

## **The medieval Muslim Sufi scholars and their roles to the spread of Islam: A Special reference to Southeast Asia**

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### **Abstract**

The religion of Islam has been introduced in Mecca by the Prophet Muhammad (Sal) in the 7th century AD. Islam has begun to spread too many countries during his lifetime due to his continue enormous efforts. Even after the death of the Prophet, a sequence of Islamic propaganda work was carried out by his Companions and Islamic preachers, paving the way for his spread throughout the world. Thus, many pioneers were responsible for the spread of Islam and its influence among the people worldwide. It is noteworthy, that the work of the pioneers of Islamic propaganda is behind the large numbers of people in Southeast Asia who can still follow Islam today. The contributions of the so-called Sufi saints, especially in these countries, are considered to be very important. The Islamic religion began to gain influence among the people through their honest actions, social interactions, unselfish social services, moral values, and cultural role models. Although some research efforts have been made on their works, services, and contributions to social change, there is less clarity and influence on the Islamic propaganda work and services of Sufi scholars in Southeast Asia than on the influence of Indian and Sri Lankan Sufi pioneers among the Tamil-speaking population. The reason for this is the lack of clarity among the people about those occult scholars. Therefore, the study treats on to explain how Islam was spread by Muslim Sufi scholars in Southeast Asian countries and how much Sufi scholars contributed to spread of Islam and development of Arabic Language, as well as their propaganda strategies and methods. This study is a social descriptive research that based entirely on secondary data. The researchers have used text books; scholarly research articles, journals, university theses and websites from Arabic, English and other languages in secondary data collection and those data are analyzed. This research briefly explains how Islam spread in Southeast Asian countries, highlighting the achievements of Muslim Sufi scholars in spreading Islam and their propaganda approaches. Exemplary attitudes and presentation style should be important for the success of a religious campaign and its influence among the people. It is important to note here that in order for a campaigner's success to move fully towards the goal, social approaches and mechanisms must be put in place.

**Keywords:** Sufis, Islamic propaganda, Southeast Asian countries, Strategies, Cultures

## **Introduction**

Islam is an international religion and it was introduced to many parts of the world in a very short period, because it belongs to everyone. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his Companions were engaged in spreading this religion day and night in accordance with the Holy Quran verse says "Reach out to the people with what has been sent down to you."<sup>1</sup> The Companions who ascended the throne after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) were also busy in the work of introducing Islam in distant lands during their possession. In this way, Islam began to spread in the Southeast from the earliest times through the honest business attitudes of Muslims and the best cultures and good behavior.

The researcher Shakir points out that "in the early days, they were not only for business purposes but also to spread Islam to the Arab Muslims who came to China in the Southeast. They arrived in Chinese ports and treated the people there in a very nice and polite manner. Thus the Chinese people loved them more than anyone else. They received the best cultures and guidance that no one else had. They were greatly impressed by their calm (honest) actions and honest business attitudes. An amount of the Chinese; they were attracted by such attitude and behavior of the Muslim people and converted to Islam."<sup>2</sup>

So, this study shows that culture, behavior and approaches of Muslims and good attitudes were the most fundamental reason for the spread of Islam in the Southeast Asia. It is a matter of history that the spread of Islam through struggle in these countries was completely avoided and Islam spread through systematic propaganda. Anyone can clearly understand that the sacrifice and dedication of the Sufi scholars was the main reason for the spread of Islam, especially in this region.

This study examines the extent to which Sufi scholars have contributed to the spread of Islam, as well as their initiatives, propaganda strategies, and approaches to social change.

The study is based entirely on secondary data. Text books, Research articles, magazines, websites and magazines from locally and internationally are used for this.

Muslim Sufi Scholars in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, as well as Southeast Asian scholars who contributed to the spread of Islam, further the social thought, scientific activities and social change; have made a huge contribution. Religious activities such as community institutions, traditional religious institutions such as Kathaatheeb schools for primary children, Islamic schools, Arabic colleges express their massive contributions in this region.

## **Objectives**

This research contains the following objectives.

1. To identify the factors that contributed to the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia.
2. To understand the contributions of Muslim Sufi scholars to the spread of Islam in Southeast Asian countries.
3. To identify the techniques and methods used by Sufi scholars during their Islamic propaganda work.

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<sup>1</sup> Surah Sabah of Holy Quran, verse no. 20

<sup>2</sup> Shakir, 1995, Islam in Turkistan, Daru al Kuthb, p-15

## **Research Methodology**

To achieve the above objectives, the qualitative research methodology has used in this study. And the researchers the secondary data was collected from the text books, journals article, theses from the universities, magazine, Newspaper and other sources. The collected information has been subjected to a qualitative analysis and it is critically acclaimed. Data analyses were done by the researchers.

## **Discussions and Findings**

### **1. The factors that led to the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia:**

The religion of Islam was introduced in the Arabian Peninsula and became one of the most influential religions among the people amidst many sacrifices. Islam, which initially spread to neighboring countries, then began to spread and grow rapidly worldwide. As Islam spread to distant lands during the time of the Companions of the Apostle, so did the Umayyad (d. 40-132) who followed it, and in the Abyssinian period (d. 132-656) it began to spread globally from west to east. The countries of the South East were no exception and began to develop in those countries as well. Many reasons have been put forward by scholars for the rapid spread of Islam in these countries. The following factors were the basis for the rapid development of Islam in this category. They are as follows:

#### **I. The honest business of the Muslim People:**

The spread of Islam in most of the countries of Southeast Asia might have been due to trade and close contact with the Arabs and Muslims. The Muslims who came as traders in the early days focused not only on trade but they interested also on the spread of Islam. Thus Islam spread speedily in these countries.

Islam spread rapidly among the people because of their propaganda and cultures that acted with beautiful actions and patriotism. "Islam came to China by sea. Maritime trade relations with China date back to the Islamic period, many years before the introduction of Islam. It is possible to observe that many of China's minority Muslims live in large numbers in Chinese ports."<sup>3</sup>

### **2. The Sacrifice and Dedication of Muslim People in Islamic Dawah:**

The sacrifice of Islamic callers is considered to be the key to the rapid spread of Islam globally. The Islamic callers who lived in each country struggled with the fact that the natural population of that country was their standard of education. Many Sufis in African and Asian countries have been responsible for the spread of Islam. "Dr. Abdur Rahman Az- Sameed is a great Islamic personality; he was a sacrificial victim who worked on the path of Dawah about 26 years. Many Christian brothers and others in Africa region have converted to Islam because of his teachings and good approach"<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Social Relationship:**

The social relations that Muslims had with the people of the South East led to the spread of Islam. Muslims married Buddhist women in these areas and lived with them as a family. Also in the region; Features such as Muslims' social relations with other peoples, justice, and humanitarian aid contributed to the spread of Islam here. "A Muslim worker who lived in China would finish his job with unblemished intent and neatness. He will take only the wage that suits his work and will self-assess

<sup>3</sup> Shakir, 1995, Islam in Turkistan, Daru al Kuthb, p-86

<sup>4</sup> Abdul Azeez Al Kahlooth, 1979, Al Istihmar wal thanseer fi shimali Africa(Arabic) p- 28

himself. Similar Muslim workers were found in many parts of China. They migrated to the region from other countries and mingled with the Chinese community there. Their actions may have contributed to the spread of Islam in the area.”<sup>5</sup>

#### **4. Contribution and influence of social and religious organizations:**

Schools and Islamic institutions are important factors in the spread of Islam in the South East. Especially in this region; many schools were found that could train the children of Arab traders. These schools were called “Pankishwar” or foreign schools in China. “These schools contributed to the spread of Islam and the development of the Arabic language. It also contributed to the spread of Islamic Arabic culture in addition to the basics of Islam. Related subjects were also taught. Especially for the children of those schools were taught grammar, literary study, Balaga, and Arabic language.”<sup>6</sup>

“Students were taught the fields of religious such as Tafseer, Hadith and Piqh al Islamic at HOCHOW the Islamic Institute of Sufi scholars. They went to their respective territories and taught Islam after completing a certain period of learning. These learned students went to the regions here and spread the Islamic religion”<sup>7</sup>

#### **5. Friendly ideological exchanges of Islamic scholars with Non-Muslims Brothers:**

Today we can find, there is a great discussion and dialogue is held between ethnic religious and community scholars in the Western countries, mostly between Islamic and Christian scholars. This is an opportunity to gain clarity about Islam as it moves Islamic ideas and looks freely in line with the democratic tradition. In Southeast Asian countries, Sufi pioneers have organized seminars in schools, Soviets, and public places to explain Islam.

#### **6. Islam is seen as embracing a life plan that is applicable to all.**

Scholar Sherman Jackson, in his book "Islam and American Blacks: A Perspective on a Third Life" (2005), points out, "Blacks are increasingly embracing Islam in the United States. This is because they consider the religion of Islam to be appropriate for them to enjoy their freedom and authority properly. They see Islam as a neutral, appropriate religion for all rights, such as the ideal of a happy ideal life and economic rights." Further the Buddhists and Chinese living in the Southeast also viewed Islam as an appropriate way of life. Thus Islam may have spread rapidly in these countries.

### **Contributions of Sufi scholars to the spread of Islam in Southeast Asian countries**

The contribution of the Sufi Pioneers to the spread of Islam is considered to be one of the most memorable in the history. The charity of Sufi scholars for Islam in the Middle East and South Asia is still at an all-time high. They have done with the pure intention of not glorifying their names only for the pleasure of the almighty Allah. “They have made great contributions to the astounding growth of Islam from being unknown callers and Islamic pioneers.

Although the Sufi scholars made many social contributions, only a few of their services could Only the works of some Sufi Scholars are taken here and examined by these researchers; One of the most important Sufi scholars in this regard was Ashshaikh Abdullah Al Arif (Rah), a scholar who can still be remembered by the people today. "He came to the Malay Islands in 1165 AD from the Arab world and

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<sup>5</sup> Fawz Tharvish, 1977, Islam in east asian countries, p- 25

<sup>6</sup> Shakir, 1995, Islam in Turkistan, Daru al Kuthb, p-57

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Arnold " Preaching of Islam, page 343

engaged in Dawah (propaganda) and was instrumental in converting more people to Islam."<sup>8</sup> Understanding the nature of the people and considering their attitudes impressed them with their good qualities through activities and introduced them to the Sufi Tariqah methods that could train them to do with greater spiritual involvement. be seen by researchers as they had no advertising purpose at all.

He instilled Islamic thoughts deep in them. The pure activities of this man led to the conversion of a large number of communities to Islam.

Another scholar like him is Ashsheikh Ismail Lafiy (Rah). During the same period, he landed in the islands of Ache and Sumatra, where he preached Islam and introduced Qadriyya Tariqah to the people. Large crowds of the people joined Islam, attracted by his propaganda works. Thus the history of the 09 Sufi saints who are still popularly spoken by the people of in Southeast Asian regions such as Java and Indonesia is significant. These are the people who called the people to the milk of Islam and were more involved in spreading Islam to the people through their pure conduct. They are still remembered by those who protected the people from Kufr, Shirk and Superstitions and instilled the values of Islam in their hearts.

In this respect Maulana Ibrahim al-Maghribi (Rah) is one of the main speakers; His home country is India. "Living in the East, he was one of the first to start traditional schools in the region and to pioneer reforms in Java and its environs, creating more and more Islamic callers.

Another scholar is the Sufi scholar Ash-Shaykh Abdullah. He came to northern Malaysia from the Arab world in 531 A.H. Inspired by his propaganda, the governor of that proclamation also converted to Islam. He spent most of his life in the region and is still well-spoken here by the people.

Another Sufi scholar who lived in the southeastern region was Ashshaikh Abdullah Masood bin Abdullah Al Jawi (Rah). He came from an Arab country and was involved in propagating Islamic Dwaha in Java. Yusuf Ann Nabhani (Rah) mentions him as "Ash-Sheikh Zawi was a famous Sufi scholar and had many students in its territory in Yemen". He spent most of his time in Sumatra and died in 768. He was a contemporary of Ibn Battuta. Although he has written many books, it is noteworthy that only a few of his books and essays have reached us"<sup>9</sup>.

Another of the pioneers of the Sufism was Radeen Rahmatullah Sonan Ambel (Luranu'yapada). His native country is Cambodia. He was the one who created the first Islamic empire in Java and made it practically possible. He is commonly known as Sultan Shah Sirri Al Alim. " He was a role model for the rulers who came after him by introducing many model projects required for the Islamic Empire. His tomb is still found in the Ambel mosque and people of the region are visiting it continually"<sup>10</sup>.

Another of the Sufi scholars is Radeen Pago Sonan Giri (Rah) is considered to be one of the most important of them (Raden Paku/ Sunen Giri). He was involved in Islamic propaganda in the Solavasi area and he was a trained teacher. "He was involved in teaching children lessons through Islamic games and making them role models. His services are still remembered today and his burial place is still under the watchful eye of the people in the Kirasik area.

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<sup>8</sup> . Kamarudeen,; 2000> Islam in Ardabil and Malay islands; p;- 75

<sup>9</sup> Ashseik Ibrahim Atha ival 1991Jamiya Karamathul Awliyah p 3-7

<sup>10</sup> Nabhani, 1987> Jamiya al Karamath\_, p: 468> Val -2

The Sufi scholar Sonan Maktoum Ibrahim (Rah) is still very much in the minds of people in the Southeast Asia. "He was involved in Islamic propaganda in North Java and East Java. Who was involved in propaganda for a long time and was responsible for converting many to Islam"<sup>11</sup>.

Ash-Sharif Hidayatullah (RA), one of the forerunners of the Sufism, has always remained in the minds of the people and is commonly known by the special name of "Sonanji". Who put forward the Islamic propaganda both theoretically and practically."<sup>12</sup>

Jafar Asradiq (Rah) is another Sufi scholar who specializes in Southeast Asia. He lived in the East Central Coast of Java and was involved in Islamic propaganda there. "He was a well-known literary figure who wrote extensively on Islamic stories and was widely known to the public."<sup>13</sup>

Rodin Barauto Sonan Moriabada (Suzanne Pzhazhavalafuranen Arasiyanaya) is still remembered by ordinary people. He was engaged in Dawah by those who were engaged in the fishing and hunting industries, explaining his Islamic mission and their nature. "He had a reputation as one of the most beautiful singers in Java. He brought Islamic thought to the people through Islamic songs. "His tomb is still visible on Mount Moriah"<sup>14</sup>.

Sheikh Sharifuddin (Rah) was the one who took the place of the people of the region through their social activities and turned it into a platform for Islamic propaganda. He was heavily involved in social work and was a devout Muslim. He was very involved in the affairs of orphans and the sick and was a stimulant to the people and its milk.

Another of the Sufi pioneers was Ash shaheed Ash shaheer (Rah). He was also nicknamed Sonan Calijo. "He was an inventor of new techniques and used new devices and strategies well for propaganda work. His campaign; Work was more prevalent in South Java"<sup>15</sup>.

Thus it is understandable that these 09 Sufi scholars and many unnamed saints have made great strides in contributing to the spread of Islam in the Eastern region and in establishing it. Notable among them are the saints such as Ashshaikh Shamsuddin, Basai, Hamza Al Bunsari, Ashshaikh Chinakal, Abdul Malik Abdullah, Dawood bin Abdul Jawi, Dawood Al Pathani. It can also be observed that their work in protecting the nation and its people was immense during the period of colonial domination and anti-national activities. The so-called Sufis are not just paralyzed by the Soviets. It is understandable that they were working on changes in the social sphere and leading activities towards adaptation.

### **Islamic propaganda methods of Sufi scholars**

Dealing with the best propaganda methods is considered to be the most important aspect when calling the people to the milk of Islam. Islam expects us to call them by the most appropriate means when calling them to the milk of God, as there are many different types of human beings with different characteristics. This method is considered essential for the campaign to move towards success and better outcome. Al Quran also instructs us to use the best methods during propaganda. The Qur'an states, "Call on people in the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful admonition."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Majmaa Al Masayil

<sup>12</sup> .Nabhani, ibid p :470

<sup>13</sup> Majmaa Al Masayil;

<sup>14</sup> Nabhani, ibid p; 469

<sup>15</sup> Seik Abdus Salam; 1977> Al Hujaj Al Kaviyyah p; : 216

<sup>16</sup> . Al Quran , Surah Nahl 124

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) also said, "Speak on the basis of human knowledge."<sup>17</sup> In this way the Sufis have used many methods and mechanisms to convert people to Islam. Dawah methods are handled based on social circumstances.

1. **Calling the people to Islam through Clear Evidence:** Muslim merchants and Sufis made a significant contribution to the development of Islam by engaging in Islamic Dawah in Southeast Asian countries. They called them to the right path of Islam with great sacrifice, taking into account the knowledge and social status of the people. The Sufis were more diligent in calling the short-lived monarchs who ruled the Malay Islands the milk of Islam. Initially, the royal family and later the king and those around them were called to the side of Islam. The best practice of these Sufi scholars was the main reason why many people joined Islam. The simplicity and honesty of their lives, the observance of Haram Halal, the breach of the vote and the patriotism may have been the reasons for others to join the fold of Islam.
2. **Involvement in spreading Islam through artistic aspects:** Traditional myths, fictions, play, short stories were widely found among the people and they were written with the verses of Shirk. They protected the people from them and introduced Islam to the people by staging Islamic art shows. Some Sufis who studied the Islamic arts wrote verses that included Islamic teachings, changed their style, read Arali songs and converted many to Islam. "Sonan Khali Jack, a Sufi and eminent scholar, became famous for his theatrical art. He was someone who did not expect any reaction through his play. He had only the intention of telling Kalima only to those who heard this"<sup>18</sup>.
3. **Carrying out the task of Dawah by participating in the political-economic administrative structures:** Sufis do not look at politics and religion differently. They saw Islam as a means to an end. In this regard, Shamsuddin, a Sumatran and Islamic caller, has been the Prime Minister of the Aceh Islamic Empire. The ruler of his time was Skander Moda"<sup>19</sup>. Thus Sheikh Noordeen Raniri of the Aceh Islamic Kingdom; He is a great personality and a key figure in the advancement of Islamic teachings. He is in Aceh; He was also a judge"<sup>20</sup>.
4. **Establishment of schools and adopting Islamic teachings:** Schools and schools may have played a major role in the rapid growth of Islam in Southeast Asia. The Sufis who established and rehabilitated these saw it as a platform for propaganda. Many schools in Southeast Asia can still be seen under the influence of the Tariqah.
5. **Carrying out the translation work set up by the library; Involvement in propaganda work:** Contributed to the writing of books on Islamic art and its preservation in libraries. "Bahru al-Laha'd" is considered to be the first important book translated by the Sufis, and was written by Sheikh Abdullah Arif. The book, which was translated from Arabic into Malay, may have helped people understand Islam"<sup>21</sup>.

## Findings

This study makes it clear that various factors are behind the spread of Islam in Southeast Asian countries. The honest actions, cultures and role models of those who lived in these countries have paved the way for the spread of Islam. These qualities were also found in the propagandists here

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<sup>17</sup> Imam Tailami, Book of Tailami

<sup>18</sup> .Kamarudeen, Development of Tasawwuf and Sufi Scholars in Malay islands,; P :40

<sup>19</sup> .Kamarudeen, Development of Tasawwuf and Sufi Scholars in Malay islands,; P :40

<sup>20</sup> Abu Hasan Sham; 1980> Karathul ibi Malaysia, P;; 75

<sup>21</sup> Kusarathul thuras Al Muallapath al Malaviyyah, Val :-1; P 3

and their tireless work and sacrifice have been the main reason for the spread of Islam. The Islamists who lived here followed their religion and were highly involved in social affairs and carried out many social activities. Thus they received an overwhelming welcome and love from the people.

They established social institutions and thereby embarked on social reform and scientific activities and became pioneers of social change. They were engaged in Islamic propaganda work with their good attitudes and handling the best methods keeping in view the circumstances of the time. The results of their propaganda were found to be effective as a result of the people acting chastely without expecting any benefit or praise for the sole purpose of pleasing the Lord.

## **Conclusion**

So the Sufis, who contributed a lot to the spread of Islam in the Southeast, became successful in understanding the nature of the people in the social sphere and engaging in propaganda using the best mechanisms. The best campaign methods, hard work and sacrifice are seen as essential elements for any campaign to move towards success. To make the best change in the community you need to work with that community and live honestly with them and set an example. These practices, which reflect solidarity like the institutional partnerships of the Sufi saints, are consistent in society; it is clear that it can create a conflict-free social environment when found.

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