

## Islamic Sufism in Malaysia (Origins and Major Sufi Orders)

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### Abstract

Undoubtedly, the science of Sufism has become an essential part of our Islamic heritage, although it did not gain prominence as a term and concept until the third century of the Hijri calendar. Sufism focused on the spiritual and heart aspects, with self-purification and spiritual refinement being the foundation of Sufism. Therefore, it had a significant impact on Islamic societies, especially the Malay community, which was influenced by certain Sufi practices such as supplications, remembrances, and other Islamic rituals that have been passed down from generation to generation. Engaging in these practices has had a profound effect on keeping Islam alive in the hearts of youth, children, men, and women, and has also had a clear influence on non-Muslims living among Muslims, and there are many of them, it was decreed for them to live among Muslims. The aim of this study is to elucidate the origins of Islamic Sufism in Malaysia, particularly through the entry of Islam to the Malay Archipelago by virtuous men who invited people to love and know Allah, and who were concerned with addressing spiritual issues and rectifying misconceptions about them. Additionally, the study aims to highlight the major Sufi orders that have influenced the Malaysian society. The research methodology employed in this study is both inductive and analytical. It involved tracing the literature on the origins and history of Sufism, as well as some Sufi paths in Malaysia, with analysis and commentary.

**Keywords:** Islamic Sufism, Sufi Orders, Malaysia

### Introduction

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all worlds, and blessings and peace be upon the leader of the warriors, the seal of the prophets and messengers, Muhammad, peace be upon him, and upon his family and all his companions.

### Importance of the Topic

Undoubtedly, the science of Sufism has become an essential part of our Islamic heritage, although it did not gain prominence as a term and concept until the third century of the Hijri calendar. Sufism focused on the spiritual and heart aspects, with self-purification and spiritual

refinement being the foundation of Sufism. Therefore, it had a significant impact on Islamic societies, especially the Malay community, which was influenced by certain Sufi practices such as supplications, remembrances, and other Islamic rituals that have been passed down from generation to generation. Engaging in these practices has had a profound effect on keeping Islam alive in the hearts of youth, children, men, and women, and has also had a clear influence on non-Muslims living among Muslims, and there are many of them, it was decreed for them to live among Muslims. The aim of this study is to shed light on the influence of Sufism on the Malaysian society, particularly through the entry of Islam to the Malay Archipelago by virtuous men who invited people to love and know Allah and who were concerned with addressing spiritual issues and rectifying misconceptions about them.

Many researchers have concluded that Sufism and its leaders and adherents have played a significant role in the spread of Islam in the Malay world and the attraction of people to it. Their role was immense in spreading the Islamic call in the Malay society, where Islam spread without wars but rather through the efforts of the early preachers and authentic Sufis. This success can be attributed to their mingling with the common people, providing them with living examples of piety and righteousness, and offering social services, as well as acts of kindness, goodness, and brotherhood. This model led many inhabitants of this region to embrace Islam, liberating themselves, by the grace of Allah, from the shackles of paganism and polytheism. Islam spread in the Malay society in a way that is still exemplary.

### **Study Objectives**

This study aims to achieve several objectives, including:

- To understand the history of the emergence of Islamic Sufism.
- To elucidate the emergence of Islamic Sufism in Malaysia.
- To clarify the most important Sufi paths in Malaysia.

### **Research Questions**

This study includes several research questions, such as:

- What is the origin of Islamic Sufism?
- How did Islamic Sufism emerge in Malaysia?
- What are the most important Sufi paths in Malaysia?

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology employed in this study is both inductive and analytical. It involved tracing the literature on the origins and history of Sufism, as well as some Sufi paths in Malaysia, with analysis and commentary.

### **Study Plan**

This study encompasses the following topics: defining Sufism linguistically and conceptually, defining a Sufi, introducing the country of Malaysia, the emergence of the science of Sufism, the emergence of Sufism in Malaysia, and highlighting the major Sufi paths in Malaysia. I ask Allah Almighty to make this work a source of good deeds and to accept our righteous actions.

## **Definition of Sufism in Language and Terminology, and the Definition of a Sufi**

### **Definition of Sufism in Language**

In the dictionary "Mukhtar Al-Sahah" (The Criterion of Language), it is stated that the entire section on defining Sufism refers back to the known "soof" (wool), These three letters have a common and correct origin, which is the well-known "soof"(wool) (Ibn Farris, 1979).

"Soof" refers to the wool that covers the skin of a sheep, characterized by its fineness, length, and waves. The plural form is "aswaf" (Omar, 2000). The verb form "yasoofo" means to level or make something equal (Ibn 'Abbad, 1994). "Safa 'ani yasofo sawfan " means to distance oneself from something (Maalouf, 1992). "Tasawwafa fulan " means someone became a Sufi (OMAR, 2000). and it also means asceticism (Al-Zubaidi, 2000).

From these definitions, the following can be concluded

The word "Sufism" and its derivatives in the Arabic language carry several meanings:

- It refers to wool, symbolizing asceticism and worship.
- It signifies abandonment, meaning to turn away from one thing to another.
- It also denotes inclination: that is, to choose one thing and abandon another.

### **Definition of Sufism in Terminology**

There are various opinions regarding the definition of Sufism, as well as its derivation. Here are some examples of definitions:

It has been said that Sufism is the purification of the heart from conforming to worldly desires, detachment from natural inclinations, suppression of human attributes, avoidance of selfish motives, pursuit of spiritual qualities, attachment to true knowledge, utilization of what is preferable over what is eternal, advising the entire community, and fulfilling the rights of Allah in truth and following the Prophet's teachings in the Sharia (Al-Kalabazi, 1992)

It was said, "Sufism is entering every noble disposition and departing from every base disposition" (Al-Ghazali, 1997)

It has been said that Sufism is a science that acquaints oneself with the states of the soul, its praiseworthy and blameworthy conditions, the methods of purifying it from blameworthy traits, adorning it with praiseworthy qualities, and the ways of returning to Allah and attaining spiritual steadfastness (Al-Kurdi, 1995)

### **Definition of a Sufi**

There are several definitions of the essence of a Sufi or a mystic, including:

"A Sufi is someone whose heart is pure for God" (Al-Kalabadhi, 1992).

"A Sufi is someone who is purified from impurity, filled with contemplation, detached from humans, and has reached a state where gold and mud are equal to him, meaning he has no desire for anything other than his Lord" (Ibn 'Ajibah, 2002)

"Sufis are the scholars of Allah and His rulings, the practitioners of what Allah has taught them, the realizers of what Allah has inspired them with, the finders of what they sought, and the vanishing of what they found because everything they attained is temporary." (Al-Tusi, 2001). From these definitions, it becomes clear that the technical meaning of Sufism is based on purifying the heart for God, purifying the soul from vices, restraining oneself from prohibited acts, and utilizing one's faculties in obedience to God. We can say that a true Sufi is someone who adheres to the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad in all aspects of life, guides people to the path of God, clarifies what is permissible and forbidden, engages in night prayer with devotion and mindfulness, fears the Hereafter, and hopes for the mercy of their Lord. They strive in the daylight to uphold the word of God. Anyone who deviates from this

path cannot be considered a Sufi, and their affiliation with the Sufi sanctuary is false and baseless.

### **Definition of Malaysia**

Malaysia is located in Southeast Asia and has a crescent shape, close to the equator. It occupies two prominent regions. The first is the Malay Peninsula, which comprises most of the states of Malaysia. It is bordered by Thailand to the north and Singapore to the south. The second region consists of the states of Sabah and Sarawak, located on the western coast of the island of Borneo. These two regions are separated by the South China Sea, approximately 750 kilometers wide. Malaysia is connected to the Indonesian island of Sumatra through the Strait of Malacca, and the Philippines is located northeast of Sabah state (Sheikh, 2004).

The total area of Malaysia is 330,434 square kilometers. The first region, the Malay Peninsula, has an area of 587,131 square kilometers and consists of eleven states. The northern part of the island of Borneo, where Sabah and Sarawak states are located, has a combined area of 198,874 square kilometers (Shaker, 1997).

### **The Emergence of Sufism**

This science (Sufism) did not exist during the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, but it emerged later in the second century after Hijrah when people became inclined towards worldly pursuits and indulged in worldly affairs. Some individuals distinguished themselves by their devotion to worship and became known as Sufis. Ibn Khaldun describes this emergence, saying, "This science is one of the new sciences in the Ummah. Its origin is that the way of these people was not seen among the predecessors of the Ummah, including the Companions and the followers. The true path and guidance are based on devotion to worship, seeking closeness to Allah, turning away from the adornments and attractions of the worldly life, and renouncing the pleasures, wealth, and status that the majority of people are inclined towards. It involves seclusion from creation for the purpose of worship. This was common among the Companions and the early generations. However, when the inclination towards worldly pursuits spread in the second century and onwards, and people became inclined towards worldly affairs, those who were inclined towards worship were distinguished with the name of Sufis and Sufism" (Ibrahim, n.d.).

Al-Suhrawardi explains the emergence of this science, stating that it did not exist during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) but it is possible that it emerged during the time of the Tabi'in and afterwards. He says, "This name did not exist during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is said that it existed during the time of the Tabi'in, and it is narrated from Al-Hasan Al-Basri, may Allah have mercy on him, that he said, 'I saw a Sufi performing Tawaf (circumambulation around the Kaaba), so I gave him something, but he did not take it. He said, 'I have four Dawaniq' is the plural of "danq," which is one-sixth of a dirham (a currency unit), which is enough for me.' This is supported by what was narrated from Sufyan Al-Thawri, who said, 'If it were not for Abu Hashim the Sufi, I would not have known the subtle forms of showing off.' This indicates that the name was known in the past. It is also said that this name was not known until the second century after the Prophet's Hijrah" (Al-Suhrawardi, 2000).

And agrees with the emergence of this science, the Islamic emergence of the orientalist "Nicholson" in his book "Atsawo Al Islami Wa Tarikhoho," where he says: "We do not see in the statements of the ascetic Sufis, such as Ibrahim ibn Adham who died in 161 AH, Dawud al-Ta'i who died in 166 AH, Al-Fudayl ibn 'Iyad who died in 187 AH, and Shuqayq al-Balkhi who died in 194 AH, any indication that they were influenced by Christianity or any other foreign

source except to a small extent. In other words, it appears to us that this type of Sufism was, or at least possibly was, born out of the movement of Islam itself and was a necessary consequence of the Islamic concept of God" (Nicholson, 1969). And this Sufism that emerged initially had an Islamic origin. Its condition was like that of other sciences, as it was not immune over time from non-Islamic philosophical and religious influences.

Dr. Omar Farrukh says: "Islamic Sufism is fundamentally based on Islam, and we cannot truly understand it without understanding the development that Islamic religion underwent in its spread and the fluctuations it experienced. However, since movements are never free from foreign influences, Sufism in Islam was not purely devoid of alien elements. These elements were not necessitated by the Arabs' need for what others possessed, but rather their presence in Islamic Sufism was a result of many Sufis being non-Arabs who brought with them strange imaginings, deviant practices, and scattered beliefs that later entered into Islamic Sufism" (Farrukh, 1981).

Dr. Ibrahim Madkur also agrees with this opinion, saying: "Sufism is an Islamic phenomenon that sprouted in the atmosphere of Islam and was influenced primarily by the actions of the Prophet (pbuh) and his companions, relying on the wisdom and admonition found in the Quran and Sunnah. It also shared some of the problems faced by major Islamic schools. However, like other Islamic phenomena, it was not exempt from external factors that infiltrated the Arab world, and it was inevitable for it to be influenced by and incorporate them" (Madkur, 1983).

Therefore, the result of the preceding is that this science of Sufism emerged with an Islamic origin, grew and flourished within the context of Islam and its environment, and had its own sheikhs and teachers who followed the path of the chosen one (Prophet-pbuh) in nurturing and refining souls. However, like other sciences, it was not immune to certain foreign influences alien to it, which the researchers among the Sufi scholars knew and those who walked in their footsteps, distinguishing between the truth and falsehood through the light of faith.

### **The Emergence of Sufism in Malaysia**

The emergence of Sufism in Malaysia can be traced back to the early days of Sunni Sufism in the Malay world with the entry of Islam to the Malay Archipelago. This can be attributed to the Arab missionaries who came to this region, including prominent figures such as Sheikh Abdullah Al-Arif, who lived between 1165 and 1177 CE. He arrived from the Arabian Peninsula to spread Islam in Samudra, Indonesia, in 1165 CE, which was under the rule of King Nurdin from 1155 to 1210 CE (Saeed, 2017).

To specifically determine the emergence of Sufism in Malaysia, its sources were from Mecca, India, and Indonesia. The Sufi thought in Malaysia is represented by the teachings and theories of Sheikh Hamzah Al-Fansuri, who died before 1016 AH (1607 CE). He addressed spiritual issues, corrected misconceptions, and called people to the love of God, the eradication of superstitions, and the strengthening of rational evidence. He believed that people must know themselves before knowing Allah, the Creator, Exalted be He.

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The spread of Sufism intensified and its foundations were established on solid ground in the Golden Age of the Malacca Sultanate in 1488 AH. Malacca was the first state to emerge in Malaysia, and its ruler was a devoted Sufi. During the reign of one of its governors known as "Mahkota Alam" (1607-1636), a prominent Sufi named Shamsuddin Al-Sumatrani emerged. He defined Allah as "the great driving force of the universe and life, the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, unaffected by sleep or slumber".

Many Sufi orders emerged in the Malay world between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries CE (Nur, 2003). And this is what we will discuss in the following lines.

The most important Sufi orders in Malaysia are as follows

In the beginning of my discussion about Sufi orders, it is necessary for me to first explain the meaning of "Tariqah" in language and terminology.

### **The meaning of "Tariqah" in language**

In "Lisan Al Arab", "Tariq" and "Tariqah" are synonymous words that mean "path" and "method." (Ibn Manzur, 1994)

"Tariqah" of a people refers to their similarities, choices, and preferences. It is said, "This man is following the Tariqah of his people, and these people are following the Tariqah of their own. And the Tariqahs of their people are also for men and leaders." Allah, the Most High, says: "we are groups having different way." (Surah Al-Jinn) Meaning, we were different groups with diverse inclinations. The plural of Tariqah is Atr eqah and Turooq. (Al-Razi, 1999)

In summary, the word "Tariq" and "Tariqah" in the language refer to the path, method, example, and behavior.

### **The meaning of "Tariqah" in Sufi terminology**

The meaning of "Tariqah" in Sufi terminology has various connotations, including the following:

Tariqah is the specific path followed by those seeking closeness to Allah Almighty through detachment from worldly affairs and progression in spiritual stations. (Al-Jurjani, n.d.)

It is also said that Tariqah is a group of individuals from the Sufis who associate themselves with a specific Sheikh in terms of education and adherence. They follow a precise system of spiritual behavior, live a communal life in Zawiyas and Rebats, or gather for regular meetings on specific occasions. They regularly hold sessions of knowledge and remembrance. The names of the Tariqahs vary in the Islamic world according to their founders (Al-Tuftazani, 1991)

And it is said that Tariqah is a covenant between the Sheikh and the disciple regarding repentance, steadfastness, entering the path of Allah, constant remembrance of Him, and practicing the etiquettes and principles of the Tariqah that the disciple follows, along with fulfilling the roles and obligations set by the Sheikh of the Tariqah at specified times (Al-Najjar, 2004)

What is notable from these definitions is that the ultimate goal of Tariqah is the same, which is to attain closeness to Allah Almighty and His pleasure. However, there is a formal difference in the means of reaching this goal among all the Tariqahs, which lies in the methods that lead

to this objective. Regardless of these methods, they must be in accordance with the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (peace be upon him), and should not contradict any established Islamic principles, even if they come from the Sheikh to the disciple. The Sheikh is not infallible, and everything he says should be taken into consideration and evaluated, except for the infallible words of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Among the most recognized and widespread Sufi orders in Malaysia are the Qadiriyyah Tariqah, the Rifaiyyah Tariqah, the Shadhiliyyah Tariqah, the Naqshbandiyyah Tariqah, the Shattariyyah Tariqah, and the Khalwatiyyah Tariqah.

Now, we will briefly explore each of these orders.

### **Qadiriyyah Tariqah**

The Qadiriyyah Tariqah is a Sufi order attributed to Sheikh Muhyiddin Abd al-Qadir bin Abi Salih al-Jilani al-Hasani (470-561 AH), known for his asceticism and righteous qualities. This Tariqah spread in the Malay world through the disciples of Sheikh Muhammad Khatib bin Abdul Ghaffar al-Sampasai al-Jawi (d. 1875 CE). It further expanded in Malaysia in the states of Kedah, Kuala Lumpur, Sabah, Sarawak, and Terengganu. In each of these states, there is an appointed representative who leads the center of instruction, chosen by the Sheikh of the Tariqah, which is based in Suryalaya, Indonesia (Al-Baruhi, 2002).

### **Rifa'iyyah Tariqah**

Also known as Bata'ih or Haidariyyah Tariqah. This Sufi order was founded by Sheikh Ahmad bin Sayyid Abu al-Hasan Ali al-Rifa'i, who traces his lineage back to his grandfather, Rifa'a al-Maghribi al-Husayni. Al-Rifa'i was born in the year 512 AH in the village of Hasan in the Wasit province of Iraq. He later moved to the village of Umm Ubayda, located between Wasit and Basra, in the year 578 AH. He was a jurist following the Shafi'i school of thought (Al-Kasnazan, 2005)

Sheikh Shehab al-Din al-Hajj bin Abdullah Muhammad al-Jawi (1162 AH) acknowledged that he was a follower and practitioner of the Rifa'iyyah Tariqah. It can be said that the Rifa'iyyah Tariqah had a notable presence in the Malay world, although not on a wide scale, and its center is not widely known (Al-Baruhi, 2002)

### **The Shadhiliyyah Tariqah**

The Shadhiliyyah Tariqah is a Sufi order attributed to Al-Shadhili (593-656 AH), who made Alexandria in Egypt his headquarters. He married, had a family and companions. The credit for its spread in the Malay world goes to numerous scholars like Sheikh Abdul Malik bin Abdullah. Sheikh Ismail al-Minangkabawi wrote a book titled "The Shadhiliyyah Tariqah," which is still in manuscript form. However, in recent times, the researchers pay little attention to its spread due to the small number of its followers in the Sufi scene (Al-Baruhi, 2002)

### **The Naqshbandiyyah Tariqah**

It is a Sufi order attributed to Sheikh Bahauddin Ahmad bin Muhammad, popularly known as Shah Naqshband, who was born in 717 AH in the village of "Qasr al-Arifan," located about 8 miles from Bukhara. He passed away in 791 AH. The Naqshbandiyyah Tariqah branched into two branches: the Mazhari Naqshbandiyyah Tariqah and the Khalidiyyah Majdidiyyah Naqshbandiyyah Tariqah. Both branches spread widely in Malaysia, but the second branch is more common and has survived to this day (Saeed, 2017).

### **The Shattariyyah Tariqah**

It is the first Sufi order that had the largest number of followers and disciples in the Malay world before the spread of other Sufi orders. It also played a significant role in the spread of Islam in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pattani in Thailand. It is attributed to Sheikh Abdullah al-Shattari (d. 818 AH / 1415 CE). It spread in the Malay world through Sheikh Abdul Rauf Sinkil, who was a disciple of Sheikh Ahmed al-Qushashi in Mecca and Sheikh Ibrahim al-Qurani in Medina. Sheikh Abdul Rauf Sinkil received the ijazah and bay'ah (authorization and allegiance) in the Shattariyyah Tariqah from them, becoming a successor and guide of the Shattariyyah Tariqah. This tariqah reached Malaysia through Sheikh Abdullah bin Abdul Malik al-Malizi, who had a significant role in spreading it in the Malay Peninsula, specifically in the state of Terengganu (Al-Baruhi, 2002).

### **The Samaniyyah Khulwatiah Tariqah:**

It is a Sufi order attributed to Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Karim al-Samani, who was born in Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah in the year 1180 AH. He grew up and was raised there, and he followed several Sufi paths, including the Qadiriyyah and Khulwatiah, before becoming known for his Samaniyyah Tariqah. Sheikh Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Mubein Fauh al-Fatani and Sheikh Abdul Samad al-Falimbani learned this tariqah from him. Through the latter, this tariqah entered Sumatra, where it gained many followers and disciples in the Malay world, especially in Sumatra. This tariqah spread in Malaysia for a period of time, evidenced by the spread of wirds (liturgical practices) called "Ratib al-Samani" in Malaysian and Indonesian society, as well as the spread of a story called "The Tale of Sheikh Muhammad al-Samani" written by Sheikh Muhammad bin Ahmad Kamal al-Falimbani. However, this tariqah remained with a small number of Malaysian followers, including Sheikh Datuk Haji Muhammad al-Samani, one of the prominent scholars in the Perak state of Malaysia and a member of the fatwa committee there (Al-Baruhi, 2002)

### **Conclusion**

All praise be to Allah, the Lord of all worlds, by whose grace righteous deeds are completed. May peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad - peace be upon him. After that, I have successfully completed the study of this research titled "Islamic Sufism in Malaysia: Origins and Important Sufi Orders." I have arrived at several conclusions, including the following

- The true meaning of Sufism is the purification of the heart for the sake of Allah, purging it from diseases, purifying the soul from vices and blameworthy traits, restraining the limbs from the forbidden, and utilizing them in obedience to Allah.
- A true Sufi is someone who adheres firmly to the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet - peace be upon him - in all aspects of life. They guide people towards the path of Allah, clarifying what is permissible and impermissible.
- The science of Sufism emerged within the Islamic context, grew, and flourished under the shadow of Islam and its environment. It had scholars and teachers who followed the path of the Prophet in nurturing and refining souls.
- The early beginnings of Sunni Sufism in the Malay world can be traced back to the arrival of Islam in the Malay Archipelago, with credit given to Arab missionaries who came to this region.

Among the notable and widely recognized Sufi orders in Malaysia are the Qadiriyyah, Rifaiyyah, Shadhiliyyah, Naqshbandiyyah, Shattariyyah, and Samaniyyah Khulwatiah.

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