

Feelings

It is impossible to write the history of Islam without referencing how the faith appealed to the feelings of those it touched. The Qur'an's rhythmic prose enchanted the Arabs. The enigmatic arrangement and tempo of its verses melted the hearts of the staunchest enemies of Islam. Although the Makkans loathed Muhammad's message of unity, egalitarianism, and humanism, they were entranced by the beauty and simplicity of the revelations sent through him. The aesthetics of the Qur'an facilitated the rapid growth of Islam. Artistic and literary works produced centuries after Muhammad's demise communicated the Qur'an's exquisiteness, winning converts from all walks of life within the expanding Muslim civilization. Sufis were perhaps the most passionate recipients of the divine word. They wept at the recitals of the Qur'an. Some suffered from fits, and others died in states of extreme emotion.¹

In Southeast Asia, Sufis used the term *rasa* to express their internalizations of Islam's sacred sources. *Rasa*, a Sanskrit term denoting taste or flavour, is an emotive and affective concept widely used by poets and mystics in India. The term permeated everyday conversations of societies within the Sanskrit cosmopolis, which spanned the waterways and land routes linking South Asia and Southeast Asia.² In Java, local mystics used *rasa* to describe earnest internalizations of divine revelations, pointing to a profound recognition of the inner

¹ Navid Kermani, *God Is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran* (trans. Tony Crawford) (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 293–345.

² Ricci Ronnit, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 83–95.

powers of charismatic persons and unravelling the “intuitive aspects of reality.”³ Sufis in other parts of Southeast Asia used *rasa* similar to the Arabic term *dhawq*, which literally means tasting. In Sufi cosmology, it refers to experiencing the divine fully via the senses, sensibilities, and the soul. *Dhawq* connotes an ardent awareness of all things transcendent and unseen.

Sufis in Southeast Asia stressed *merasakan* (to feel) divine presence in their writings. Such feelings were intended to go beyond the personal to the social, beyond the inner conscience to touching other hearts. Using *rasa* as their missionizing tool, Sufis in Southeast Asia generated a whole array of textual, visual, auditory, and performative arts. As Annemarie Schimmel observes: “Thanks to their experiences, new nuances of ‘the language of love’ developed in Arabic. Persian is unthinkable without the Sufi flavor, even in very worldly parts of its literature; Turkish, Urdu, Sindhi, Panjabi and Pashto were all used as literary media first by the Sufis in order to preach to the people in an idiom which they could easily understand.”⁴

The same could be said about Malay-Indonesian, the languages of Southeast Asia, which are widely spiced with Sufi inflections. Southeast Asian Sufis were innovators and inventors of poetical works. Adept with Hindu-Buddhist metaphysics, acquainted with Indic epics, and skilled at appropriating Arab-Persian mystical prose, they introduced a new genre of poetics that was at once Islamic and yet indigenous in character and concerns. By introducing new vocabularies and reinterpreting existing ones into Malay-Indonesian poetical writings, Sufis ushered two major transformations.

First, they altered local concepts and made these concepts congruent with the spirit of Islam. Ancient and Hindu-Buddhist keywords were reinterpreted to reflect the Islamic *tasawwur* (worldview). Hence, *sembahyang* which literally means “to pray to the divine” was retained because it has the same connotation as *solat* in Arabic. Sufis, however, changed the interpretation of *sembahyang* from entreating many deities to praying to the One True God, Allah. *Dosa*, a Sanskrit word that could be translated as “something which causes harm,” was reinterpreted to mean sins. As they did in South Asia, the Sufis in Southeast Asia

³Paul Stange, “The Logic of *Rasa* in Java,” *Indonesia* 38 (1984): 4.

⁴Annemarie Schimmel, “Aspects of Mystical Thought in Islam,” in *The Islamic Impact*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad, Byron Haines, and Ellison Findly (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 113–136.

vernacularized Islam to fit local needs, embedding primordial beliefs within the faith's universal message.⁵

Second, due to the imaginative stimulus afforded by the Sufis, Southeast Asian literary works once penned in Kawi, Sasak, Pallava, and Nagari scripts gradually transitioned to Jawi, a writing system based on Arabic script. A "Jawi ecumene" encompassing most of island Southeast Asia, and stretching north into Thailand and Cambodia, became dominant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the kingdoms of Malacca, Aceh, and Patani morphed into intellectual and literary powerhouses.⁶ Sufism did not completely undo the creative legacies of non-Muslims in Southeast Asia. Rather, they made these artistic vestiges "deeper, more complex, and utterly fascinating."⁷

This chapter examines how Sufis utilized and fashioned emotions through oral, artistic, and literary works filled with significant meanings. Products of *perasaan* (feelings), these works shaped the feelings of the people as well. I call them "aesthetical mediums" inspired by Islam's sacred sources, with the Qur'an being the most dominant. Sufi dialogical tradition in Southeast Asia was reproduced by aesthetical mediums, used to engage with the masses and bring about a new brand of religious universalism. For clarity, I have divided the mediums into supplicative and figurative forms.

SUPPLICATIVE MEDIUMS

Sufis produced and used supplicative mediums to direct the masses' feelings towards divine grace and to epitomize the magnificent qualities of His Messenger, the Prophet Muhammad. I use the word "supplicative" because these mediums were not for vain entertainment but for generating the remembrance of all things sacred. Supplicative mediums were transcendental in character, linking human beings to God through pleasurable and memorable words, acts, and sounds. The most influential

⁵Tanvir Anjum, "Vernacularization of Islam and Sufism in South Asia: A Study of the Production of Sufi Literature in Local Languages," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 54, no. 1 (2017): 190–207.

⁶Michael Francis Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma Below the Winds* (Routledge, 2003), 11–36; Leonard Y. Andaya, *Leaves of the Same Tree: Trade and Ethnicity in the Straits of Melaka* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 125; Philipp Bruckmayr, *Cambodia's Muslims and the Malay World : Malay Language, Jawi Script, and Islamic Factionalism from the 19th Century to the Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 21.

⁷David D. Harnish and Anne K. Rasmussen, "Introduction," in *Divine Inspirations: Music and Islam in Indonesia*, eds. David D. Harnish and Anne K. Rasmussen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18.

supplicative mediums popularized by the Sufis in Southeast Asia are called *burdah*, *mawlid*, and *ratib*, all originating from the Arab-Persian worlds and have been translated in many parts of Asia for centuries. These mediums included dhikr, *du'a* (invocations), and Prophetic panegyrics.

The importance of dhikr and *du'a* in Sufi praxis is well-documented. Numerous books and treatises discussing the types of dhikrs and *du'a* to be read by any aspiring Muslim have been published across South-east Asia, some claiming to provide cures for a host of illnesses such as cancers.⁸ Both dhikr and *du'a* were read in tandem either individually or in gatherings, with the use of different instruments performed in either monophonic or polyphonic rhythms.⁹ Dhikr and *du'a* were also part of a long assemblage of *wirid* (litanies) put together to beseech God's succour, praising the Prophet, his family, and companions, and petitioning for the well-being of oneself and the community of believers. For the Sufis, dhikr and *du'a* are inseparable as means to attain the highest forms of love and to enter into the abode of serenity.¹⁰

As a child, I used to attend congregations to read these texts, eagerly anticipating the feasts that followed these highly emotive sessions. Such gatherings served many purposes. They were occasions of blessed remembrance, communal solidarity, and generous hospitality as kindreds and the needy converge to enjoy sumptuous meals. The texts read by the congregants were arranged and read in ways to ease memorization. Kenneth Honerkamp captures the functions of these supplicative mediums well:

Through these litanies and invocations, which were recited and memorized from childhood, even those who had neither the time nor the means to pursue a mystical path had the opportunity to reflect upon the essential teachings of Islam as they were filtered through the litanies, invocations, and devotional texts of the faith, and through the inherited wisdom and shared understanding of the community as a whole.¹¹

Burdah, *mawlid*, and *ratib* have been read in one sitting and interlaced with three other supplicative mediums: *zikr zamman* (remembrance of

⁸ H.M. Amin Syukur, *Zikir Menyembuhkan Kanker* (Jakarta: Emir, 2016).

⁹ Patricia Matusky and Tan Sooi Beng, *The Music of Malaysia: The Classical, Folk and Syncretic Traditions* (London: Routledge, 2017), 237–250.

¹⁰ Sri Mulyati, *Tasawuf Nusantara: Rangkaian Mutiara Sufi Terkemuka* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2017), 144–145.

¹¹ Kenneth Lee Honerkamp, "The Spirituality of Invocations and Litanies in Islam," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Islamic Spirituality*, eds. Vincent J. Cornell and Bruce B. Lawrence (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2023), 71.

the time), *hadrah* (presence), and *qasidah rebana* (poetic tambourine songs).¹² In Kerala, South India, where many Muslim missionaries in Southeast Asia hailed from, *burdah*, *mawlid*, and *ratib* were recited to guard against and relieve oneself from evils and ailments caused by evil spirits, snake bites, and burns.¹³ Similarly, Sufis in Southeast Asia incorporated beautiful sounds and rhythms appealing to local ears as they read these mediums. They termed it as *sama'* (listening), where music, chanting, singing, and melodious recitations were used to achieve spiritual states and devotional experiences.¹⁴ *Burdah*, *mawlid*, and *ratib* filled the transcendental thirst of the Sufis and those who promoted and participated in the remembrance of God and his Prophet. These supplicative mediums cemented communitarianism among Southeast Asians while heightening feelings about Islam and revered Muslim figures.

The *Qasidah al-Burdah* (Poem of the Cloak) was one of the earliest supplicative mediums that captivated the *rasa* of Southeast Asians.¹⁵ Written by Sharaf al-din al-Busiri (1211–1294), an adherent of the Shadhiliyyah Sufi order, it is part of longer poem entitled *Al-Kawakib al-Durriyya fi Madh Khair al-Bariyya* (The Shining Stars in Praise of the Best of Creation), consists of ten parts and over 160 lines. Al-Busiri enjoins his audience to suppress their egos and lusts in order to fully discern and internalize the merits, message, and mission of Prophet Muhammad. Known to Southeast Asians as *kasidah burdah*, this supplicative medium was possibly introduced by Sufis from Makkah, Egypt, and India who travelled into the region. Well into the nineteenth century, the *burdah* was recited during festive gatherings or during the pinnacle of every *majlis ta'lim* (or *majelis taklim*, Islamic forum). The Dutch orientalist, Snouck Hurgronje recorded the recital of the *burdah* in nineteenth-century Makkah in a congregation led by a famous Southeast Asian Sufi shaykh, Ahmad Khatib Sambas (1803–1875). An émigré to the holy land, Ahmad Khatib Sambas' followers comprised students and pilgrims from many parts of Southeast Asia who disseminated his teachings and institutionalized *burdah* recitals in their hometowns.¹⁶

¹² David D. Harnish, "Tensions between Adat (Custom) and Agama (Religion) in the Music of Lombok," in *Divine Inspirations: Music and Islam in Indonesia*, eds. David D. Harnish and Anne K. Rasmussen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93–96.

¹³ V. Kunhali, *Sufism in Kerala* (Calicut: University of Calicut, 2004), 75.

¹⁴ Kenneth S. Avery, *A Psychology of Early Sufi Sama: Listening and Altered States* (Abingdon: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

¹⁵ Ph. S. van Ronkel, "Account of the Six Malay Manuscripts of the Cambridge University Library," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 46, no. 1 (1996): 49–50.

¹⁶ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century: Daily Life, Customs and Learning. The Moslims of the East-Indian Archipelago*, (trans. J. H. Monahan) (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 300.

The poem's allure and power lie in its autobiographical confessions, its clever play of words, and the cadence of its rhyming couplets. Read in Arabic and vernacular languages at mosques and homes, the *burdah* oscillates between the personal and the prophetic. The poet expresses his innermost weaknesses, portraying himself as a wretched and insignificant soul when compared with the impeccable figure of Muhammad. The contrast drawn between the lowly self and the notable ideal, between self-effacement and eulogizing a perfect figure, between regretting one's heedlessness and beseeching divine guidance, struck a high chord among Southeast Asians who had for centuries been attuned to poetic religious literature. The *burdah* echoed aspects of Southeast Asian Hindu-Buddhist inclinations towards humility and fine manners and their constant admiration of saintly and deity-like figures.¹⁷ The *burdah*'s emphasis on love and the beloved, lynchpins of *rasa*, made the poem even more mesmerizing for its listeners.¹⁸ A close reading of *burdah* underlines this point:

A token of love in hope of getting a glimpse of you,
Then spending my days and nights with you for eternity;
A word of praise for the Praised, O you,
the Praiseworthy One,

...

Yes, sights of my love have come at night and kept me awake;
How love repels all delights and comforts with agony!

...

He is the loved one whose intercession we're hopeful of,
At every horror to hit—yes, every calamity.

...

He is the one with perfected essence and outward form
Picked as the love of the Maker of all humanity.

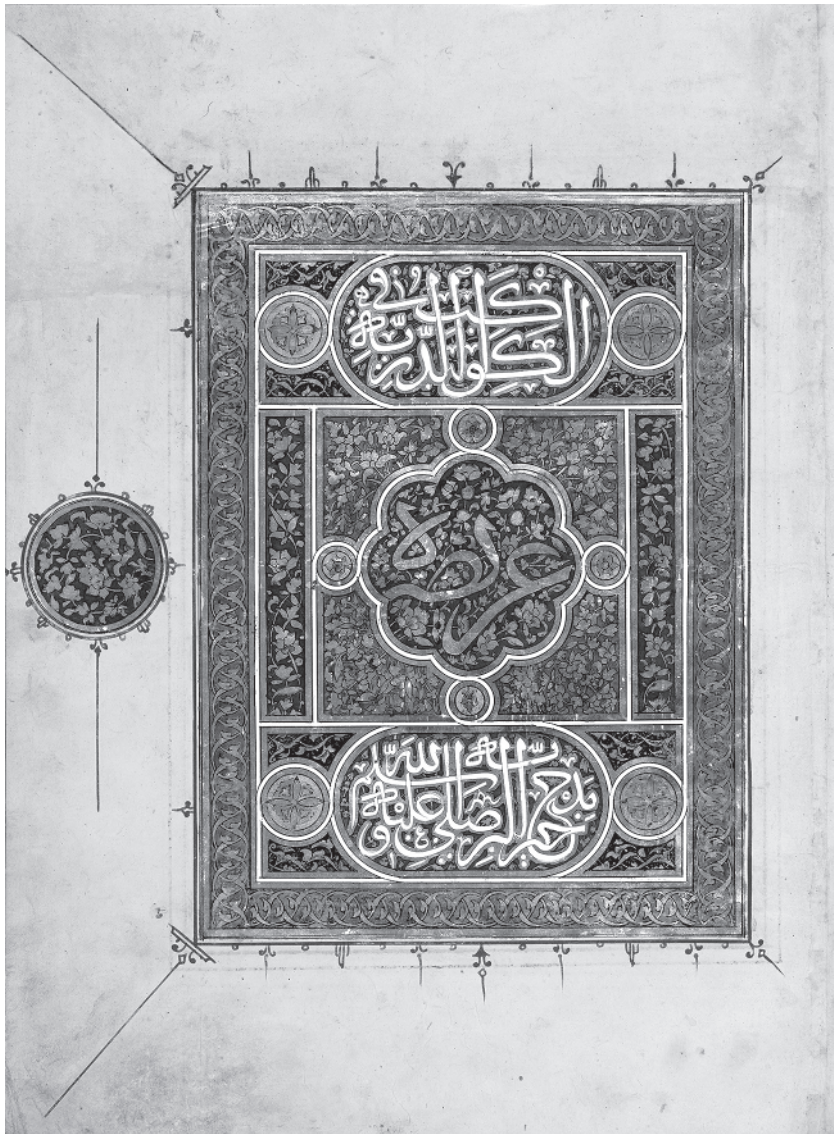
...

O my beloved, I beg of you in life and in death,
To wrap your *Burdah* of special care and love over me.¹⁹

¹⁷ G. W. J. Drewes, *Een 16de Eeuwse Maleise Vertaling van de Burda van Al-Būsiri: Arabisch Lofdi-
cht Op Mohammad* (Nijhoff's-Gravenhage, 1955), 27–30.

¹⁸ Wazir Jahan Karim, "Prelude to Madness: The Language of Emotion in Courtship and Early Marriage," in *Emotions of Culture: A Malay Perspective*, ed. Wazir Jahan Karim (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), 21–63.

¹⁹ Sharaf al-din al-Busiri, *The Burdah: The Singable Translation of Busiri's Classic Poem in Praise of the Prophet* (trans. Mostafa Azzam) (Atlanta: Al-Madina Institute, 2016), 1, 4, 9, and 30.



Illuminated frontispiece of the manuscript of *Al-Kawakib al-durriyya* by Al-Busiri made for the Sultan Qayt Bay: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Burda#/media/File:Frontispiece_of_%22Al-Kawakib_al-duriyya%22_by_Al-Busiri_\(CBL_Ar_4168,_f.2a\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Burda#/media/File:Frontispiece_of_%22Al-Kawakib_al-duriyya%22_by_Al-Busiri_(CBL_Ar_4168,_f.2a).jpg)

These emotive lines were amplified by music instruments. In West Kalimantan, for example, the burdah has been read in various local dialects and tunes to mark different occasions, accompanied by drums and tambourines. In recent times, electric guitars and other

modern musical instruments have replaced percussions. The *burdah* took centerstage during weddings and childbirth. It has been read as a fulfilment of one's vow. For the Malays in West Kalimantan, *burdah* retains its place as a marker of their identity, memorized by young and old. Parents send their children to study with religious teachers to perfect their reading of the text while learning the rules of the Qur'an.²⁰ In Bali and the Celebes islands, the *burdah* has been sung with the use of *rebana* (frame drums). The Bugis community claimed to be the first to popularize the *burdah* in Southeast Asia, although such claims cannot be verified with written sources. Oral histories paint the *burdah* in glowing terms as one of the efficacious mediums used by Sufi saints to convert the Hindu-Buddhists to Islam. *Burdah* is an established and venerable tradition handed down *turun-temurun* (from one generation to another).²¹

The *burdah* has also been recited during Mawlidur Rasul (or simply *mawlid*), a day of observance for the birth of Prophet Muhammad on the twelfth of Rabiulawal in the Muslim calendar. The *mawlid*'s origins could be traced to the Imami Shi'ite tradition and made a state-sponsored event by the Fatimid dynasty that ruled Egypt from 969 till 1171. *Mawlid*s were celebrated annually with lavish ceremonies, public feasting, and recitals of the hagiographies of the prophet and Shi'ite imams. The Fatimids used these celebrations to underscore their hereditary status, linking back to the Prophet Muhammad. The institutionalization of the *mawlid* served a dual purpose: preserving the memories of the prophet and his progeny and legitimizing Shi'ite rule over the majority Sunni population.²² *Mawlid*s survived the restoration of Sunnism in Egypt. With support from succeeding caliphates and kingdoms, Sunni Sufi scholars removed Shi'ite elements in *mawlid*s and disseminated the practice in other parts of the Muslim world. Numerous texts extolling the virtues of Prophet Muhammad were read during the *mawlid*s in Southeast Asia. Among them, the ones composed by 'Abdurrahman ibn Ali Al-Dayba (1461–1537), the *Mawlid ad-Dayba'i*, and Ja'far bin Hassan al-Barzanji (1690–1766), *Iqd al-Jawhar fi Mawlid al-Nabiyyil-Azhar* (The Jewelled Necklace of the Resplendent Prophet's Birth), were most popular.

²⁰ Yusriadi, *Identitas Orang Melayu Di Hulu Sungai Sambas* (Pontianak: IAIN Pontianak Press, 2019), 55–59.

²¹ Mashino Ako, "Frame Drum Ensemble in Muslim Balinese Culture," in *Drums and Drum Ensembles Along the Great Silk Road*, eds. Xiao Mei and Gisa Jahnichen (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2019), 119.

²² Nico N. J. Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday Festival* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

These mawlid texts have also been referred to as “Maulud Ad-Diba’i” or “Maulud Barzanji.” In different places in Southeast Asia, mawlid was known as “Molud,” “Mo’lot,” “Perjanjen,” “Berjanjen,” “Berzanjen,” “Marhabanan,” or “Marhaban.” In the Malay peninsula, where the supplicative medium remained iconic, we encounter terms such as “Sulong Maulud,” “Padua (or Sengah) *Maulud*,” “Peruga (or Alany) *Maulud*,” and “Bongsu *Maulud*,” each describing the times of the day when these mawlids were organized.²³

Sufis in Southeast Asia also used the mawlid text written by the Andalusian scholar, Syihab al-Din Ahmad bin Ali al-Bukhari. Entitled *Syaraf al-Anam* (The Glory of Humanity), it was the first Islamic book to be printed on lithographed paper at Surabaya in 1853. In Javanese dialect, it was called *Sarapulanam*, while in Acehnese, *Carapha anam*.²⁴ Southeast Asian Sufi masters in Makkah wrote commentaries on these texts to explain their inner meanings and maintain the authoritative-ness of the mawlid and burdah in the hearts and minds of Muslims back home. They organized mass recitals in the houses of their closest murids, who would then bring back the same practices in their homelands. The mawlids and burdah travelled along the capillaries of Sufi diasporic and trade networks.²⁵ Texts and their recitals moved along with communities and commodities in the heart of Southeast Asia, aiding in the spread of *rasa* coloured by Islamic nuances.

The origins of mawlids in Southeast Asia are difficult to trace. The earliest recorded mention of this supplicative medium was in the early seventeenth century in Makassar, South Sulawesi, where the mawlid barzanji was referred to as “Barasanji” or “Maudu’.”²⁶ In many Makassarese villages, Sufis from the Sammaniyyah, Naqshbandiyyah-Khalwatiyyah, and Bahr ul-Nur tariqahs, led by a Hadrami-Arab Sayyid Jalaluddin al-’Aidid and his descendants, led the recitation of mawlid texts. They popularized the mawlid barzanji through networks of students and families that grew slowly into remote villages in South Sulawesi.²⁷ These networks were not only communities of meaning that derived inspiration from the life stories of Muhammad but also formed and fortified local

²³ Abdul Samad Ahmad, *Kesenian Adat, Kepercayaan Dan Petua* (Melaka: Associated Educational Distributors, 1990), 58.

²⁴ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese Vols. I* (trans. A.W.S. O’Sullivan). (Leiden: Brill, 1906), 18–20.

²⁵ Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century*, 291–295.

²⁶ Muhammad Adlin Sila, *Maudu’: A Way of Union with God* (Acton: ANU Press, 2015).

²⁷ Thomas Gibson, *Islamic Narrative and Authority in Southeast Asia: From the 16th to the 21st Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 120–122, 151–152.

Muslim identities. As villages congregated regularly to show their love for the Prophet, they affirm their faithfulness to his teachings. Such networks also led to the construction of authoritative practices, influencing policies relating to everyday lives of societies. Miriam Cooke and Bruce Lawrence theorize such networks as having the potential of reinforcing “norms and orthodoxies even as they submit them to constant scrutiny and challenge... They both sustain and contest the systems of which they are a part.”²⁸

From the nineteenth century onwards, mawlid were institutionalized and normalized. The Acehnese declared it obligatory for all Muslims to celebrate mawlid on the month of Rabiulawal and the two months that followed. In the Philippines, on 14 February 1977, Article 169 of the “Code of Muslim Personal Laws of the Philippines” was passed to recognize Prophet Muhammad’s birthday as one of the official holidays.²⁹ Outside these specific months, the mawlid was read on occasions of a child’s birth, circumcision, or during weddings.³⁰

Local animistic rituals and Hindu-Buddhist beliefs and practices were sometimes blended in mawlid recitals, making these texts creolized sup-plicative mediums readily accepted by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. At the same time, such melding of influences have been denounced by the ulama. In many parts of Indonesia, for example, the mawlid was recited at the tombs of Sufi saints, with men and women dancing to the beats of loud music and animal sacrifices made during these events.³¹ In South Philippines, the Tausugs have an established tradition of arranging palm leaves on banana stalk pillars and placing these artistic objects around mosques to symbolize Prophet Muhammad. These objects, called *telian-telian*, have been the centre of attraction with different Muslim tribes reciting the mawlid according to their unique vocal traditions (*lugu* or *lugu*) and regional melodies.³² Since the last four centuries, the royal courts of Yogyakarta celebrated the birth of the Prophet for an entire week. The main feature of the celebration is the “Garebeg Maulid.”

²⁸ Miriam Cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence, “Introduction,” in *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip Hop*, eds. Miriam Cooke and Bruce Lawrence (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 9 and 28.

²⁹ “Presidential Decree No. 1083” (1977), accessed March 25, 2023 <https://pcw.gov.ph/assets/files/2020/03/PRESIDENTIAL-DECREE-No-1083.pdf>.

³⁰ Hurgronje, *The Acehnese Vols. I* (trans. A.W.S. O’Sullivan), 18.

³¹ Thomas Gibson, *Islamic Narrative and Authority in Southeast Asia: From the 16th to the 21st Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 151–152.

³² Peter G. Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon* (Manila: New Day Publishers, 1979), 124; Elmer I. Nocheseda, “Palapas Vernacular: Towards An Appreciation of Palm Leaf Art in the Philippines,” *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 32, no. 1 (2004): 10.

A *gunungan* (Javanese for “mountain”) model made up of various local foods and fruits is built prior to the start of the ceremony. With sounds of the gamelan filling the air, Javanese rulers, their royal guards, and hundreds of followers carrying the *gunungan* marched towards the Great Mosque. Upon arrival, men, women, and children eagerly take parts of the *gunungan*, a ritual carried over from the pre-Islamic era. For many Javanese Muslims, the objects on the *gunungan* are blessed, providing protection from mishaps and seen as sources of prosperity.³³

Indeed, mawlid in Southeast Asia were always a symphonic affair. Led by those with melodious voices, men, women, and children alternated readings of the text in vernacular and Arabic languages, creating a highly emotive mixture of staccato, legato, and vibrato sounds. Reading the mawlid was a form of art in itself, perfected through constant practice.³⁴ Some contents of the mawlid deserve close attention here. I highlight verses that strongly appealed to Southeast Asians’ love for stories of the incredible and extraordinary, the miracles associated with the Prophet, and his conspicuous superiorities. These virtues, narrated in hyperbolic ways bordering between fact and fantasy, set the messenger apart from the rest of humankind.

It was announced in the Heavens and the Earth that Sayyidah Aaminah was carrying the blessed Noor. Every ardent lover turned towards this scented breeze of the Most Beloved. After a long barren spell, the earth was clothed with a lush green carpet, fruits ripened, the trees bowed their heavy-laden loads so that fruits became easy pickings. Every animal from the Quraish tribe, spoke in pure Arabic of his arrival. The idols fell flat on their faces. The animals of prey from east to west exchanged this good news. The whole world drank pure wine from this cup of great joy. The jinns announced his coming, the soothsayers foretold, and the monks became afraid. Every learned scholar was eager to hear the news of his coming and became lost in astonishment by the display of his beauty.

...

Upon the Blessed birth, miraculous and strange events appeared in order to announce His Prophethood and to notify the world

³³ Herman Beck, “Islamic Purity at Odds with Javanese Identity: The Muhammadiyah and the Celebration of the Garebeg Maulud Ritual in Yogyakarta,” in *Studies in Ritual Behaviour*, ed. Jan Platvoet and Jan van der Toorn (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 261–284.

³⁴ Anna M. Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Quran in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 11–12.

that He is Allah's Chosen One. The sky was shielded; the evil and mischievous devils and jinn were driven away from it. The luminous stars struck every accursed one and then lowered themselves to the Beloved out of love. By their light, the valleys and hills of the Haram (Makkah) were illuminated. Upon the Blessed Birth such a bright light appeared with Him, illuminating the Roman castles of Shaam, and these were seen by those who resided in the valleys of Makkah. The high and extremely strong Persian palace at Mada'in built by Nausherwan cracked and crumbled and fourteen of its high balconies fell. This event, which had such a devastating effect on the palace, had the same effect on his kingdom. Upon the appearance of the Blessed illuminating face, by the illuminating rays of this beautiful full moon, the fires worshipped by the Persian kingdoms extinguished.³⁵

Massive in scale, no part of Southeast Asia was spared by the charms of the *burdah* and *mawlid*. These recitals had permeated every corner of the region by the mid-nineteenth century. However, the rise of modern reformists brought critiques and calls for purification. Influenced by the Salafiyyah movement figures like Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) and Rashid Rida (1865–1935), the modern reformists (also known as the “Kaum Muda (Young Faction)” or “Golongan Sunnah (Sunnah Group)”) in Southeast Asia argued that these practices deviated from true Islamic teachings. They viewed elements of the *burdah* and *mawlid* as innovations (*bid'ah*) that strayed from the Prophet's tradition.³⁶ Modern reformists' reproaches were a continuation of reservations expressed by medieval *fuqaha* (jurists). Both contested the contents and extravagant performances associated with many supplicative mediums. The *fuqaha* viewed *burdah* and *mawlid*s as *bid'ah dalalah* (innovations that deviate from the truth). Although some took a softer position of categorizing supplicative mediums as *bid'ah hasanah* (good innovations), most *fuqaha* singled out the *Nur Muhammad* (Light of Muhammad) ideology found in most of these texts, which depicts the Prophet as the source

³⁵ Ja'far bin Hassan al-Barzanji, *The Barzanji Mawlid: The Jewelled Necklace of The Resplendent Prophet's Birth* (trans. Muhammad Shakeel Qaadari Ridawi) (London: Self-Publishing, 2018), 15 and 22.

³⁶ Most prominent among which were comprised of personalities such as Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi (1867–1934), Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin (1869–1957), Shaykh Muhammad Djamil Djabat (1860–1947), Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (1879–1945), Haji Abdullah Ahmad (1878–1933), Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin and Rozaimi Ramle. *Hukum Sambut Maulid Nabi - Dr Rozaimi / Dr Maza / Maulana Asri / Maulana Fakhrrurrazi*, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_KqyJI1RkI.

of all creation. To them, this ideology amounted to pantheism.³⁷ In Chapter 5, I will delve more deeply into the controversy over the concept of Nur Muhammad among Sufis in Southeast Asia.

The fuqaha and modern reformists highlighted other ills accompanying the mawlid and burdahs. The depraved atmosphere during these events was apparent to all. Men and women intermingled freely, opening doors to illicit relationships. The boundaries of Islamic morality and decency were usually breached. Wastage of food and lavish spending on processions and performances were common.³⁸ The modern reformists censured the practice of *qiyam* (standing) midway during the mawlid, a collective ritual that came with the belief that divine and prophetic *hadrah* (presence) could be achieved during these sessions. They opposed the incorporation of music as well as elements of pre-Islamic cultures.

Controversies over burdah and mawlid became so heated that Southeast Asians requested for fatwas from the ulama residing in Makkah. Sufi scholars such as Shaykh Nawawi Al-Bantani and Ahmad Dahlan regarded *qiyam* and the use of tambourines during mawlid as *mustahabb* (recommended). Ahmad Dahlan, however, forbade the use of phrases like “Oh Muhammad, Oh my beloved” when referring to the Prophet and railed against those who used mawlid for scandalous entertainment. At the same time, he highlighted the iniquities found in these gatherings, prominent among which was smoking hookahs.³⁹ The modern reformists went further. The Al-Imam periodical regarded mawlid as a deviation from the prophetic tradition. Minangkabau scholar Abdul Karim Amrullah and Ahmad Hassan (1887–1958) from the Persatuan Islam (PERSIS) rebuked the use of tambourines and the belief in *hadrat al-nabi* (Prophet’s presence) during mawlid. They labelled Muslims who made such claims as *fasiq* (one who violates Islamic law).⁴⁰

To the modern reformists, Sufi scholars who justified the celebration and reading of mawlid and burdah were methodologically unsound. Noble in intention and no doubt well-meaning, most mawlid have,

³⁷ Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 169–205.

³⁸ Samuli Schielke, “Hegemonic Encounters: Criticism of Saints-Day Festivals and the Formation of Modern Islam in Late 19th and Early 20th-Century Egypt,” *Die Welt Des Islams* 47, no. 3/4 (2007): 319–355.

³⁹ Nico N. J. Kaptein, “The Berdiri Mawlid Issue among Indonesian Muslims in the Period from circa 1875 to 1930,” *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 149, no. 1 (1993): 124–153; Nico N. J. Kaptein, *The Muhimmat Al-Nafa’is: A Bilingual Meccan Fatwa Collection for Indonesian Muslims from the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Jakarta: Indonesian-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS), 1997), 156.

⁴⁰ Kaptein, *The Berdiri Mawlid Issue*, 133–149.

however, violated the foundational teachings of Islam and have strayed from the *usul al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence). Even the founder of the Sufi-based organization, the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (Revival of the Ulama), saw mawlid organized in the 1930s as veering into *ma'siyah* or *maksiat* (contravening Islamic law). For Muhammad Hasyim Asy'ari (1871–1947), if done in line with the shari'a, mawlid can deepen one's "love, respect, and exaltation towards the Prophet, while displaying gratitude."⁴¹ The Muhammadiyah movement held the same position. The mawlid is *mubah* (permissible) if done for the sake of remembering the Prophet and instilling love for him.

This tolerant attitude towards mawlid saw a shift from the 1970s onwards. The onset of Salafism from Saudi Arabia into Southeast Asia brought about a new wave of denunciation towards mawlid. Mawlid texts, to the Salafis, contained exaggerated allegories and metaphors that barely represented the sober career and message of the Prophet. Ostentatious mawlid transgressed the proper manner to which Muslims should honour the messenger of Islam. The Salafis, in sum, imposed limits on the scope of enchanting *rasa* so often acculturated by the Sufis. *Rasa* must be tamed by what was historically factual and what is legally permissible in Islam.⁴²

Anti-mawlid diatribes have hardly lessened its allure among Southeast Asians. In response to these criticisms and the pressures of modernization, Sufis have continuously repackaged, reinvented, and represented mawlid. Under colonial rule, *perarakan mawlid* (mawlid marches) were akin national-day parades. Contingents of men and women walked from street to street carrying flags and uniforms to symbolize specific families, organizations, and tariqahs. Attended by thousands, such events were also a public show of Muslim unity and hence have had the potential of becoming platforms for political and other forms of mobilization. In Singapore on 21 July 1964, for example, more than twenty thousand Muslims came out to join mawlid marches. The overall atmosphere then was burning with passions, in the midst of heated debates regarding communal politics.

⁴¹ Hasyim Asy'ari, *Koreksi Peringatan Maulid Nabi Muhammad Saw (Tanbihat al Wajibat Li Man Yashna'al Maulid Bi al Munkarat)* (trans. Rosidin) (Malang: Bayu Media Publishing, 2013), 5.

⁴² Muhammad As'ad, "Salafi's Criticism on the Celebration of the Birthday of Prophet Muhammad," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 9, no. 2 (2019): 353–379; Fadlil Munawwar Mansur, "Interpretation and Overinterpretation of Ja'far Ibn Hasan Al-Barzanji's Mawlid Al-Barzanji," *Humaniora* 29, no. 3 (2017): 316–326.

Before the mawlid procession began, highly-emotive speeches were delivered by Muslim activists and grassroots leaders. As crowds chanting praises of the Prophet marched along the eastern parts of Singapore, Chinese hooligans attacked a mawlid contingent with bottles and rocks.⁴³ One of the bloodiest riots in the history of the island-state broke out, killing over two dozen people and injuring hundreds of others. Sufi pugilistic groups who dubbed themselves as *pendekar* (warriors) in defense of Muslim rights played major roles in the conflict. In contrast, a pacifist segment of the Sufi fraternity established goodwill committees in the aftermath of the mayhem.⁴⁴ Haji Mohammed bin Abdul Kadir recalled how the tragic episode had spurred thousands of youths to join a *silat* (Malay pugilistic art) group helmed by Ustaz Taha bin Suhaimi (1916–1999), a notable Hadrami-Arab Sufi teacher and murshid of the Ahmadiyyah tariqah in Singapore.⁴⁵ Since then, mawlid marches were banned in Singapore, though mass celebrations are still rampant in mosques and stadiums.

In other parts of Southeast Asia, the habaibs and Sufi performers have been active in magnifying the already massive mawlid celebrations. The advent of new communication technologies and the rise of social media have widened the reach of mawlids. Digital technologies provided broader publicity and deeper penetration into the furthest reaches of societies. The 1990s saw nasyid pop groups utilizing stanzas from mawlid and burdah texts into entrancing melodies.⁴⁶ The habaibs, whose religious capital have been eroded by the advent of Salafism and modern reformism, regained their hold on the Muslim masses by organizing “Mega Mawlids,” “Mawlid Concerts,” “Majelis Rasulullah (Prophet’s Gathering),” “Malam Cinta Rasulullah (Loving the Prophet Night)” in stadiums and convention centres. Joined by hundreds of thousands of Muslims and non-Muslims, these events were streamed live on YouTube, Facebook, and other online platforms.

One of the most popular habaibs is Syekh Abdul Qadir As Saggaf. He has over a million subscribers in his YouTube channel, an ever-expanding community collectively known as “Syekher Mania” who are awestruck by his vocal powers. Almost single-handedly, Abdul Qadir

⁴³ Alberto Lau, *A Moment of Anguish: Singapore in Malaysia and the Politics of Disengagement* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003), 137–138.

⁴⁴ “Goodwill Committees Established in All 51 Constituencies,” *The Straits Times*, July 27, 1964.

⁴⁵ Mohamed B. Haji Abdul Kadir @ S. Mohdir Haji, *Visual Arts*, Reel/Disc 9 of 20, Accession Number 003431, 2009.

⁴⁶ Wendy Mee, “The Ebb and Flow of Popular Islamic Music Forms: Zikir Maulud Amongst Sambas Malays,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 40, no. 2 (2012): 203–233.

made the “Mawlid Simtud Duror,” originally written by Habib Ali bin Abdurrahman al-Habshi (or Habib Ali Kwitang, 1870–1968), a meteoric sensation. The confluence of state-of-the-art technologies, exquisite vocals, aggressive marketing, and the coming together of Sufi masters from different parts of the world transformed mawlid in Southeast Asia into huge gatherings akin to music gigs. Well into the twenty-first century, what I would call “Superstar Mawlid” has thrived and transformed into a multi-million dollar pious industry.⁴⁷



Malaysian Muslims participate in a Maulidur Rasul parade in Putrajaya, also known as Mawlid, the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, at Putrajaya Putra Mosque: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mawlid#/media/File:Mawlidur_Rasul_\(8413657269\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mawlid#/media/File:Mawlidur_Rasul_(8413657269).jpg)

The third supplicative medium to be considered here is *ratibs*. They are a collection of litanies and supplications recited in congregation in praise of Allah and His beloved prophets and saints. A few *ratib* texts have predominated Southeast Asian Islam: the *Ratib Al-Attas*, the *Ratib Al-Haddad*, and *Ratib Samman*. The first two originated from Hadrami-Arab authors namely Umar Ibn Abd Al-Rahman Al-Attas (1583–1660) and Abdullah bin Alawi Al-Haddad (1634–1720). They were said to

⁴⁷ “Mega Mawlid 2013: Habib Syech Assegaf,” accessed June 2, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_Bi3Sg4t6c. See also Habib Syech Assegaf YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@habibsyechbinabdulqadirassegaf>.

have spread Islam into Southeast Asia through the use of ratibs. The Ratib Samman traces its roots from the Sammaniyyah tariqah whose founder, Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Karim al-Madani al-Syafi’i (1719–1775, commonly known as-Sammani), was a Makkan-based Southeast Asian Sufi scholar. His most loyal student was Abdul Samad al-Palimbani (1704–1791). Al-Palembani introduced the Ratib Samman in Sumatra before it was adopted by Sufis in other adjacent islands.⁴⁸

Ratib sessions have been conducted weekly in mosques and *suraus* (prayer halls). In Singapore, ratib sessions organized at the Ba’alawi Mosque every Thursday served multiple audiences and motives: for sincere devotees seeking salvation, for volunteers bent on maintaining the vivacity of the house of Allah, for business people hoping to expand their networks, and for those vying for positions in the government and other elite institutions.⁴⁹ Secular and sacred, personal and political motivations intersect during these sessions. Finding a balance between these agendas is perplexing. Many Sufis have instrumentalized gatherings such as ratibs, burdahs, and mawlids for pragmatic ends and as instruments of social control and political endorsement. This utilitarian use of supplicative mediums is especially palpable in the event when Sufis anticipate many incentives – material and symbolic – from patronage by those in power, as seen in North African Sufis. Isabelle Werenfels argues:

On the one hand, the Sufi elites have interests linked to their spiritual activities and social agendas that entice them to engage in the political arena. On the other hand, state policies have created additional incentives or increased pressure to do so ... In short, even if a Sufi sheikh’s main concern simply is to spread his spiritual message, he is forced to play by the rules of the game in order to achieve his goal. Playing the game implies entering into competition with other orders or religious actors over adepts and resources and seeking protection, patronage, and a position in clientelist structures and other arrangements with national power players.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Vladimir I. Braginsky, *The System of Classical Malay Literature* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1993), 477–478.

⁴⁹Mona Abaza, “A Mosque of Arab Origin in Singapore: History, Functions and Networks,” *Archipel* 53 (1997): 61–83.

⁵⁰Isabelle Werenfels, “Beyond Authoritarian Upgrading: The Re-Emergence of Sufi Orders in Maghrebi Politics,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 19, no. 3 (2014): 283.

Playing the game also entails managing the laity in ways that would ensure obeisance and submission to the will of Sufi and elite partnerships. Ratib is a powerful tool to achieve that end. During my conversations with mosque congregants who have been following ratib sessions for decades, they shared that there are privileged circles of politicians, businessmen, academics, and known personalities within the congregation who have reserved places in prayer halls and special rooms after the end of ratib recitals. Ordinary Muslims have no access to these designated places unless they serve as volunteers for the shaykhs and elite classes, with little (if any) practical return for themselves. Most accept such arrangements based on respect, reverence, and redemption. “Privilege” during ratib sessions is therefore enforced and reproduced through spatial favouritism, hierarchical enclosures, and differential treatment.

Equally emotive in content, ratibs, however, differ from the mawlids in several ways. First, ratibs are usually read without musical stylistics. Sombre pitches increase in pace as the reading progresses. The eyes of the congregation are usually closed midway through such recitals, and their bodies swing from side to side. There is no standing ritual in ratibs, unlike in mawlids. Furthermore, ratibs are small-scale events organized weekly in mosques, homes, and other designated places. Ratibs can also be read individually and daily after the completion of obligatory prayers or in mornings and evenings. On rare occasions, ratibs have been read during mawlids.

The third difference lies in the function of ratibs. The litanies are perceived as antidotes for many tribulations in life. In the early twentieth century, Malays read the ratibs to ward off small pox and cholera pandemics. This specific ratib was known as “ratib tubin.” It was read over a hundred times during night, reflecting the infusion of a pre-Islamic form of mysticism with the use of a Sufi supplicative medium. A resurgence of ratib occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Brunei, ratibs were couched as *vaksin ketuhanan* (divine vaccines). Daily readings of these litanies were strongly encouraged for all Bruneian Muslim citizens.⁵¹

The Ratib Samman deserves some elaboration here because it differs from other ratibs. The ratib is read exclusively by followers of the tariqah. In Aceh, this ratib incorporated local *pantun* (poems), idioms,

⁵¹ Raymond LeRoy Archer, “Muhammadan Mysticism in Sumatra,” *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15, no. 2 (128) (1937): 105–107; Awang Abdul Aziz bin Juned, *Raja Brunei: Pelopor Penggunaan Vaksin Ketuhanan* (Bandar Seri Begawan: Jabatan Mufti Kerajaan, 2021).

popular music, and dance performances.⁵² Divided into ten to seventeen different dhikrs, Ratib Samman sessions stretched for a few hours. The first few dhikrs were read first in *ratib duduk* (sitting ratib) then *ratib berdiri* (standing ratib). The congregation would usually make a large circle and move their bodies and hands upwards and downwards. They stamped their feet while chanting in fast sequence, *Ahum!*, then *Ahil!* and ending with 'Am! Ah! 'Am! 'Ah! Within a few minutes, the congregation would enter a trance, regaining consciousness only after being summoned by the Sufi master.⁵³

The influence of Hindu worship is noticeable here and frowned upon by the religious authorities, as observed by Naquib Al-Attas in his study of the ratib in Johore in the 1960s.⁵⁴ Some decades earlier, Hadrami-Arab scholars in Indonesia, namely, Shaykh Salim bin Sumayr (d. 1852) and his student, Sayyid Uthman bin Yahya (1822–1914), launched stinging attacks against practitioners of this ratib. Sayyid Uthman's critique rested on theological, linguistical, moral, and sociological grounds. To him, Ratib Samman should be forbidden because the Arabic words were often pronounced wrongly during recitals, corrupting the meanings of holy words. Moreover, the screaming, dancing, and clapping associated with the ratib contradicted Islamic *adab* (manners) and were reminiscent of the practices of disbelievers during the time of the Prophet. The loud noises caused by this ratib disturbed public peace. Sayyid Uthman also faulted the Sammaniyyah tariqah for prioritizing their litanies over other obligatory rituals and basic duties towards their families.⁵⁵

Sayyid Uthman's critique was one among many attempts by Sufi scholars to reform Sufi-inflected mystic practices. Regardless, the significance of the ratib in the lives of rural communities can hardly be ignored. One reason why it has been difficult for Sufi scholars and modern reformists to steer Muslims away from this ratib has to do with the transmittal aspect of such rituals. Ratib Samman was passed on through *ijazah* (licenses) by respected teachers to students. As will be seen in Chapter 3,

⁵² Holly S. Smith, *Aceh: Art and Culture* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1997), 57.

⁵³ Osman Bakar, "Sufism in the Malay-Indonesian World," in *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 29.

⁵⁴ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Some Aspects of Sufism as Understood and Practised among the Malays* (Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1963), 78–88.

⁵⁵ G. W. J. Drewes, "A Note on Muhammad Al-Samman, His Writings, and 19th Century Sammaniyya Practices, Chiefly in Batavia, According to Written Data.," *Archipel* 43 (1992): 73–87; Ahmad Purwadaksi, *Ratib Samman dan Hikayat Syekh Muhammad Samman: Suntingan Naskah dan Kajian Isi Teks* (Jakarta: Yayasan Naskah Nusantara, 2004), 318–319.

the teachers and students were bound together by organic texts that were read, learnt, and reflected upon by members of a close-knit fraternity. Teachers and students were bonded by the affective ties of solidarity and commitment to preserving traditions, among which was the *ratib*. *Ijazah* has been an effective method by which the *ratib* was handed down from person to person, making it a novelty sought after by Muslims in certain parts of Southeast Asia to this day.⁵⁶

FIGURATIVE MEDIUMS

David Harnish and Anne Rasmussen distinguished between “*musik Islam* with its Arabic texts” and “*musik islami* (music featuring Islamic characteristics),” which “is a category that can include all kinds of folk and popular music in regional languages and in Indonesian, as well as newly composed music and popular music hybrids.”⁵⁷ This is a useful typology for differentiating between supplicative and figurative mediums. While supplicative mediums included references to God and the Prophet in the Arabic original, figurative mediums are usually written and articulated in the vernacular, with some Arabic devotional terms peppered within them. As the term suggests, figurative mediums are Sufi works that employed analogies, metaphors, similes, symbols, and allegories with the overriding objective of capturing the *rasa* of the masses, to bring them closer to Islam and Sufism. These texts stand in stark contrast from the more formalistic and methodical *kitab* (learned treatises). Both supplicative and figurative mediums contain allegorical elements and use wordplay to arouse the *rasa* of their listeners. The difference lies in the fact that figurative mediums are not meant or used for devotional purposes. They were not ritualized and read at designated times and places.

Figurative mediums produced by Sufis legitimized the power and authority of elites in Southeast Asian Muslim societies. Legitimization was achieved through narratives and proses that exhibit the extraordinary traits of the nobility and their journeys towards salvation. Figurative mediums also highlight the softer and exoteric dimensions of Islam. Themes of beauty, the refinement of character, morality, spirituality, the

⁵⁶ Abdul Razak Abdul Rahman, *Tradisi Ratib Al-Haddad Di Alam Melayu: Manuskrip, Sanad, Kitab Dan Pembudayaannya* (Kuala Lumpur: Akademi Jawi Malaysia, 2021); Lois Lamya Al-Faruqi, “The Mawlid,” *The World of Music* 28, no. 3 (1986): 85.

⁵⁷ Harnish and Rasmussen, “Introduction”, 26–27.

environment, as well as the experience of traversing through the five worlds of consciousness – *Nasut* (the Human World), *Malakut* (the Invisible World), *Jabarut* (the Highest World), *Lahut* (the Divine World), and *Hahut* (the Ipseity World) – saturate figurative mediums. Through them, Sufis articulated their affection and awe towards everything around them. They expressed their hopes to meet God and achieve deliverance from their sins. Most figurative mediums registered the “principle of mutual resemblance, or mutual correspondence, of the macrocosm (universe) and the microcosm (humanity).”⁵⁸

Sufis refashioned these texts with local poetics and inundated them with Arabic and Persian concepts to Islamize Southeast Asians, albeit subtly and in gentle ways. There are two dominant types of figurative mediums: *sha’irs* and *hikayats*. The nine saints of Java, according to oral histories, were most active in using such mediums to purvey Islamic beliefs. They capitalized on the local penchant towards romance and miraculous tales to relate stories of legendary Muslims and Sufi figures. *Sha’irs* and *hikayats* have been included in *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet play). In East Java, festivals have been held to memorialize the astuteness of these Sufis in spreading Islam through such figurative mediums.⁵⁹

The *sha’ir* (or *sya’ir*, derived from the Arabic *shī’r*) is a narrative poem. Its importance in Islam is evidenced in a *surah* (chapter) in the Qur’an, *Ash-Shu’ara* (The Poets). The prominence of *sha’irs* and poets in pre-Islamic societies, their persuasiveness and misdemeanors, are discussed in this *surah*. Sufis have mined these verses to develop beautiful poetry. The term *shu’ara* (poets) has been used as honorifics for their best prose writers. The Timurid Sufi, Nuruddin ‘Abdul Rahman Jami or simply Jami (1414–1492), was described by Sufis as *Khatam al-Shu’ara* (The Seal of the Poets). During the zenith of the Mughal empire, a special graveyard was reserved for Sufis and other notable poets christened as *Mazar-i Shu’ara* (Cemetery for Poets).⁶⁰ *Sha’ir* shares common features with Malay *pantun*. Both are monorhyme quatrains offering sagely advice or recounting stories of ethical value. Many features of *sha’ir* are shared by other poetic compositions such as *gurindam* (rhyming couplets with free meter), *seloka* (poetry containing humour), *nazam* (thematic poem), and *teromba* (poem that contains teachings of Malay customs

⁵⁸ Braginsky, *The System of Classical Malay Literature*, 274.

⁵⁹ Ismatu Ropi, “Wali Songo Festival: Tracking Islamic Heritage and Building Islamic Brotherhood,” *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* 6, no. 3 (1999): 197–202.

⁶⁰ Sunil Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia: Persian Literature in an Indian Court* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2017), 126.

and traditions). They were written in *untai/bait/rangkap* (stanzas) like songs. Each line of the sha'ir contains nine to thirteen syllables, and the length can be as short as five to hundreds of lines. Sufi authors would usually graft Qur'anic imageries into their sha'irs.

Scholars are divided over the evolution of the sha'ir in Southeast Asia. This is no place to discuss the history of this genre that originated from Arab-Persian lands. What is most important for our purposes is to be acquainted with the fact that the sha'ir was first introduced by the Sufis in Aceh. As one of the earliest kingdoms to accept Islam as a state religion, Aceh became the nucleus for the production of sha'irs and other figurative mediums. From the fifteenth century onwards, the kingdom developed into a centre of Sufi thought and literature. Sufism, according to Leonard Andaya, provided the inspiration for much of the religious literature written and read by Aceh's intellectual elite. The rulers' principal Islamic advisors – known as the *Shaykh al-Islam* – were mostly Sufi scholars who determined the theological direction of the country.⁶¹

Sha'irs were used by the Sufis to steer the rasa of Southeast Asians towards spiritual maturity and enlightenment. The most famous of them was the sixteenth-century Acehnese litterateur, Hamzah Fansuri (d. 1590). A pioneer and an avant-gardist of the kitab genre, Hamzah also introduced the sha'irs as rhymes written with four verses in each stanza. His *Asrar al-Arifin* (Secrets of the Gnostics) and *Syarab Al-Asyikin* (Drink of the Lovers) gave new forms to Arab-Persian poetics, namely the *ghazal* (amatory poem), *bait* (poetry with two half lines), *ruba'i* (poetry with four lines of rhyming verse), and *saj'* (rhymed prose). Hamzah melded these styles with the Malay *pantun* (Malay quatrains expressing ideas and emotions), creating a unique poetic fusion.⁶² Or as Amin Sweeney explains: "Although his aim was to write Islamic poetry, his basic materials – as regards verse structure, rhyme, and number of lines in a unit – were Malay. Before Hamzah's time, however, no known genre of poetry, whether in Arabico-Persian or Malay, displayed all four defining characteristics of the Malay *sha'ir*."⁶³ Writing within the ambit of Islamic prosody and Sufi cosmology, Hamzah's poems were highly metaphorical covering a host of topics, imageries, and tropes, from divine love, to adventure, to romance to the splendours of nature, to unveiling

⁶¹ Andaya, *Leaves of the Same Tree: Trade and Ethnicity in the Straits of Melaka*, 123.

⁶² Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri* (University of Malaya Press, 1970).

⁶³ Amin Sweeney, "Some Observations on the Malay Sha'ir," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 44, no. 1 (219) (1971): 66.

his innermost struggles and his interrogative sense of the self. Yet the messages he was seeking to convey were not purely for entertainment's sake. His Southeast Asian audience were cajoled into appreciating and accepting Islamic devotions and ideas. Hamzah won converts to Islam just as he exchanged barbs with his Muslim dissenters.⁶⁴

Hamzah Fansuri transformed sha'ir into a much-loved genre in Southeast Asia, read and sung in homes, palaces, and marketplaces. The themes and words he employed in *Sha'ir Burung Pingai* (Poem of the Pingai Bird), *Sha'ir Dagang* (Poem of Trade), *Sha'ir Perahu* (Poem of the Boat), and many others were adopted by later writers and musicians who kept alive Hamzah's poetic ingenuity and rhetorical flair. The sha'irs produced by Hamzah, his followers, and admirers became a famed figurative medium because it evoked the emotions of Southeast Asian audiences. These compositions were filled with detailed descriptions of personas, places, and passions. The richer the depictions, the more these sha'irs provoked the audience to engage, remember the lines, and become invested in them.⁶⁵ In the wake of Hamzah, five distinct kinds of sha'irs developed in Southeast Asia. The hagiographic type, covering the stories of prophets and saints, was predominant. There were sha'irs focusing on beliefs and devotions. The third kind touched on eschatology and the afterlife, the fourth was centred around the environment, and there were a substantial sub-genre delving into existential questions.⁶⁶

One sample of Hamzah's stanzas must detain us for a moment since it had set the tone for Malay poetry in the centuries to come:

If you know yourself, dear sir,
You are the sea without compeer,
Waves and sea are not different,
Let this vision be steadily yours.

Smooth is the course of the waves of benignity,
Do not give up yourself to the waves of omnipotence,
Earn your livelihood in an honest way,
So that the Endless Sea be pleased.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Amin Sweeney, "Malay Sufi Poetics and European Norms," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112, no. 1 (1992): 89.

⁶⁵ Virginia Matheson, "Questions Arising from a Nineteenth Century Riau Syair," *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs* 17 (1983): 1–61.

⁶⁶ Vladimir Braginsky, *The Heritage of Traditional Malay Literature: A Historical Survey of Genres, Writings and Literary Views* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004), 364.

⁶⁷ Hamzah Fansuri, *The Poems of Hamzah Fansuri* (trans. G.W.J. Drewes and L.F. Brakel) (Leiden: Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology, 1986), 131 and 135.

Hamzah's poems and other treatises soon came under the condemnation of other Sufi scholars such as Nuruddin Al-Raniri (d. 1658) who flagged the poet's pantheistic inclinations. But his significance lived on for many centuries thereafter through his disciples or those who were inspired by his poetic edge. Some notable sha'ir authors who expanded Hamzah's legacy were Hasan Fansuri, Syamsuddin al-Sumatra'i, Abdul Rauf Singkel, Daud al-Sumatrani, Raja Chulan, Raja Hassan, and Raja Ali Haji. In their sha'irs, we may discern Sufi concepts relating to dhawq, ma'rifah, *ashiq* (burning love for the divine), *fana'* (annihilation of the self), *faqr* (poverty), and *musyahadah* (witnessing).

In the eighteenth century, the sha'ir sub-genres grew to cover themes of romance, dreams, and incredible tales of nobles and kings. Sufi traces were of course noticeable. The existence of Sufi ideas and symbolisms in later sha'irs can be found in *Sha'ir Tabir Mimpi* (Poem of the Interpretation of Dreams), written in the early nineteenth century and published in Singapore. Dream interpretation (*ta'bir al-ru'ya*) and dream visions (*al-ru'ya*) occupy a prominent place in Sufi thought. Used for centuries to unravel divine signs and as a means to communicate with angels and pious figures who had long passed on, dream visions were, to the Sufis, comparable to prophetic inspiration.⁶⁸ *Sha'ir Tabir Mimpi* is unique because it provides interpretations of a variety of dreams: about one's state of being and social relations, encounters with animals, and experiences with the natural environment, all pointing to the rural milieu of the author. These interpretations showed a clever redaction and reinterpretation of the work of a well-respected scholar and Sufi, Muhammad Ibn Sirin (d. 729), to fit with the Southeast Asian context. Some stanzas in the sha'ir suffice here to illustrate its Sufistic thrust:

This is the beginning chapter,
Of which the council of the learned says,
Dreams should be accepted as omens,
And should be interpreted without delay.

If one dreams that he ascends the clouds,
Or that another person does so, oh brethren,
It is a sign that he will live in great ease,
And God in his generosity will favour him.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Dreams and Visions in the World of Islam: A History of Muslim Dreaming and Foreknowing* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 2.

If one dreams of storm and rain,
 With pitchy darkness, so that everything becomes invisible,
 It is a sign that evil is coming,
 And that many people will die of illness.
 That dream is most evil,
 And no mercy is portended,
 Many people will commit treason,
 And calamity will be brought down by the angels.⁶⁹

Modernity did little to diminish the production and impact of sha'irs. Aside from being recited and sung during mass events, in the early twentieth century, sha'irs were vehicles for Islamic missionizing. In Sumatra, a Sufi master named Abdul Wahab Rokan (1811–1926) authored the *Sha'ir Munajat* (Supplication Sha'ir) broadly used by followers of the Naqshbandiyyah tariqah to convert the Sakai tribes in Riau Islands to Islam.⁷⁰ In contemporary Malaysia, one of the most recognized popularizers of the sha'irs is Roslan Madun. He established the Anggun Performing Arts Club to keep alive the Malay and Sufi ethno-musical traditions. His efforts at giving new life to Sufi sha'irs have reached audiences globally and are now the subject of a number of studies. A recipient of the international laureate for folk singers, Roslan's *Sha'ir Berbuat Jasa* (Poem of Good Deeds), reincarnates and provides a new rendering of Hamzah Fansuri's *Sha'ir Perahu* (Poem of the Boat).⁷¹

Another figurative medium with Sufi nuances is the hikayat. Tales highlighting the genealogies and virtues of prophets, saints, kings, warriors, missionaries, and other extraordinary figures, and the part they played in the making of Muslim societies were common themes of hikayats. Hikayats existed before the coming of Islam in Southeast Asia. Sensitive to its significance in local life, the Sufis utilized these oral traditions for the purposes of Islamization. The hikayats provided unique visions of justice and love, with a view of reminding the masses of the importance of loyalty and faithfulness to the king, customs, and religion.

⁶⁹ Hans Overbeck, "Shaer Ta'bir Mimpi," *Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 7, 2 (107) (1929): 338–375.

⁷⁰ U.U. Hamidy, *Pengislaman Masyarakat Sakai Oleh Tarekat Nakshyahbandiyah Babussalam* (Pekanbaru: UIR Press, 1992), 37–60.

⁷¹ Editorial, "USIM Iktiraf Sumbangan Roslan Madun Martabat Syair," *Berita Harian*, May 2, 2019; Roslan Madun, "Roslan Madun Syair Berbuat Jasa," accessed April 29, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMrsaY8UibM>; Victor A. Pogadaev, "Folk Singer Roslan a Hit at Russian Festival," *The New Straits Times*, August 22, 2021.

The hikayats cautioned elites of the grave consequences of tyranny and warned the masses of *derhaka* (treason), the most serious of crimes punishable by death and exile. These texts were written in a didactic style to underline the importance of Islam and the social contract between rulers and the people as lynchpins of the *kerajaan* (kingship).⁷² Highly moving in tone and lacking a chronological sequence, like the sha'irs, hikayats were imbued with the concepts and doctrine of Nur Muhammad, *wahdatul wujud* (the unity of existence), and the *martabat tujuh* (seven stages of being which is a Southeast Asian rendering of the *wahdatul wujud*).

The British orientalist Richard Winstedt divided Malay-Islamic hikayats into "Muslim Legends" and "Cycles of Tales from Muslim sources." Sufistic elements impregnated both genres. These works were, to him, adaptations from Indian, Persian, and Arab stories.⁷³ But such argument seems too far-fetched. Most hikayats had original plots. Even if some adaptations from outside sources are indeed present, they were highly modified. Even if these texts were, to the orientalists, uninventive in form and content, they were no less impactful in Southeast Asia up until mid-twentieth century. The hikayats were read aloud by traders during their long journeys, by storytellers and performers as sources of entertainment, by missionaries to spread Islam, by educators and parents to nurture the young, and by soldiers in the face of battles.⁷⁴ The hikayats were texts of passion, persuasion, pontification, and provocation. These texts certainly provoked Hadrami-Arab Sufi scholars who regarded most hikayats, notably those about the Prophet Muhammad, as works "compiled by heretics (*Rafidi*): do not believe it."⁷⁵

I divide the hikayats into two broad categories, Sufi centred and Sufi-imbued. Sufi-centred hikayats are texts which manifestly indicate Sufi origins and messages. A few significant examples of Sufi-centred hikayats are in order here. The most well-known of them all is the Hikayat Rabi'ah. A tale based on the ninth-century female mystic Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah who lived in Basra, Iraq, the earliest textualized version of the hikayat can be dated to the nineteenth century. That the story of a famous Sufi was retold in a Southeast Asian text suggests attempts by

⁷² Amin Sweeney, "The Connection between Hikayat Raja2 Pasai and the Sejarah Melayu," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 40, 2 (1967): 94–105.

⁷³ Richard O. Winstedt, "A History of Malay Literature," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 17, no. 3 (135) (1940): 58–78.

⁷⁴ Ismail Hamid, *The Malay Islamic Hikayat* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1983), 44–45.

⁷⁵ Winstedt, "A History of Malay Literature," 70.

Sufistic authors to use such a narrative for religious conversion directed primarily towards women. As is well-known, women were held in high esteem in Southeast Asian societies and played crucial roles in shaping and enforcing customs and faiths in the region. The Sufis were most likely aware of this social datum. They used stories of female mystics to connect Islamic notions of womanhood and piety with pre-Islamic matrilocal and matrilineal cultures. Rabbiah's ascetic life was embellished as an embodiment of an ideal female figure which Southeast Asian women could aspire to become. The hikayat was also an oblique reminder to male audiences to be watchful of their treatment of pious women in everyday life.⁷⁶

Standard biographies of Rabbiah al-Adawiyah tell us of a mystic who remained celibate throughout her life. The Hikayat Rabbiah narrates a different story. She is portrayed as an honourable woman. Married twice, first with an eminent Sufi master, al-Junaid al-Baghdadi (d. 910), and then with the Sultan Abu Sa'id of Baghdad, these unions heightened Rabbiah's spiritual acumen. She rose to the highest *maqam* (station) of spiritual ecstasy. Such interesting twist of facts should be read as a localization of Rabbiah's image to make it consonant with Southeast Asian realities. Singlehood and celibacy were frowned upon in Southeast Asia. Multiple marriages among women were fairly common even before the coming of Islam. More crucially, this hikayat made Rabbiah a magnetic figure for its readers and listeners. *Rabiya* or *rubiah* are often used in Malay-Indonesian writings to point to commendable traits stemming from the teachings of Sufism: "from hermit or ascetic, living an isolated and presumably celibate life; to teacher, engaged rather than secluded; to teacher's wife, fully enmeshed in domestic and conjugal relationships."⁷⁷

To wit, the hikayat underlines the virtue of *wara'* or *warak* in Malay-Indonesian. *Wara'* means scrupulousness, a moral compass guiding a Muslim to refrain from unlawful acts and things. This concept was deliberated in Hikayat Sultan Ibrahim bin Adham, a story narrated in Malay, Javanese, Sundanese, and Acehnese dialects. This tale mirrored a known Arab-Persian story of a ruler who lived in eighth-century Balkh, a territory within modern-day Afghanistan. The story of Ibrahim is somewhat reminiscent of the life of Buddha. Such a parallel should come as no surprise given the wide influence Buddhism enjoyed in Southeast Asian

⁷⁶ Barbara Watson Andaya, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (University Hawai'i Press, 2006), 87.

⁷⁷ Mulaika Hijjas, "The Trials of Rabbiah Al-Adawiyah in the Malay World: The Female Sufi in the Hikayat Rabbiah," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 174, no. 2/3 (2018): 220.

societies and texts many centuries before the rapid spread of Islam.⁷⁸ The new rendering of Sultan Ibrahim bin Adham's life in the hikayat fuses two streams of accounts: Arab-Persian portrait of a prominent Sufi and Indic portrayal of Buddha. There is strong evidence suggesting that a Hadrami-Arab, Shaykh Abu Bakar, was one of the authors or copiers of the hikayat.⁷⁹

The hikayat reads like a book of counsel for Southeast Asian rulers, informing them of the dangers of worldly avarice. Renunciation is the preferred approach to attain happiness. In the hikayat, the much loved and just king, Sultan Ibrahim, became disillusioned with power and wealth. He turned to asceticism and travelled to distant lands posing as a beggar. This is a different representation of the historical Ibrahim bin Adham, who fled the onslaught of the Abbasid army, lived life as a Sufi, and died in exile after being killed in a raid.⁸⁰ The hikayat has it that Ibrahim chanced upon a lady named Siti Saleha, the owner of a pomegranate plantation. Siti Saleha had earlier on received premonition about meeting Ibrahim. Impressed by his piety, she asked for his hand in marriage, a common practice among women in Southeast Asia who held the upper hand at times in nuptial arrangements. They bore a son named Muhammad Tahir.

Years of affluent life passed but Ibrahim again saw his devotions fleeting in the face of fame and fortune. He left his family and continued his travels to Makkah. His sacrifices availed him to be with those that obtained the highest blessings from God. Muhammad Tahir, in turn, followed his father's footsteps. He travelled to Iraq where he was offered the mantle of a king. Politely refusing the position, he advised the would-be ruler to remain just. Tahir left Iraq with precious gifts for his mother and continued to receive contributions from the just king. Ibrahim's life story and that of his son underline a central message the author was sending to Southeast Asian rulers: power and wealth have no intrinsic value. Renunciation is the path to eternal bliss.

Like the Hikayat Rabiah, the overall plot of Hikayat Sultan Ibrahim bin Adham was centred around the theme of spiritual enlightenment. If Rabiah gained divine guidance and wisdom through her relationships

⁷⁸ Al Makin, "Unearthing Nusantara's Concept of Religious Pluralism: Harmonization and Syncretism in Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic Classical Texts," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 54, no. 1 (2016): 1–30.

⁷⁹ Russell Jones, *Hikayat Sultan Ibrahim Ibn Adham* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 85.

⁸⁰ Tsugitaka Sato, "The Sufi Legend of Sultan Ibrahim Bin Adham," *Orient* XLII (2007): 41–54.

with her loved ones, Ibrahim did so through abandonment. Both, however, established familial relations and thrived in them. Both forsook affection for material wealth and lived life in austerity as fakirs. Both symbolized Sufi emphasis on being in constant dhikr. There are many other Southeast Asian hikayats with such Sufistic essences.⁸¹ Viewed as a corpus, these figurative mediums exhibit a synthesis of pre-Islamic and Islamic views of spirituality, the merging of local and foreign narrative traditions, and the unique creativity of the authors in using stories to advise kings and laypersons. They all place into sharp relief the importance of contemplation, the cleansing of the heart, and the presence of the divine in all things, in all happenings. They all emphasize dialogues between human beings, their environment, and their Creator.⁸²

The second kind of hikayat to be considered here are Sufi-imbued. Such hikayats explained how and why Southeast Asian kingdoms accepted Islam and the miraculous circumstances leading to the Islami- zation of rulers. *The Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), *Hikayat Iskandar Dzulkarnain*, *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, *Hikayat Aceh*, *Hikayat Patani*, and the *Tajus-Salatin* are among many others in this inventory. The narration of the rulers' unexpected shift in beliefs, usually by way of dream visions and encounters with holy men, bear evidence of the influence of hagiographical Sufi literature.⁸³ The *Hikayat Raja Pasai* (also known as *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*) is one of such texts. It eventually emerged as a model or template for all other Malay hikayats produced from the sixteenth century onwards.

Commissioned by a ruler in Sumatra in the mid-fourteenth century, Sufi-imbued hikayats became part of the oral culture and living tradition of the Malays. The stories in it were refashioned and recast as they reached new audiences in the rest of Southeast Asia. An ensemble of romance and incredible tales, the episodes, characters, themes, and

⁸¹To name a few: *Hikayat Luqman al-Hakim*, *Hikayat Syekh Abd al-Qadir Jilani*, *Hikayat Abu Yazid al-Bistami*, *Hikayat Syah Mardan*, *Hikayat Syaikh Muhammad Samman*, *Hikayat Indera-putra*, *Hikayat Isma Yatim*, *Hikayat Badr al-'Asyiq*, *Taj al-Muluk*, *Hikayat Nabi Lahir* (Tale of the Prophet's Birth), *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* (Tale of the Light of Muhammad), *Hikayat Kejadian Baginda Rasulullah* (Tale of the origins of God's Blessed Messenger), *Hikayat Nabi Mi'raj* (Tale of the Prophet's Ascent), *Hikayat Nabi Wafat* (Tale of the Decease of the Prophet), *Hikayat Nabi Mengajar Fatimah* (Tale of the Prophet teaching Fatimah), and *Hikayat Nabi Mengajar Ali* (Tale of the Prophet teaching Ali).

⁸²Hamid, *The Malay Islamic Hikayat*.

⁸³Russell Jones, "Ten Conversion Myths from Indonesia," in *Conversion to Islam*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion (New York: Holms and Meier, 1979), 154.

lessons in the Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai were often repeated in other courtly texts found in Southeast Asia, testifying to the intense intellectual networks that existed among the Malays and between locals and the rest of the world from the eleventh century until the eve of colonial rule. The hikayats' references to Indian, Chinese, Arab, and European kingdoms and personas show how globally oriented the Malays were during those times and the extent to which Sufi circulations have affected their thinking.⁸⁴

The Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai narrates the metamorphoses of the first non-Muslim ruler in Southeast Asia – Merah Silu (or Silau) – his conversion to Islam, and his role as a pioneering propagator of his new-found faith. Like most Sufi-inspired stories of Muslim kings, Merah Silu's life story is traced to the Prophet Muhammad. The prophet had somewhat been informed of Pasai's fame, more commonly known to the Arabs by its pre-Islamic name, "Samudera." The prophet envisioned Samudera as a place filled with *wali Allah* (saints of Allah) who would spread Islam throughout Southeast Asia. No authoritative book other than this hikayat can verify whether the prophet knew of Samudera's existence.⁸⁵ This was a clear indication that the author of this text was either a Sufi or was familiar with Sufism, according to Ismail Hamid.⁸⁶ Beyond Southeast Asia, the amalgamating of fiction and fact has been a common aspect of many Sufi tales across the Muslim world. Fabricated sayings of the Prophet and his companions were often included without proper reference to where these words were drawn. Fabricated sayings were powerful nonetheless as they bolstered the agency of the Sufis in the conversion of many Muslim populations, much to the consternation of Sufi scholars who specialized in the science of hadith and viewed such tales with contempt.⁸⁷

The task of spreading Islam to Samudera, so goes the hikayat, was left to a Makkan-born Sufi preacher, Shaykh Ismail. Before Shaykh Ismail's arrival at Samudera, Merah Silu encountered the Prophet in a dream. Dreams of encounters and deriving wisdom from the prophet

⁸⁴ Sumit Mandal, "The Indian Ocean in a Malay Text: The Hikayat Mareskalek in Transregional Perspective," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 43, no. 120 (2013): 237–254.

⁸⁵ Anon., "Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai, ed. and trans, by A. H. Hill," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 33, no. 2 (190) (1960): 116–117.

⁸⁶ Hamid, *The Malay Islamic Hikayat*, 198.

⁸⁷ Yusuf Talal Delorenzo, "Translator's Introduction," in *A Sufi Study of Hadith: Haqiqat al-Tariq Min al-Sunna al-'Aniqa* (London: Turath Publishing, 2010), 17–18.

are an important part of Sufi monumentalization of their miraculous powers, as we shall see in the next chapter. The Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai recounts:

In his dream, he saw a person standing, his chin cupped in his hand, his eyes covered by his four fingers. The person said “Merah Silu, recite the words of the profession of faith.” “I do not know how to recite them,” replied Merah Silu. “Open your mouth,” said the person. Merah Silu opened his mouth and the person spat into it....Then Merah Silu said “Who are you?” asked Merah Silu, and in his dream the voice answered, “I am the Prophet Muhammad the Apostle of God (may God bless him and give him peace) who was in Mecca.” Then the person removed his hand from his chin.⁸⁸

The prophet taught the king the *kalimah syahadah* (declaration of faith). He enjoined Merah Silu to eat only *halal* (permissible) meat and informed the ruler of the coming of Shaykh Ismail in forty days’ time, who would instruct him about Islam. The prophet personally bestowed him a new illustrious name and title, Sultan Malikul Saleh or the “Pious King.” Malikul Saleh woke up from his dream realizing that he had been miraculously circumcised. He could recite the Qur’an.⁸⁹ Sufi influences are evident here and in many other hikayats written in Southeast Asia since the sixteenth century. In drawing upon many stories from other Sufi sources and melding them creatively into the stories of kings and their conversion, the hikayats made Southeast Asian kings larger than life. The hikayats endowed the kings with Sufistic credentials and connected them into an already globalized Sufi dialogical tradition.

CONCLUSION

Using supplicative and figurative mediums, the Sufis charmed, challenged, and changed the rasa of the Southeast Asians. By introducing new musical styles and instruments, chants, and tales from elsewhere in the Muslim world and combining them with those already familiar

⁸⁸ Anon., “Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai”, 118.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 118.

in the region, Southeast Asians became increasingly predisposed to Sufi concepts and cosmology.

Put simply, the Sufis culturalized Islam into Southeast Asia without necessarily displacing what was already established. Soon enough, Hindus, Buddhists, and animists accepted Islam or learnt to live harmoniously with Muslims who shared their love for the arts. What came out of this process was the creation of a hybridized Hindu-Buddhist-Islamic culture expressed in vernacular languages and in many daily and devotional practices. Sufism's metaphysical and philosophical expressions, in other words, enchanted the feelings of peoples in Southeast Asia. Or as Sean Foley, in his study the Naqshbandiyyah-Khalidiyyah order, through such mediums, the Sufis struck deep into "the innermost desires" of their audiences.⁹⁰

Contemplating over centuries of Sufi engagement with the feelings reveals to us how a dialogical tradition was stamped into the lives of Southeast Asians in ways that were at once subtle and salient. Sufis won over their audiences and maintained them within ever-expanding Islamic solidarities by captivating them with prose and poetry which they could easily relate to in their everyday lives. Sufis in Southeast Asia made play with the human need for motivation by providing them with inspirational stories of prophets, heroes, and saints whom everyone aspired to be or at least, emulate. This relentless dialogue with feelings enabled Sufis to enchant Southeast Asians all through the waves of modernization and secularization. This dialogue also provoked fellow Sufis to air their discontentment towards what they saw as creative expressions and practices that breached the shari'a. The contestations between Sufis and between Sufis and non-Sufis on how supplicative and figurative mediums ought to be appropriated seem unending. Till this day, what has become an age-old dialogical tradition of touching the feelings of Southeast Asians has gained a renewed prominence as contemporary Sufis and their interlocutors use new advances in technology to leave imprints on the cognitive and emotive landscapes of their subjects.

⁹⁰Sean Foley, "The Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya, Islamic Sainthood, and Religion in Modern Times," *Journal of World History* 19, no. 4 (2008): 521–545.