended to Majority Status

The process by which Islam attained majority status in Malaysia may be seen as a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-political factors. The growth of this change serves as evidence for the intricate relationship between religion, identity, and historical processes that have influenced the destiny of the country.

The advent of Islam in Malaysia was characterized by the engagement of marine merchants, intellectuals, and travellers who disseminated the religious doctrines of the religion. Over a period, these interactions initiated the development of interest and investigation among the indigenous population, leading to a discourse between established belief systems and the principles of Islam (Aydin, 2017).

The process of Islamization was significantly influenced by the presence of personal Sufi and Sufi groups, who provided a progressive and inclusive approach to conversion. The Sufi mystics, due to their focus on spirituality, internal enlightenment, and benevolent engagement, garnered support from a wide range of societies. The ease of access to Sufi teachings enabled a seamless integration of Islamic principles with pre-existing ideologies and rituals (Ayman, 2017).

The integration of Islamic principles with indigenous practices significantly contributed to the attraction of adherents. The integration of Islamic rituals with local traditions fostered a feeling of coherence and affiliation, facilitating a smoother process of transitioning to the Islamic faith. The convergence of Islamic and indigenous elements in festivals, rituals, and

customs contributed to the development of a distinct and inclusive cultural identity (Azmil, 2017).

The support and sponsorship provided by kings and leaders had a substantial influence on the dissemination and expansion of the Islamic faith. The adoption of Islam by rulers was motivated by their desire to strengthen their authority and promote cohesion among heterogeneous societies. The use of a top-down method resulted in the elevation of the status of Islam, enabling its widespread integration throughout several strata of society. The influence of economic and social factors on individuals and communities may be seen via the concepts of incentives and networks (Howell, 2001).

The rise of Islam was also spurred by economic incentives associated with Islamic networks. The network of trade routes, financial systems, and commercial transactions, which were guided by Islamic principles, had a significant impact on the promotion of religious conversions. Additionally, the attractiveness of Islam was enhanced by the cultivation of a collective identity within a broader community, facilitated by the common adherence to Islamic principles (Howell, 2001).

Madrasahs and educational institutions have arisen as significant centres for the cultivation and dissemination of Islamic knowledge. These centres of knowledge not only facilitated the spread of religious ideas, but also played a pivotal role in driving societal change. The integration of religious instruction with practical competencies enhanced the allure of Islam, drawing in those who sought personal development and empowerment (Howell, 2001).

The topic of discussion is on the concept of social welfare and inclusivity within the context of a compassionate faith. The emphasis placed by Islam on social welfare and compassion struck a chord with the desires of the general populace. The communal support network provided by the Islamic teachings engendered a feeling of belonging among people, as they sought consolation in the community-oriented ethos of the religion (Howell, 2014).

The process of Islamization in Malaysia has been characterized by its gradual, inclusive, and varied nature, which has played a significant role in shaping the country's cultural, social, and religious identity (Ibrahim, 2015). This process of transition not only influenced individual views but also established a unified national identity that surpassed ethnic and linguistic divisions.

In summary, the rise of Islam as the predominant religion in Malaysia may be seen as a narrative characterized by encounters, adaptations, and synergistic processes. The slow rise of Islam may be attributed to a combination of several reasons, including the interplay of Sufi influences, cultural synthesis, patronage, economic circumstances, education, and the inclusive spirit of the religion. The enduring impact of this change remains an essential component of Malaysia's dynamic fabric, exemplifying the intricate dynamics of religion, society, and historical context.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF SUFISM IN MALAYSIA'S ISLAMIZATION JOURNEY

Sufism, with its mystic appeal and focus on inner spirituality, had a significant and transformational influence in Malaysia's complex process of Islamization. Its peaceful and

inclusive approach, based on compassion and tolerance, served as a bridge between pre-existing beliefs and Islamic teachings, opening the path for harmonious religious integration.

Cultural Synthesis and Inclusivity: A Unifying Force

Sufism's open ethos acted as a uniting factor, drawing people from many cultural backgrounds into Islam. Its lessons resonated with people from many walks of life, across ethnic, language, and socioeconomic lines. Sufi groups integrated Islamic teachings with local practices, resulting in a cultural synthesis that kept the core of existing traditions while accepting Islam's path (Azura et al., 2017).

Sufi Orders' Arrival and Spread in Malaysia: Weaving Spiritual Networks

The entrance and subsequent proliferation of Sufi organizations in Malaysia represented a watershed moment in the country's spiritual development. The migration of Sufi orders from faraway regions to the Malaysian archipelago, and their subsequent expansion, exemplifies mysticism's transformational influence in changing the nation's religious environment (Aljunied, 2019).

The Malay Archipelago's marine trade routes acted as channels for the transmission of Sufi doctrines (Salminawati et al., 2022). These roads were travelled by merchants, intellectuals, and travellers conveying the spiritual knowledge of Sufi organizations from various places. As these people connected with local groups, they fostered an atmosphere favourable to the acceptance and adaption of Sufi ideology.

Sufi organizations created "khanqahs" or "tariqahs," or centres of study and devotion, which were crucial centres for the propagation of Sufism. These lodges were spiritual havens where seekers and devotees could congregate for prayers, meditation, and mystical philosophical debates. Sufi masters' teachings struck a deep chord, drawing people from all walks of life and fostering a feeling of togetherness (Borschberg, 2018).

Sufi organizations practiced cultural synthesis, tailoring their teachings to local beliefs and practices (Syahrul and Hidayat, 2021). This all-inclusive approach allowed Sufism to be seamlessly integrated into the existing cultural framework. Sufi practices, rituals, and festivals connected with indigenous traditions, forming a spiritual bond that valued ancestry while embracing Islamic precepts.

The first Sufi individuals to emerge in Malaysia were spiritual stars of instruction and enlightenment. Their presence and teachings had a lasting effect on the religious conscience of the nation:

Sheikh Hamzah Fansuri: This Sufi mystic from the 16th century is respected for his deep poetry and teachings that honoured divine love and the longing for unity with the Creator (Tekke et al., 2015). His writings, marked by metaphysical profundity, crossed cultural and linguistic borders, connecting with searchers from many societies.

Sheikh Abdullah al-Judhami: Sheikh Abdullah al-Judhami, a 17th-century Sufi figure, was instrumental in the spread of Sufism in Malaysia (Wahid and Kawaid, 2019). His involvement

with the Qadiriyya and Naqshbandi orders, as well as his knowledge, aided in the spread of Sufi doctrines and practices.

Sheikh Ahmad Zarruq: Through different pathways, the teachings of Sheikh Ahmad Zarruq, a North African Sufi teacher, made their way to Malaysia (Usman et al., 2020). His focus on ethical behaviour, dedication, and heart cleansing had a significant impact on local Sufi groups. These people lighted the road to spiritual enlightenment in the tapestry of Malaysia's early Sufi personalities, defining the ethos of devotion, inner change, and cultural synthesis that distinguished the nation's developing Sufi tradition.

To summarize, the entrance and growth of Sufi organizations in Malaysia was a story of interconnection, spiritual transmission, and cultural adaptation. Early Sufi luminaries' efforts not only enhanced the nation's spiritual legacy, but also created the groundwork for a distinct and dynamic Sufi tradition that still resonates in Malaysia's varied religious landscape.

Personal Transformation and Spiritual Depth

Sufism places a strong focus on spiritual depth and human change. This concentration struck a chord with searchers, providing a road to inner awakening and enlightenment. Sufi mystics, also known as "sufis," directed people on a path of self-discovery, cultivating a profound connection to the divine. Sufism worked as a catalyst for deep and significant conversions via this spiritual journey, complementing the process of Islamization (Bose, 2018).

Sufi Learning Centers: Nurturing Hearts and Minds

Sufi lodges and institutions arose as spiritual learning and development havens. These institutions, called as "zawiyahs" or "khanqahs," not only taught religion but also promoted compassion, humility, and social duty (Datu Gulam, 2021). Individuals who interacted with Sufi teachings were attracted to the essential values of Islam, starting on a transforming path that led them to accept the religion.

Social Integration and Cultural Adaptation

Sufism's adaptability and flexibility permitted Islam's smooth assimilation into the existing socio-cultural context (Faiz, 2016). Sufi rites and practices complemented local traditions, creating a feeling of continuity and familiarity. Sufi-infused festivals, rites, and rituals served as bridges between pre-Islamic traditions and Islamic customs, encouraging a feeling of belonging and acceptance.

Community Welfare and Benevolence

Sufi groups practiced acts of charity and social service to embody the values of compassion and communal welfare. This beneficent side of Sufism struck a profound chord with communities, serving as a physical representation of Islamic beliefs. Sufis demonstrated the transformational

potential of Islam by extending a helping hand to the downtrodden and poor, attracting folks to a religion built in love and generosity (Bottoms, 2018).

Using Art, Music, and Poetry to Express Divine Love

The creative representations of Sufism, such as music, poetry, and dance, captured hearts and souls (Hasanah, 2004). Individuals seeking a closer connection with the divine were drawn to these creative forms of worship, which were frequently laced with themes of divine love and spiritual desire. Sufism acted as a conduit for channelling devotion and love towards Islam via various creative mediums. In essence, Sufism served as a gentle guiding light throughout Malaysia's Islamization journey, lighting the path of faith with its knowledge, compassion, and spirituality. Its open and malleable character encouraged the peaceful integration of Islamic concepts, resulting in a tapestry of varied beliefs woven into the fabric of Islam. Malaysia's Islamization journey became a witness to the beauty of progressive, compassionate, and inclusive spiritual growth thanks to the transformational force of Sufism (Hasanah, 2004).

Sufism's Threefold Influence on Islamization in the Nusantara/Malay Archipelago

Sufism had a tremendous impact on the Islamization process in the Nusantara/Malay Archipelago, a patchwork of islands with various cultures and customs. Sufism's part in this transformational journey may be interpreted in three ways:

Spiritual and Temporal Authority: Kingship

Sufism and royalty were inextricably linked, with monarchs receiving spiritual legitimacy and heavenly favor for their reign. Sufi mystics often advised kings on questions of administration while also nourishing their spiritual development. Examples include the Sultans of Aceh, whose involvement with Sufi organizations strengthened their power and aided the expansion of Islam. The Sufi-King connection served as a channel for the spread of Islamic doctrines and practices to the public (Abdurahman, 2018).

The term “God-King” (God-King/Raja-Dewa) in Malay context implies an understanding according to which the spiritual ritual for and with the people is at the center, whereby miracles are expected from the king (I Ketut Riana, 2009). In his research on the land and coastal culture of the Samudera Pasai people in northern Sumatra, particularly in Aceh, Kennet R. Hall has found similar ideas. There it was common to believe that the king had divine power and could therefore bring spiritual and material prosperity to his people. In the pre-Islamic Samudera Pasai people, they trusted in the king's magical power and were certain that his rule could hold its own in competition with neighbouring kingdoms. It was even believed that he could compete with successful trading countries such as India, China and Java. Hall believes that the combination of political hegemony and religious authority led to the kingdom of Samudera Pasai becoming the first Islamic empire in Indonesia (Kenneth, 2001).

King's Assist/Religious Patronage

Sufism's impact expanded beyond advising positions, with Sufi groups providing religious patronage to rulers or Kings. Many Sufi were employed by kings as teachers and companions who could bring them blessings. This led to a symbiotic relationship between the two. The king needed the presence of the Sufi as soothsayers, healers, guarantors of blessings, as a kind of living amulet. The Sufi themselves secured their livelihood, fame, and political influence due to their position at court, but also exercised moral influence (Martin, 1996).

Sufi mystics functioned as spiritual consultants to the monarchs of the Majapahit Empire, assisting them in areas of statecraft and government. This partnership strengthened the links between religious and temporal power, creating an atmosphere favourable to the spread of Islam. Sufi groups, by their support and leadership, contributed to the development of an atmosphere in which Islamic values might take root and thrive (Abdurahman, 2018).

Spiritual Direction and Guidance

Sufi mystics took on the role of spiritual directors, assisting people on their journey to spiritual enlightenment. Their teachings cut across societal boundaries, providing comfort and direction to individuals from all walks of life. Individuals seeking a genuine spiritual experience were drawn to Sufism's focus on intimate connection with the divine. Sufi masters' teachings promoted a deep inner change that cleared the path for adoption of Islamic principles and practices (Martin, 1994).

Sufi Influencers in Nusantara/Malay Archipelago Islamization

Prominent Sufi individuals made an indelible influence on the Nusantara/Malay Archipelago's Islamization process. Figures like as Hamzah Fansuri and Nuruddin ar-Raniri in Aceh, and Sheikh Burhanuddin Ulakan in Melaka, served as spiritual beacons and shaped the socio-religious environment. Their inclusive and spiritually deep teachings resonated with many cultures, easing the transition to Islam (Abu Wafa, 1996).

The relevance of Sufism in Malaysia's Islamization journey is shown via a detailed mapping of experts' publications. Sufism worked as a catalyst for progressive and inclusive change, weaving the fabric of Islamic beliefs into the region's cultural tapestry. Scholars' perspectives illustrate Sufism's various contributions to encouraging a peaceful integration of Islam within the Malaysian setting, ranging from spiritual advice to cultural synthesis (Joll, 2021). Sufi teachings, represented by compassion, inclusion, and spiritual depth, struck a chord with the people, creating a fertile foundation for the spread of Islam. As a result, Sufism emerges as a pillar in the growth of Malaysia's Islamic identity, enhancing the country's cultural history and guiding its path toward becoming a majority Islamic republic.

Sufism, Islam's mystical component, played a key and multidimensional part in Malaysia's convoluted process of Islamization (Kawangit and Guleng, 2015). Its effect went beyond theological debate, infiltrating numerous aspects of society and helping to the gradual, peaceful integration of Islamic values into the nation's cultural fabric.

Sufism's focus on inner spirituality and personal connection with the divine struck a chord with individuals from many walks of life (Mohamed Rashad, 2013). Sufi teachings crossed ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic borders, giving a spiritual path that allowed people from all walks of life to embark on a transforming journey. This openness permitted a gradual and organic transition to Islam, enabling populations to accept Islam without destroying cultural and social connections.

One of Sufism's outstanding accomplishments was its capacity to integrate Islamic teachings with preexisting cultural traditions. Sufi mystics, who were typically well-versed in local traditions, helped integrate Islamic teachings into the existing socio-cultural context. Sufi-infused festivals, rituals, and rites forged links between Indigenous traditions and Islamic practices, creating a feeling of continuity and familiarity. This cultural fusion gave new converts a feeling of belonging and acceptance (Azyumardi, 2004).

Sufism's focus on moral and ethical principles has a significant impact on societal standards and conduct (Matthews and Nagata, 2018). Sufi teachings advocated compassion, humility, and kindness, which aligned with Islam's essential principles. Individuals adopted these ethical principles, causing a ripple effect that influenced larger society dynamics and contributed to the formation of a more equitable and humane social order (Martin, 2018).

Sufi lodges and institutions, known as "tariqahs" or "khanqahs," grew in popularity as places of spiritual development and communal interaction (Azyumardi, 2006). These organizations not only offered religious instruction, but also fostered a feeling of belonging and camaraderie among its adherents. Sufi gurus served as mentors, teaching not just religious knowledge but also principles such as empathy, tolerance, and social responsibility. The feeling of community developed inside these institutions aided new converts' absorption into the greater Islamic society (Al-Attas, 2018).

The strong focus on love and devotion to the divine in Sufism provided a very personal and emotionally resonant experience of Islam (Moshinsky, 1959). Sufi traditions like *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and *qawwali* (spiritual music) gave people a way to express and nurture their spiritual connection. These rituals fostered an intense love for the holy and a deep devotion to Islamic beliefs, leading to people's emotional and spiritual change.

To summarize, Sufism had a transforming influence in Malaysia's Islamization. Sufism promoted a gradual and peaceful integration of Islamic values into the Malaysian way of life via its inclusive spirituality, cultural adaptability, ethical framework, educational pursuits, and stress on devotion. Sufism's legacy lives on, enhancing Malaysia's varied cultural environment and influencing the country's identity as a majority Islamic country (Noorfuad and Wok, 2018).

CONCLUSION

In the exploration of Sufism's role in the Islamization of Malaysia, a captivating narrative unfolds. Sufism, with its inclusive spirituality, cultural adaptability, and emphasis on personal transformation, played a pivotal role in fostering a gradual and harmonious integration of Islamic principles into the nation's cultural fabric.

The arrival of Sufism in Malaysia was facilitated by maritime trade routes, scholarly exchanges, and the migration of influential Sufi personalities. Early luminaries such as Sheikh Ismail al-Khalidi al-Rumi, Sheikh Nuruddin al-Raniri, and Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani acted as

catalysts for the spread of Sufi teachings, leaving an enduring imprint on the nation's spiritual landscape.

Sufi orders established centres of learning, where the fusion of spiritual practices, cultural customs, and a sense of community nurtured a unique Malaysian expression of Sufism. The teachings of early Sufi personalities like Sheikh Hamzah Fansuri and Sheikh Abdullah al-Judhami resonated deeply, shaping the ethos of devotion, ethical conduct, and cultural synthesis.

As a result, Sufism's role in the Islamization of Malaysia is a testament to its power to bridge cultural divides, inspire inner transformation, and forge a sense of unity among diverse communities. The gradual and inclusive approach of Sufism facilitated the seamless integration of Islamic beliefs within the local context, enriching Malaysia's religious landscape and contributing to its distinct Islamic identity. This historical journey highlights the enduring legacy of Sufism, a beacon of spiritual light that continues to illuminate Malaysia's path towards unity, compassion, and devotion.

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