



Islamization in Malay Archipelago: A Study of the Historical Philosophy Analysis of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to reveal the view of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas about the Islamization in Malay Archipelago. In this research, Al-Attas, as one of the world intellectuals of Malay Archipelago, tried to reconstruct the ideas of western scholars who tended to restrict the role of Islam and accentuate the significance of Hinduism and Buddhism in the Islamic history and culture in Malay Archipelago. The western scholars supported Hinduism and Buddhism as the most influential religions in Malay Archipelago instead of the influence of Islam. The argument was proved by the various relics of stone carvings, statues, and temples. The argument of the western scholars seemed to reduce the role of Islam as the largest religion embraced by people of Archipelago for centuries. Some of western scholars whose views would be clarified by Al-Attas were Van Leur, Schrike, Snouck Hurgronje, and Winstedt. Al-Attas provided an argument with facts and data that it was the role of Islam through Sufism metaphysics and Arabic language of Malay Archipelago that shaped, changed, and became the view of people's life in Malay Archipelago. It should be emphasized here that Islamization was a theory initiated by Al-Attas to confirm the influence of Islam in Malay Archipelago through the concept of Sufism metaphysics.

Keywords: Islamization, Malay Archipelago, Philosophy.

Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengungkap pandangan Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas mengenai Islamisasi di Kepulauan Melayu. Dalam penelitian ini, Al-Attas sebagai salah satu intelektual terkemuka dunia dari kawasan Kepulauan Melayu berupaya merekonstruksi pandangan para sarjana Barat yang cenderung

membatasi peran Islam dan lebih menonjolkan signifikansi agama Hindu dan Buddha dalam sejarah serta kebudayaan Islam di Kepulauan Melayu. Para sarjana Barat tersebut berpendapat bahwa Hindu dan Buddha merupakan agama yang paling berpengaruh di Kepulauan Melayu dibandingkan dengan pengaruh Islam. Argumen tersebut didasarkan pada berbagai peninggalan sejarah berupa ukiran batu, patung, dan candi yang masih dapat ditemukan hingga kini. Pandangan para sarjana Barat tersebut tampak mengurangi peran Islam sebagai agama terbesar yang telah dianut oleh masyarakat Kepulauan Melayu selama berabad-abad. Beberapa sarjana Barat yang pandangannya dikritisi dan diluruskan oleh Al-Attas antara lain Van Leur, Schrike, Snouck Hurgronje, dan Winstedt. Al-Attas mengemukakan argumen yang didukung oleh fakta dan data bahwa peran Islam, melalui metafisika tasawuf serta penggunaan bahasa Arab dalam tradisi intelektual Melayu, telah membentuk, mengubah, dan menjadi dasar pandangan hidup masyarakat di Kepulauan Melayu. Perlu ditegaskan bahwa Islamisasi merupakan teori yang dikemukakan oleh Al-Attas untuk menegaskan besarnya pengaruh Islam di Kepulauan Melayu melalui konsep metafisika tasawuf.

Kata Kunci: Islamisasi, Kepulauan Melayu, Filsafat.

INTRODUCTION

Southeast Asia is an area that is greatly demanded by researchers to be a regional research object. The research includes history, archeology, and manuscript study. The regional research is so wide that domestic and foreign researchers try to reveal something hidden in the history and culture of Malay Archipelago. The Malay Peninsula consists of various ethnic groups, cultures, languages and different dialects. The differences become a distinctive and unique value of Malay Archipelago society.

In historical records, Malay Archipelago was visited by many people from all over the world. The influence of the immigrants brought out many theories about the influence of the dominant religion in Malay Archipelago. Before the arrival of the immigrants, Malay Archipelago seemed to have been influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism. The religions were mingled with animism and dynamism of Archipelago society. Animism and dynamism were very dominant in playing important role for the behavior of Malay Archipelago society in pre-Islamic period (Muzani, 1993: 169).

Recently, the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism has been defined as a unique characteristic of Malay Archipelago society. It can be seen from the opinion of Van Leur who said that Hinduism had given a great influence to Malay Archipelago society before the arrival of Islam (Al-Attas, 1990: 36). The great civilization of Hinduism and Buddhism can be seen in the relics, such as temples, stone carvings, puppets, and also the relics of Hinduism and Buddhism buildings.

This opinion really attenuates Islam as a religion that has a great influence on the soul of Malay Archipelago society.

Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas clarified some opinions that glorified the influence of the religion. Al-Attas tried to answer the opinions by looking at the influence not only on the external element, but also inside the soul of Malay Archipelago society. Therefore, Al-Attas revealed a theory of Islamization in order to answer the fallacies of some western scholars in seeing the influence that dominated the soul of Malay Archipelago society.

Research on the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago, especially when examined through the historical-philosophical lens of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, is not entirely new. Various scholars have investigated the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia by employing historical, sociological, and philological approaches. However, while these works offer valuable insights into networks, trade, political patronage, and religious institutions, they seldom focus on the intellectual and philosophical implications of Islamization as emphasized by al-Attas. Thus, a review of related studies highlights both continuities and gaps that inform the present research.

Azyumardi Azra, in his article *Islam di “Negeri Bawah Angin” dalam Masa Perdagangan* (1996), explores the spread of Islam across the eastern Indian Ocean during the flourishing maritime trade period. He argues that the Islamization of the Malay world was deeply connected to trading activities, which enabled merchants, scholars, and Sufi leaders to introduce Islam into port-polities. His findings suggest that Islam was not imposed but gradually adopted through translocal networks of trade, scholarship, and Sufism. While Azra’s work underscores the socio-economic structures and interpersonal networks that facilitated Islamization, al-Attas’s perspective, which this study follows, goes further by interrogating how those processes transformed intellectual categories and ethical worldviews in Malay thought.

Further, Azra expands his analysis in *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII dan XVIII: Akar Pembaruan Islam Indonesia* (2013) and *Renaissance Islam Asia Tenggara: Sejarah, Wacana, dan Kekuasaan* (2006). These works highlight the significance of ulama networks linking the Malay-Indonesian world with the Middle East, particularly through study travels, ijazah, and Sufi silsilah. His findings emphasize how scholarly linkages structured renewal (*tajdid*) and doctrinal consolidation in the 17th and 18th centuries. The similarity with the present study lies in recognizing the intellectual role of ulama and Sufi orders. However, Azra’s works concentrate on later centuries and the empirical mapping of networks, while al-Attas’s framework—adopted here—analyzes the *earlier formative centuries* and conceptual transformation, particularly the Islamization of language, epistemology, and *adab*.

In contrast, Roeslan Abdulgani’s *Sejarah Perkembangan Islam di Indonesia* (1983) provides a broad descriptive narrative on the stages of Islamization in Indonesia. He identifies routes of entry—via Gujarat, Arabia, and Persia—before tracing the role of rulers and scholars in adopting and promoting Islam.

Abdulgani's findings point to Islamization as a gradual process shaped by political adoption and social diffusion. This account shares with the present study a recognition of multiple channels of Islamization, yet differs in emphasis: Abdulgani focuses on political chronology and regional diffusion, whereas the present research investigates the conceptual and philosophical restructuring of Malay intellectual traditions as theorized by al-Attas.

Complementing these accounts, A. Hasymy's edited volume *Sejarah Masuk dan Berkembangnya Islam di Indonesia* (1993) compiles scholarly papers—particularly those centered on Aceh—that argue for early and direct Arab influences in Islamization. This work highlights the roles of ulama and sultanates in strengthening Islam in local contexts. While Hasymy's collection aligns with al-Attas's perspective in stressing the intellectual and religious leadership of scholars, it remains largely empirical and regional in scope, not extending into the philosophical dimension of Islamization.

From this review, it is evident that existing scholarship has provided detailed accounts of trade dynamics, political structures, and intellectual networks that shaped Islamization in the Malay Archipelago. Yet, a significant gap persists: few studies have examined Islamization as a *conceptual reconstitution of worldview and knowledge*. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's historical-philosophical analysis addresses precisely this issue, emphasizing the Islamization of language, categories of thought, and ethical frameworks. By adopting al-Attas's lens, the present study contributes a deeper intellectual dimension to the historiography of Islamization, complementing and extending prior empirical works.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach that described and analyzed a certain topic. The main reference was taken from some primary figures. The additional data were taken from books, journals, and other related references. Then, the researchers described, analyzed, connected, and revealed Syed Muhammad Al-Attas' thoughts on how Islam entered and developed in the Archipelago and how Islam was accepted by the Archipelago society who believed in animism, dynamism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

DISCUSSION

1. Islamization in Malay Archipelago

For some orientalists, Islamization in Malay Archipelago seemed so superficial that Islam was only a flimsy lining of civilization that had existed before. In this case, Van Leur and Schrieke said that Hinduism and Buddhism had a great influence instead of Islam. As quoted by Azra, Van Leur said that the arrival of Islam in Malay Archipelago did not bring profound changes so that it did not affect the condition of pre-existing civilization in social and economic

aspect, state order, and trade (Azra, 2006: 5). Syeh Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas also quoted that Van Leur saw the progress of a civilization lay in the progress of artistic and aesthetic value. Some relics, such as temples, stone carvings, statues, and puppets contained the fineness of art that characterized a high-value civilization (Al-Attas, 1990: 36). The analysis of Van Leur really attenuated the role of Islam. Al-Attas added that Winstedt said that the influence of Islam was very restricted. It had mingled with Hinduism and Buddhism.

As quoted by Azra, London also said that Islam in Archipelago was only a flimsy lining that existed above the local culture (Azra, 2006: 5). The orientalist were so influenced by Snouck Hurgronje's writings that they seemed to reduce the role of Islam in Malay Archipelago (Al-Attas, 1990: 36). Al-Attas rejected the great assumption of the tradition of the orientalist scholars above.

Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas did not deny that art was one of the benchmarks of a high-value civilization. However, based on his opinion, a view of life based on high artistic values did not mean having nobility of mind, sense and knowledge. Al-Attas gave a very serious response and refutation by saying that the impression of a high civilization of a nation was not seen from its physical matters only, but it was far embedded and hidden in its view of life. The progress of civilization was not only seen from the progress of artistic and aesthetic values, such as temples, monuments, sculptures, and puppets, but also from the Malay language and writing which expressed common sense and summarized thought (Al-Attas, 1990: 37-42).

The reason for choosing Malay language as a language that summarized common sense and thought was because Malay language had the best structure in semantic language family. In terms of meaning, Malay language seemed to be more appropriate in accepting the content of Al-Qur'an teachings which were not touched by the changes experienced by other languages. Malay-Arabic language put a meaning of rationality as an ability to say words in conversation. Malay language had undergone a revolutionary change by enriching most of its vocabularies from Arabic and Persian. This language also became the main medium for spreading Islam to all islands, so that in the 9th century of *Hijriah* or 16th *Masehi*, it had reached its position as a religious language replacing the hegemony of Hinduism and Buddhism influences (Al-Attas, 1993: 260).

Malay-Arabic language developed in a new change as a result of its use as a medium for philosophical conversation, a medium for transforming views of life from aesthetic to scientific. The use of Malay language as a literary language and Islamic philosophy in Malay Archipelago which had many terms can overthrow the sovereignty of Javanese language as a literary language of Indonesian Malay. Javanese language was strongly influenced by *Mahabrata* stories and was more dominated by aesthetic elements than scientific ones which were still mingled with Hinduism concepts. The ancient Javanese language was used by Hinduism and Buddhism which had assimilated as imagined and experienced by its users. Thus, it changed the meaning and basic concepts in order to correspond to what was desired (Al-Attas, 1990: 37). Malay-

Arabic language carried a great influence on the Javanese language. The writings regarding Islamic philosophy contained in the Javanese language came from Malay references, or at least were influenced by the style of Malay language (Al-Attas, 1990: 37).

Islam had provided an intellectual and rational formulation to the Malay Archipelago literature in the 16th and 17th century, especially through philosophical *tasawuf* which spread over and influenced the mindset of Malay Archipelago society. Philosophical *tasawuf* contained fundamental concepts that were connected with the central concept of oneness of God. *Sufi* metaphysics, through the group of thinkers, scholars, and Arabs had formulated a profound concept of philosophical metaphysics, *tasawuf*, and *Kalam* science which was also the result of *Sufi* metaphysics of Malay Archipelago. The form of *Sufi* metaphysics was clearly seen in the rational description and writings about the concept of *wujūd*, *Waḥdah al-Wujūd*, the description about ontology, cosmology, theology, circumstance, existence, and the concept of *tauhid*, which played a fundamental role in attracting the Malay Archipelago people into Islam (Al-Attas, 1993: 248).

Sufi metaphysics was very far from political values and desires to rule so that it gained a great influence on the Malay Archipelago society. *Sufi* metaphysics had an aim at forming an essential Islamic religious conception of psychology based on Al-Qur'an in the soul of Malay Archipelago society. *Sufi* scholars with the foundation of the Al-Qur'an had an incomparable base so that they imprinted on the soul of Malay Archipelago society. Therefore, the influence of *Sufi* metaphysics with the spirit of Al-Qur'an had resulted in people's repentance to Islam, thus it brought the transition from non-rational traditions to philosophical written literature. This metaphysics played an important role in opening the soul of Malay society in recognizing ontological aspects based on philosophy and rationality and far from mythological insights (Al-Attas, 1993: 259).

According Al-Attas, Islam had changed the people's mindset of Malay Archipelago both in terms of empirical and rational metaphysics. Islam did not only provide changes to the physical structure, but also profound changes in the spiritual structure. Islam was able to change the view of life of Malay Archipelago society that was previously artistic and aesthetic into more philosophical based on the harmonization of mind and soul. Syeh Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas said that the process of Islamization in Malay was defined as "the historical and cultural impact of Islam upon the Malay world which revolutionized the Malay vision of reality and existence into distinctly Islamic worldview" (Al-Attas, 1993: 169). We should review the Islamization in the Archipelago as the effective Islamization in carrying modern changes.

Before the arrival of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism had come to Malay Archipelago. However, in the opinion of Al-Attas, Hinduism and Buddhism had mingled with the indigenous religion. Hinduism and Buddhism had no profound effect on Malay Archipelago society because the teachings were modified in

such a way that they did not have profound philosophical purity. The progress of metaphysics of Hinduism and Buddhism cannot be grasped by kings and nobles because they more inclined to the artistic and aesthetic values, such as the story of puppet, the story of *Mahabrata*, and the mythology of Gods. On the other hand, the priests who were expected to be able to summarize and to spread the subtlety of Hinduism and Buddhism philosophical metaphysics were hindered by the kings' authority which only tended to artistic and aesthetic values. Furthermore, Hinduism and Buddhism were not missionary religions so that the religions were not massively spread among societies. Moreover, the Buddhist priests were not natives. They came from South India on a mission to find quiet places for worship, such as in temples that were isolated from society (Al-Attas, 1993: 165). Hinduism and Buddhism were only the religions of personal purification.

For Malay Archipelago people, the philosophy of Hinduism did not have a profound influence on them and could not summarize the subtlety of Hinduism and Buddhism metaphysics. The element of logic and rational thought from the subtlety of metaphysics were not clearly visible. Therefore, they changed the greatness of metaphysics into the art that had no philosophical value. What they received from Hinduism and Buddhism was only limited to things that were in accordance with the original nature of people at that time with an inclination towards art and aesthetics. The kingdom of Sriwijaya in Sumatera in the 5th century of *Hijriah* or 11th *Masehi* was famous as one of the centers of Buddhism, so it was visited by many priests, especially from Tibet, including Atisha who was known as a Tibetan Reformer Priest. Atisha came to Sumatera to study with a teacher, as well as a great Buddhist priest, Dharmakriti (Al-Attas, 1990: 172).

The influence of philosophical Buddhism metaphysics did not embody itself authentically. The philosophy of Buddhism teachings was embodied in art and aesthetics. This could be seen in the splendor of Borobudur temple as an empirical image of the art manifestation in the scope of architecture. Al-Attas stated that Malay Archipelago society was unable to grasp the subtlety of Hindu metaphysics because the society more inclined to be directed at something that was aesthetic instead of philosophical. Because of the fundamental reason, Hinduism did not change the view of Malay Archipelago society who had *Weltanschauung* based on that art.

Al-Attas confirmed in his work 'Islam and Secularism' (Al-Attas, 1993: 172) that "The people of archipelago were more aesthetic than philosophical by nature: they either did not fully grasp the subtleties of Hindu metaphysics or they ignored it in favour of that which was less complicated and more readily acceptable to their own worldview".

The arrival of Islam in Malay Archipelago changed all old understandings into the new ones. Islam was introduced in the society as a rationalistic and intellectual view of life. Islam succeeded in overthrowing various mythologies in the previous belief traditions. Islam was also comprehended rationally and

profoundly in various social strata, both among the kings and the nobles as well as the lower societies.

The concept of God metaphysics that had power to arrange and to develop the universe wisely and creatively was comprehended through deep contemplation of mind. Islam gave the highest appreciation to humans as the most perfect God's creature in regulating the life of nature. The caste system that was supported by the mythology of the previous religions was removed by Islam into a concept of equality at the level of human beings physically. Islam built a spiritual hierarchy on scientific authority and piety.

Islamic treatises in the Archipelago contained *tasawuf* metaphysics which had reached a lofty value in the history of human thought. Islam built intellectual spirit that we cannot compare with the writings of Malay-Javanese literature in Hinduism and Buddhism period that was empty from rationality and intellect (*'aqliyyah*) (Al-Attas, 1990: 37).

The real proof of the culture revolution in Malay Archipelago after the arrival of Islam was that there were many academic works that seriously debated the concept of *wujūd*. The discourse about *wujūd* showed a tense intellectual understanding in the 8th century of *Hijriah* or 15th *Masehi* until the 10th century of *Hijriah* or 17th *Masehi*. This debate was an improvement of the process of Islamization. The process of Islamization carried out the process of clarification, intensification, and standardization of the old traditions that were influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism previously, so that it produced completely different changes in the important elements of the view of life of Malay Archipelago society. Al-Attas said:

“Sufi metaphysics did not come, contrary to what is held even by some Muslim scholar, to harmonize Islam with traditional beliefs grounded in Hindu-Buddhist beliefs and other outochthonous traditions; it come to clarify the difference between Islam and what they had know in the past.” (Al-Attas, 1993: 179).

Islam came to Malay Archipelago actually brought by wandering *Sufi* people based on *tasawuf* metaphysics. The metaphysics contained the concept of *wujūd* with a complete explanation, so that it influenced the soul of Archipelago society. The influence of the *Sufi* metaphysics showed a religious spirit that was so intellectual and rational that it entered the mind of society so that it was easily accepted. *Sufi* metaphysics was manifested in what was called *tasawuf*. *Tasawuf* that discussed about the concept of *wujūd* caused a rational and intellectual awakening that had never happened in the Hinduism and Buddhism period (Al-Attas, 1993: 173). *Sufi* metaphysics that contained the concept of *wujūd* was a new identity that successfully made the Archipelago society know Islam, so that this became the foundation of the Islamization root in Malay Archipelago authentically.

Texts about Islam that came to Malay Archipelago through the influence of *Sufi* wandering leading to the concept of *wujūd* had been widely spread throughout the country. The doctrine of the ontology of *wujūdiyyah* had changed the thought of Archipelago society. It was suitable with the Ibn al-‘Arabī’s concept of *waḥdah al-wujūd* (Al-Fayyadī, 2012: 160-162). In terminology, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s used the word ‘*wujūd*’ to refer to the shape of God. The only *wujūd* was the shape of God. There was no shape except the shape of God. Therefore, it meant that everything except God had no shape. Logically, it could be taken as a hypothesis that the word ‘*wujūd*’ could not be given to anything except God (*mā siwā’llāh*), nature and everything in nature (Nasution, 1993: 94). However, Ibn ‘Arabī used a metaphor in using the word *wujūd* except God’s shape, namely the shape of nature that was essentially a shape that God lent to His creation (Al-Attas, 1990: 33-34).

The influence of the Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of *wujūd* was spread to fill the content of Islam in the Archipelago through the influence of Sufism. It could be seen in Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī’s legacy texts that embedded in the soul of Malay Archipelago society. The Sufism teachings quickly spread because they were pure Islamic teachings. The Ibn ‘Arabī’s influence on *waḥdat al-Wujūd* was embedded in Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī’s soul, so that it was reduced into the understanding of *wujūdiyyah*.

According to Al-Attas, the word ‘*wujūd*’ in Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī’s *wujūdiyyah* terminology was used to describe *wujūd* of Allah SWT that was identical with Allah’s substance, as an essential shape. Everything except Him, such as nature, did not have shape by itself. Nature was a shape of *wahmī* (shadow) as a mirror or an aura of the true *wujūd*. Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī also used the word *wujūd* to show everything except Allah SWT. The using was only in the form of *wahmī*, or *majāz* in the concept of Ibn ‘Arabī. This was done solely to maintain that shape belonged only to Allah SWT, while the shape of nature was essentially the aura of Allah’s shape (Al-Attas, 1970: 241-242).

The influence of Sufism that still could be seen in Malay Archipelago was the existence of closed and open *zikir* assembly. The *zikir* assembly can be found in some places in Indonesia, for example in Aceh. The characteristic of Sufism teachings was then implemented in *Sufi tarekat* that was still growing in the Archipelago. The *tarekat* continued to develop although the influence of globalization continued to develop. The more the *zikir* assembly and Islamic *tarekat* in Archipelago was maintained, the more the doctrines of Sufism would never be broken and would even strengthen the true spirit of Islam in the Archipelago.

Islam had gradually come to the Malay Archipelago since the first century of Hijrah or in 7th and 8th *Masehi* directly from Arabia. It was a criticism of the analysis of western and Dutch scholars who said that the arrival of Islam in Archipelago around the 13th century of *Masehi* through Persia and India. It must be admitted that among the first period Islamic scholars, there were people

from Malabar, Gujarat, and Persia. However, it was a natural thing. Although they were from Gujarat, Malabar, Persia, etc, they were Arabs.

The arrival of Islam was not by violence or by war, but by peace and gentle method (Hasymy, 1993: 38). In 10th century, Islam had controlled trade in the world. In the next century (11th century), the Islamic merchants had controlled the west coast of India (R. Roolvink, 1957: 15). According to Van Leur, Islam spread through the merchants along the trade routes of Southeast Asia (Apipudin, 2010: 108).

The arrival of Islam in Archipelago, both from South India, one of the Indian subcontinents, Coromandel, Malabar, Gujarat, and directly from Arabia, cannot be separated from who the carrier was and where it came from. The missionaries who brought it were of course Arabs. Therefore, Islam came directly from Arab although the people who spread Islam were the merchants by trading. Al-Attas was one of the world Muslim scholars of Malay Archipelago who defended his argumentation that Islam came to Malay Archipelago directly from Arab.

Al-Attas admitted that it was true that those who spread Islam in Malay Archipelago came from India. However, they dominantly came directly from Arab through Persia, China, Maghrib, and Turkey. According to Al-Attas, the most important thing was that the content of religious understanding that was brought was Middle Eastern not India. The content and the method of faith description from various schools of *tasawuf* science in the form of *Jawi* writing and the pattern of some letters, the names of the days of a week, the way in reciting Al-Qur'an, and several other important matters, firmly stated the Arabic characteristic, not India, as the original carrier and spreader of Islam in Archipelago (Al-Attas, 2011: 135-137).

The analysis of Al-Attas provided a much different understanding because from a Muslim point of view, what nation brought Islam might not be so important as long as it was Islam. The fact is that nowadays, Islam is the largest religion adopted by the Malay Archipelago society. The Islamic hegemony in Malay Archipelago had succeeded in overthrowing the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism that had earlier come to the Archipelago.

2. The Influence of Sufism on the Process of Islamization

Islamization is a doctrine that inserts Islamic values into mind, heart, and soul of the Malay Archipelago society that contains faith, worship and human values. The doctrinal process takes place not all at once but over a long period. The *Sufi* as Muslim missionaries performed several processes of introducing Islam and processes of strengthening Islamic law and faith. Some periods succeeded in changing the Malay Archipelago society who was originally animistic and impressed with the sacred arts of the previous knowledge. They were replaced with Islamic metaphysical knowledge under the guidance and the

teaching of the *Sufi*. The doctrine succeeded in changing aesthetic metaphysics into rational metaphysics in the soul of Malay Archipelago society.

a. First Period, Introduction to Faith and Islamic Law (578-805 H/1200-1400 M)

According to Al-Attas, in the first period, the teaching that played a very important role in the process of Islamization towards the style of Islamic Archipelago was the teaching of faith and *fiqh*. This process was a contribution in understanding Islamic law (*syariah*) in attracting people of Malay Archipelago to Islam. Anyone who embraced Islam at this period was only taught faith. It did not have to be followed by an understanding of the rational and intellectual implications brought by the religious conversion. In this first period, the Islamic concepts which were very fundamental about the oneness of God (*tauhid*) were still vague in the mind of the repentant people. The old concepts before embracing Islam overlapped and gave obscurity and were confusing in accepting new concepts (Al-Attas, 1993: 248).

The arrival of Islam in Malay Archipelago, according to Al-Attas, should be judged as a new world construction, a new hope, a new goal, a new culture, and a new civilization. Islam provided more advanced teachings, especially in the field of monotheism theology that released people's view from the chain of superstition and idolatry. In this first period, the Malay Archipelago society was introduced to basic concepts of one God. The religious leaders gave a basic understanding about monotheism theology perfectly and about the relation of human life behavior with God. Islam formed the concept about the relation with each other and the relation with material nature. The rules in worship and *syariat* were essentially inseparable from others. The rules started to be introduced in every activity of society's life (Abdulgani, 1983: 22).

Islam organized the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with other humans. The presence of Islam which was spread on a large scale by the *Sufi* gave a new spirit, so that it caused an awareness of Islamic life, namely a society's life based on spiritual logic that led to the points of individual, social, and divine relationship. Islam gave a freedom to every individual and replaced the caste system with the concept of equality. Islam provided a balanced doctrine between material and non-material, that is, it did not dissociate the reality of existence that could be felt, and non-material which was abstract as a substance that had existence in the realm of existence. Sufism provided an understanding based on the spiritual experience. Besides, because of various influences such as the values of culture and local belief, the purity of teaching referred to the spirit of Al-Qur'an and *hadits*. The influence provided a different horizon in the mind and the imagination of Malay Archipelago society (A. Salam, 2004: 25).

The description of human as a creation whose soul substance came from the substance of God, the substance of the human soul was non-material, and human body was material, provided a different understanding in their souls. The

unification was a process of *sunnatullah*. Islam recommended to study from revelation and *sunnatullah*. According to Al-Attas, the Sufi tried to embed the concept of belief in one God into the soul of Malay Archipelago society. The view of the oneness of God, from a philosophical point of view through *kalam* and *tasawuf* science, proposed a separate ontology, cosmology, and psychology in a grand concept that commonly referred to the oneness of *wujūd* or *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. This concept stood on the basis of Al-Qur'an which could not be equated with Hinduism philosophy which followed the view of *Vedanta*. This concept was what we want to introduce in this whole first period. The soul of Malay Archipelago society still overlapped with its old beliefs so that we could say that the whole first period in jurisprudence and the law as a stage in physical repentance (Al-Attas, 1990: 48).

b. Second Period, Continuation of First Period, the Teaching of Syari'at Continuing to Sufi Metaphysics (Tasawuf) (803-1112 H/1400-1700 M)

This period was a continuation from the introduction of *syari'at* that had been described in the first period above. This period was still related to the first period. This teaching period continued to the teaching of religion in the realm of philosophical mysticism (*tasawuf*). Besides, the other rational and intellectual elements, such as rational theology or *Kalam* science gave contribution as a foundation in this period. During this period, the Sufi and their works played an important role, and also the writings of *Kalam* experts played a dominant role, so that this period was focused on a more advanced period, namely spiritual repentance. The Islamic fundamental concepts introduced an Islamic world view that was comprehensive and appropriate with what was understood at that time. The people of Archipelago were still influenced by the old world view although it had begun to erode, but it was continuously explained so that it could be understood clearly (Al-Attas, 1993: 249).

The influence of Hinduism and Buddhism was very strong in the aspect of arts, fairy tales, stories, and mystical beliefs. The metaphysics of Hinduism and Buddhism was changed into hymns of praise and art songs that did not show the subtlety of the metaphysics. For example, in the Book of *Veda Parikrama* translated by G. Pudja, it was written that:

“Tuhan dipuja dengan nyanyian-nyanyian, nada-nada, dan alat-alat musik dan memakai mantra-mantra dalam tiruan bunyi suara-suara yang dimunculkan bunyi-bunyi itu. Tiruan-tiruan itu berupa bunyi baka-baka, paca-paca, nati-nati, baja-baja, nide-nide, dan cini-cini. Keseluruhannya diiringi oleh alat musik kesenian untuk memuji-muji Tuhan Atman. Pujian-pujiannya juga berupa lagu-lagu erotik yang membawa hanyut perasaan hingga mencapai puncaknya yaitu tingkat trans” (G. Pudja, 1971: 319-320).

God is worshipped by songs, notes, and musical instruments and by using spells in the form of sounds imitation that was emerged by the sounds. The imitation is the sound of *baka-baka*, *paca-paca*, *nati-nati*, *baja-baja*, *nide-nide*, and *cini-cini*. All are accompanied by artistic musical instruments to praise God Atman. The praises are also in the form of erotic songs that carry feelings until they reach the peak, namely the level of trance (G. Pudja, 1971: 319-320).

Al-Attas argued that the mysticism of Hinduism and Buddhism had been changed by kings and dignitaries according to their wishes. The subtlety of the metaphysics was not clearly visible in the delivery to the public so that it did not imprint on the people's soul of Archipelago. The dominant aspects of art created vagueness in themselves, so that the teachings were not clearly visible. Islam put forward metaphysics, ontology, psychology, the concept of *wujūd* and the influence provided its own understanding to the people's soul of Archipelago. The Islamic concepts overthrew the superstition, mysticism, mythology, and they were replaced to philosophical Islamic concepts (P. Riddell, 2001: 105-114).

Through the comparison, it could be said that *Sufi* metaphysics was very superior to the process of Islamization of Archipelago people at least until the end of the 17th century. *Sufi* metaphysics with all its mystical understandings and interpretations towards Islam, in certain aspects, was very appropriate with the background of the Archipelago people who were influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism asceticism and the syncretism of the beliefs of indigenous people.

Islam came to Archipelago in a Sufism version based on *tasawuf* philosophical. Islam provided a religious spirit that was so intellectual and rational that it easily entered the mind and soul of Archipelago people. The *Sufi* metaphysics formed a new revolution and caused the rise of rationalism and intellectualism in society that did not exist in the pre-Islamic period. The *Sufi* provided a profound understanding about the truth of God as the true reality from *wujūd* in a metaphysics context and referred to an absolute substance that manifested Him in all levels of existence. God was a basic of all creation and was the highest and the most powerful (Al-Attas, 1966: 50). God realized His wish through creation, destruction, and recreation continuously without limitation on Him. The knowledge of *Sufi* had a great influence on Archipelago society because it was not only based on reason, but rather on a higher form than that, namely spiritual experience that had reached a certain stage of reality (Wan Daud, 1998: 87-92).

The spirit of Islamic religiosity that was essential was embodied in a monotheistic concept that was formed in the shape of incomparable concept. The concept of the unity of *wujūd* (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*), cosmology, and psychology was formulated logically so that it imprinted on the soul of Archipelago people. The ontology, cosmology, and psychology could not be equated solely with the concept of Hinduism and Buddhism because they had a foundation of Al-Qur'an as an incomparable holy book of Muslims so that it imprinted on every aspect of society at that time (Al-Attas, 1993: 255).

The influence of Al-Qur'an in the Archipelago along with the arrival of Islam made the religious leaders, especially *Sufi* who spread Islam, use Al-Qur'an as a main guidance in the mission of Islamization. Al-Qur'an contains the elements of ontology, *wujūd*, faith (*tauhid*), cosmology, and the state of Creator. Al-Qur'an gives a profound impression on the aspect of faith in every aspect of human's life. In contrast to the concept of Hinduism and Buddhism ontology which views human as having caste or degree in life, the concept of Al-Qur'an provides equality in life; there is no caste or strata in human.

Sufism was one of the most valuable contributions from Islamic thinkers towards humanism. Sufism developed as a reaction and a rebellion against corrupt formalism in Islamic world, whose power was held by the tyranny of the rulers. Sufism was an antithesis of the spirit of arrogance, the spirit of intolerance, the spirit of hypocrisy, and the spirit of corruption that existed in every period. The doctrine of Sufism emphasized on human to keep away from pleasures, to live a simple life, to keep away from wealth and prosperity that was desired by many people (A. Hasymy, 1976: 5). Islamic teachings brought by *Sufi* accommodated a monotheistic view that was more advanced and more attractive than the existing view because it was a spiritual liberating force against various kinds and forms of unclear mythology (A. Hasymy, 1993, 114-116).

According to the theory of some experts, another factor that made Islam become dominant was the similarity between the form of Islam that first came to the Archipelago and the mystical and syncretic nature of local ancestral beliefs. In this theory, Islam in a version of *Sufi* metaphysics could be accepted purely by many people. To certain limitations, especially in the first period of the spreading of Islam, this theory might be accepted. The similarity facilitated the conversion of religion into Islam on a large scale. When the intensification process of Islamic teachings was increasing, the process of similarity disappeared, with the various conflicts that followed it.

c. Third Period, the Perpetuation of the First and Second Period in the Midst of Western Cultural Influence (1112 H/1700 M)

This period was a determinant of the extent to which the first and second periods were influential in Malay Archipelago society. The continuation of the first period and the improvement of the second period could be said to be successful. The third period was a period of perpetuation of the spirit of rationality, individuality, and intentionality that philosophical foundations have been laid by Islam previously.

This period was marked by the arrival of foreign colonization in Malay Archipelago. The colonization was in the form of physical belief, religion, and psychology of the indigenous people. Foreign expansion had made the nation destroy. The values of national integrity for indigenous people disappeared. The influence caused by the colonialists became an obstacle to the process of Islamization that conducted by people who had converted their beliefs from a

vague mysticism into a rational mysticism based on Al-Qur'an and prophet's *hadits*.

In this third period, the West began to play its role in blocking the process of Islamization. The cultural influences that began to expand along with the arrival of western civilization continued to permeate the society at that time. In this period, westernization emerged. Westernization was an attempt to westernize the Malay Archipelago society. The decline in the role of Islam was also very visible in the influence of the VOC hegemony which colonized the Malay Archipelago nation (Azra, 1996: 220). However, the Archipelago people were well-established in understanding the philosophical bases of Islam which had been indoctrinated in advance by Islam before the West was influential. The arrival of imperialism and western culture from the 16th and 17th century had delayed the process of Islamization. The arrival of western imperialism and its cultural influence clearly created a major challenge for the process of Islamization in the Archipelago. Therefore, it faded the intensification process of Islam.

Before this period occurred, there were other forces operating in the Islamic world, such as the internal political conflicts and the decline of political and economic power. Furthermore, the advance in the field of science and technology in Europe, together with the rise of Western intellectual, reduced the role of Islam. Another thing that caused the process of Islamization to fade in the Archipelago was the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism remnants which was still maintained by a small part of indigenous people. The religion remnants were still mingled with the basic teachings and beliefs of Islam, so that it resulted in the decline in intensification of Islam in the Archipelago. The colonial government controlled the religion matters and chose the religion leaders according to their envoy. The religion envoy had a full control from the colonialists, so that any decision should be based on colonial rules. Finally, the religious affairs should be separated from state affairs (A. Steenbrink, 1984: 5). The western and colonial influences created a chaotic condition in all levels of society. This influence made the balance of the Islamic process disturbed by the western expansion (Reid, 2011: 225).

So far, it should be no profound concern on the soul of Archipelago people because the Sufism influence would still continue. Islam had prepared the Archipelago people for the future modern world. It should be noted that Islam did not prepare it to designate a secularized world, but to designate an Islamic world. A real Islamic world is a world that is free from magical, mythological, animistic tradition, free from a world of vague culture, free from secularism. The Islamic world is a world based on *syariat*, where the rule and the authority are in God; a world that follows the prophets; a world that is free from malice and arrogance; a world that has been seen, known, experienced, organized, realized by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Al-Attas, 1993: 265).

CONCLUSION

Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas stated that it was Islam that had changed the structure of Malay society which was originally aesthetic into scientific and rational society. Al-Attas said that Islam came to the Archipelago in the metaphysical version of Sufi which was the true Islamic philosophy. This showed a difference with the views of some orientalist who assumed that the arrival of Islam into the Archipelago only affected to a flimsy lining above the existing structure of society. Islam did not only change the view of Malay Archipelago society in the aesthetic dimension, but Islam also changed the spiritual structure, mindset and soul. Malay Archipelago civilization, which was originally close with the elements of art that were mingled with many superstitions, had experienced a revolution towards a more scientific and rational view of life. The arrival of Islam laid a foundation for a new view of life that was more advanced than the previous understanding. The arrival of Islam overthrew the caste system that had been established by Hinduism and Buddhism. The caste system changed into an equality system in physical level. Islam built an equality system for all mankind. What distinguishes the degree of a human from another is the degree of faith and piety at the spiritual level in dealing with God.

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