

## Trade and Religious Conversion in the Malay World: Study on Islamization in the Inderapura Kingdom in the 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD

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**Abstract:** This study was derived from a paradigm developed by historians that the process of conversion to Islam in the Malay world was spread dominantly by the Sufis. As a result, historical reconstruction in this region has always been linked to the teachings, rituals and religious behavior of the Sufi. Based on available sources (manuscripts and archives), the role of traders was very significant in conversion to Islam in the Malay world. Through trade and religion, the countries in the Indian Ocean were interconnected. The religious conversion among traders grew faster as in the 17-18th century AD traders from various regions came to the West Coast of Sumatra to get spices. Most of these traders have embraced Islam. The Muslim traders carried the spirit of the Koran in their right hands and the commodities in the left hand. This spirit of spreading Islam was the driving force of the merchants to spread Islam in every place they visited. This research has implications for the community's perspective on Islam in the Malay world because Islam that was brought by traders was progressive and flexible about the local culture. This study is a historical socio-religious study that is examined through three approaches, namely historical approach, social approach, and religious approach. This study found that the religious conversion in the Malay world was succeeded mostly by the merchants. To facilitate the conversion, they married local women and negotiated with the authorized Sultan.

**Keywords :** Trade, Religious Conversion, Malay

## A. INTRODUCTION

It has become a joint consensus that Islamization in the Indonesian archipelago was brought through six approaches; trade, education, Sufism, marriage, arts, and politics (Pusponegoro & Notosusanto, 1990). The six approaches contributed to Islamic ideology in the country and both complemented each other. It was also undeniable that the six approaches had limitations of movement to convert the locals to Islam. Schrieke (1955), for example, did not excessively believe that the marriage approach can Islamize the local people massively. Besides, according to Schrieke, it was impossible that a community would convert to Islam automatically following the converting rulers (Azra, 2004). Likewise, the trade approach was distrusted to be the basis of Islam within the local community, because according to Johns, a person cannot have two functions at a time, being a trader and being an Islamic broadcaster. Johns' argument highlights the question "If the traders were active in spreading Islam in the archipelago, why was the development of Islam so slow or stagnant?" regarding the fact that Islam has been spreading to the Indonesian archipelago through trading approach since the 7-8 century AD to present. There has been no evidence either archaeologically or in the form of other sources showing a large number of Muslim locals or substantial Islamization in the archipelago (A.H. Johns, 1961).

The process of Islamization in the archipelago in the 17-18 century AD has been separately noted by Azyumardi Azra. He preferred that in the 17-18 century AD the Islamization process was dominated by the Sufis and Muslim scholars who had scientific networks centered in Mecca and Medina, where the transformation of the knowledge was supported by teaching activities and writings (Azra, 2004). Azra's opinion is actually not much different from the two previous historians namely A. H. John and Fatimi (Fatimi, 1961), who agreed that it was the wandering Sufis who mainly spread Islam in this country. Since the 13th century AD, the Sufis had succeeded in converting the majority of the population in the archipelago to Islam. The secret of the success of the Sufis is their ability to understand local wisdom within the community so that Islam comes with instruments that the society has been familiar with more interesting content (Johns, 1961). In addition, the Sufis also have a magnetic power that is able to attract nobles and authorities to engage in the transformation of divinity by bringing their descendants closer

to the spiritual lineage of the Sufis, this strategy seems to be very effective in accelerating communal Islamization which has not been done by traders who came to the archipelago (Johns, 1961).

The influence of Sufis and Muslim scholars in the process of Islamization in the Indonesian archipelago in the 17-18 centuries AD proposed by Azra is certainly true in the macroscope of historicity. However, this point of view will be a comprehensive consideration to be observed in microlocal historicity in the context of Islamic studies in the Inderapura Kingdom. The variable composed by Azra to reconstruct the theoretical framework of Islam in the Indonesia archipelago cannot be carried out in more problematic cases. Thus, researchers are more likely to reread the effect of trade on Islamization in the Indonesia archipelago to discover more clearly about Islam in Inderapura in 17-18 century AD. The most outspoken historian to speak about the influence of trade on Islam in the archipelago is Van Leur. According to him, economic and political factors are determinants of the process of Islamization of the local community. The authority had an interest in the continuity of trade in his territorial where the law of mutual benefit applies. The authority facilitated Muslim traders to freely conduct trading activities, with the hope that local authorities can build not only a regional trade network but also international. Likewise, Muslim traders carried out a mission so that the authority can accept Islam as a royal religion which will have an impact on the Islamization of all the people under the authority (Van Leur, 1983). This condition is explained by Neher:

“... Converting to Islam brought traders to the international Muslim community, namely the *ummah*, an important factor in Indonesia's economy. The greater sense of community and trust among Muslim merchants broadens their networks and opportunities to expand their business.” (Neher, 1981).

For the authorities, integrating with the international or global community through religious conversion does not only provide hope and promises but also a strategic step to obtain various benefits. *Firstly*, the authorities or kings personally enter the international economic-political community. As the Islamic power is pursuing politically and economically, conversion to Islam strengthens the political position of authorities because Islamic power will influence the progress or collapse of a Kingdom (Hasbullah, n.d.). *Secondly*, the conversion of religion has raised trading economics and the welfare of the royal state. Accepting a new religion means strengthening the trading

economy. The authority must continue to establish persuasive contacts with Arab traders, Indian Muslims and Chinese. *Thirdly*, the conversion also means strengthening the country. The Inderapura Kingdom already had strong ties with the kingdoms on the west coast of Sumatra, for example, political alliances with the Sultanate of Banten on the eastern tip of Sumatra and political alliances with Aceh Darussalam on the western tip of Sumatra. Therefore, it means that Islam has strengthened and enlarged the power of the Inderapura Kingdom.

The role of the authorities towards Islamization in the archipelago is an inevitable fact. Milner (1983) emphasized that leaders (sultans/kings) in Southeast Asia had a very important role in the process of Islamization for religious doctrines and structures relied on the authorities. There are at least three reasons why kings and palaces should be given more attention in reviewing the process of Islamization: First, they have a special role and strategic position before their people. Second, there is a relationship between the kingdom authority and the world trade network. The history of the archipelago has determined that Islamization took place in the age of commerce which experienced a peak of busyness in the 17-18th century AD. It can be said that at that time there was not any kingdom located in city ports that were not connected with international trade. For the trade to remain active and secured, all the kingdoms in the archipelago bind themselves by building international trade relations (Hasbullah, n.d.). Third, the great impact of the conversion of the King to Islam. In pre-Islamic traditional views and beliefs, authorities or kings are perceived as “God-Kings”, “God-Emanations”, or “God-Reincarnations” where the people serve them wholeheartedly with body and soul because the king is trusted by his people as the incarnation of God so that the legitimacy of the king’s power is very strong.

This historical research applies historical method. There are three research steps carried out following the historical method. First, heuristic method, it is the stage where the researcher collected archive (Lohanda, 2011) resources in the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI), the archive of Library of Rusli Amran Foundation which is stored at Gusti Asnan’s home, archives and maps that researchers obtained at the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, and archives in the Yogyakarta Ignatius Library. The archives collected are in the form of letters and news compiled in the *Bronnenpublikatie* series of *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-*

*Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, totaling 16 volumes. VOC documents stored in the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI) are now recorded in the inventory book, *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company and Local Institutions in Batavia*. Letters were sent regularly from the local authorities and more intensely in 1700 AD. In 1700 AD, local authorities in West Sumatra, particularly the Inderapura Kingdom, reports to Batavia about the development of trade in the Inderapura Kingdom nearly every year.

Other archives that also strengthen the Inderapura are; *Contract Gesloten door R. Palm met de Regent van Indrapoera, Verbond Indrapoera, Contract Indrapoera*. These archives explain sufficiently about the existence of the Inderapura Kingdom and its relationship with trade on the west coast of Sumatra.

The collection of local sources in the form of *Tambo* and manuscripts about Inderapura was obtained from the collections of Yulizal Yunus and Pramono. Moreover, the archive of the Kerinci *Tambo* was obtained from Dikki Saputra. Two texts discuss comprehensively the Inderapura Kingdom. First, the script of *Muballighul Islam* (abbreviated MI) describes that in 580 H the Arab adventurer arrived in Inderapura and helped develop Islam in this Kingdom. This manuscript illustrates that in the 12th and 13th centuries AD the Inderapura region was crowded by foreign sailors, mainly Arabs (Asnan, 2012). Second, the *Inderapura Manuscript* (abbreviated MIP) describes the geographical Inderapura and plants that are favored by traders. Also, the MIP manuscript contains the bureaucratic structure in the Inderapura Kingdom (Asnan, 2012).

Second, source criticism, the stage where the researcher verifies the sources obtained in the form of archives written by the VOC and sources written by the local community. Both sources are verified for source validation (Sjamsuddin, n.d.). The source criticism procedure is carried out using internal criticism (credibility) and external criticism (determining the authenticity of the source).

Third, interpretation, it is the stage that is done to interpret historical sources that have been verified. These sources are interpreted to obtain an explanation of historical facts that implicitly discuss an event and synthesize the facts obtained through a historical explanation (Abdurrahman, 2011).

Regarding the interpretation, the method used to analyze verified sources is situational analysis (Huda, 2012). The situational analysis consists of two levels. The first level analyzes the process of perpetrators' awareness concerning the interpretation of situations that are thought to cause action. The second level explains the nature of the actor's situational interpretation concerning several biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors that build interpretation and actions that follow the interpretation (Alfian, 1992). In the context of trade, accurate data are obtained by applying the theory of conversion. In this theory, the data are interpreted and divided into three categories. The first category is the sources identified as having information about the arrival of Islam brought by traders. The second category is the data containing information about the acceptance of local traders to Islam brought by traders. The third category is the data included in groups containing information about the role of the sultanate and traders in Islamizing the local community. The data that has been interpreted is considered as a historical fact. Thus, historical facts are created by historical researchers.

Fourth, historiography is the last stage in the writing of history that aims to re-create the totality of past events that happened. Historiography made by compiling a series of facts that have been synthesized in the form of analytical critical historical writing. Through this stage, the author hopes to present a good and scientific historical writing and convey expected value (Alfian, 1992).

## B. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the *Tambo Tinggi* script of the Inderapura Kingdom revealed by Yulizal Yunus (2002) in Inderapura is closely related to the Islamization in the Sriwijaya kingdom. The Sriwijaya kingdom had established trade relations with Arab traders. To strengthen the relationship, the Arab merchants brought the king's son (the Crown Prince) named Indrayana to travel and visit the Arabian Peninsula. The trip was planned for only one round (approximately three months). Unexpectedly, after witnessing the movement of Islam in Arab lands, Indrayana was interested in converting to Islam and postponed his return to study Islam in Arab lands. When he returned to Sriwijaya, his conversion to Islam was known by the king and the entire royal family. The king was angry because Indrayana had dared to leave his Hinduism and Buddhism behind. The king's wrath is extremely increased when Indrayana began to spread Islam

in the kingdom of Sriwijaya, this is what caused Indrayana to be expelled from the kingdom.

Indrayana left the Palace and sailed with a large ship equipped with all provisions. His voyage moved towards the west coast, crossing the Sunda Strait and entering the Indian Ocean. Indrayana went along the coast of the island of Perca, through the ferocity of large oceans, with waves, and terrible storms. Finally, he docked to a port in a two-pronged river mouth flanked by two small islands. Indrayana settled in Pasir Ganting and built a village. He formed a small kingdom named Indrajati and he became the King. This Islamic kingdom developed rapidly and established relations with the kingdoms around Indrajati's kingdom. After the king of Indrayana died, he was replaced by Indransyah Sultan Galomatsyah (Yunus, 2002).

Another source that explains about Islam in Inderapura is *Tambo Alam*, the kingdom of Inderapura. In the *tambo* explained that the Inderapura Kingdom had interacted for a long time with Persia and the Arabian Peninsula. The emergence of Islam in Mecca was also an interesting news in the Inderapura Kingdom. The Sultan Gelomahsyah was ordered to go to Mecca to meet Sayyidina Ali in 656-665 AD. After studying Islam to Sayyidina Ali, the Sultan Gelomahsyah returned to Inderapura by flying *sepelangkahan kaki* (one step) on *shelai lapik pandak* (a mat). After arriving in Inderapura Kingdom, Sultan Gelomahsyah taught the fundamental of Islam to the people and royal authorities. The arrival of Islam in Inderapura was impeded by Hinduism so that the development of Islam in the Inderapura Kingdom was reluctant.

The two traditional sources above provide a general picture of Islam in the Inderapura Kingdom. Both *Tambo* revealed three main pieces of information. Firstly, Islam in the Inderapura Kingdom originated directly from Arabic because Indrayana and Sultan Gelomansyah studied Islam from the source and returned to the Inderapura Kingdom to spread it in the royal environment. Second, the process of Islamization in the Inderapura Kingdom was encouraged by Muslim traders who came to Inderapura. Indrayana embraced Islam because he was influenced by the persuasion of Arab traders who invited him to take a pilgrimage to Arab lands. Likewise, Sultan Gelomansyah also directly studied Islam in Arab lands. His arrival in the Arab lands was caused by the information he heard from Muslim Arab traders about the development of Islam in the Arab land. Referring to *Tambo Tinggi*

Kerajaan Inderapura, Sultan Gelomansyah was the second king after King Indrayana. It indicates that the Inderapura Kingdom under the leadership of Gelomansyah has engaged to Islam because King Indrayana was the bearer of Islam and the founder of the Inderapura Kingdom. The arrival of Sultan Gelomansyah to Arab was to explore further Islam and build an ideological network with Islam in Arab. Third, Islam came to Inderapura at the beginning of Islam's development in Arab lands. Therefore, Sultan Gelomansyah studied Islam directly to caliph Ali bin Abi Talib who ruled in 656 to 661 AD (7th century AD).

Information from the two *Tambo* about the Inderapura Kingdom certainly is not necessarily taken for granted, because this traditional historiography recurrently associating facts and myths. The arrival of Islam to the archipelago expressed in traditional historiography often declares that; First, Islam was brought directly from Arab; Second, Islam was introduced by "professional" teachers and spreaders, those who specifically intended to introduce Islam; Third, the authorities converted to Islam before the people; Fourth, most of these "professional" spreader of Islam came to the archipelago in the 12th century AD (Azra, 2004).

The validity of *Tambo* as a historical source to reconstruct the arrival of Islam in the Inderapura Kingdom is still a debate among historians. However, the historical facts about the year and the spread of Islam in the Inderapura Kingdom are very relevant to the theories developed by other historians. According to Arnold, for example, Arab traders had spread Islam in the archipelago in the 7th century AD even though the record of these activities could not be proven academically. Chinese sources said that in the 7th century AD an Arab trader had become a leader in the Muslim community on the west coast of Sumatra. Some of these Arab traders married local women so a community of Arabs and local people was built (Arnold, 1913). The existence of Islam in the Kingdom of Inderapura in the 7th century AD needs to be considered because the pattern used in spreading Islam was unusual. Instead of inviting the Islam spreader to introduce Islam to the Inderapura Kingdom, the Sultan visited Arab, the birthplace of Islam, and learned Islam comprehensively. However, from the perspective of local sources, this pattern of spreading Islam is considered a new thing in the study of Islam in the archipelago.



In 1838 Salomon Muller (1838) visited Inderapura, it was stated that Islam had developed in Inderapura since 1279. Before this period, Hindu Brahmanism was deeply rooted in this region. If it is true what Regen said to Muller, evidence is required to encourage Muller's report to be a source of history. In relation to the strong influence of Brahmin Hinduism in the Inderapura Kingdom written in Tambo Alam Kerajaan Inderapura, it is also mentioned that the Hindu Religion was the main obstruction to the presence of Islam in the Inderapura Kingdom. Therefore, it can be understood that the role of Islam in the Inderapura Kingdom emerged in the 13th century AD.

Muller's statement needs to be taken into consideration because Islam in the 13th century AD on the east coast of Sumatra had developed in the Kampar River as the center of the Islam expansion. The spreading of Islam then entered the hinterland through the Kuantan river, the Rokan River, the Kampar River, and the Batanghari River. Even though Islam came from *Darek* (land) in the 13th century, it does not mean that Islam has not yet entered the Inderapura Kingdom (Amran, 1981). Islam was not significantly influential because regardless of the fact that the Kingdom authorities had converted to Islam, the religious figures in the Inderapura Kingdom yet came from the Brahmin Hinduism. Arnold emphasized that Islam in the Archipelago began to show its development and experienced rapid Islamization in 12-13 century AD (St Indera, 1970).

Islam in Inderapura increasingly experienced rapid development when Inderapura was under the authority of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalm when Sultan Ali RiajatSjah al-Qahhar ruled in 1337-1368 and conquered the west coast of Sumatra to reach Inderapura. Sultan Ali Riajat Sjah al-Qahhar did not only conquer the Inderapura Kingdom but also spread the scholars to teach Islam to the people on the west coast of Sumatra, particularly in the Kingdom of Inderapura (Zainuddin, 1961). The tradition of delegating *ulama* (Muslim scholar) to the territories of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam was continued. The successor to Sultan Ali Riajat Sjah al-Qahhar was Sultan Aladdin Mansjursjah, a king who was highly passionate to spread Islam throughout the archipelago. To achieve his obsession, the Sultan invited many scholars from Arab and India to teach Islam in the territory of Aceh Darussalam. In 990 AH / 1382 AD. Two Muslim scholars, namely Sheikh Abdul Chair Ibnu Hadjar and Sheikh Muhammad Jamani (Hadi, 2004) who were experts in the science of Sufism, Mantiq, and Monotheism, came to the Inderapura Kingdom. These

scholars were then assigned by the Sultan to give teachings to give enlightenment about Islam in the Kingdom of Inderapura.

The pattern used by the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam in expanding its authority and conquering Kingdoms on the west coast of Sumatra through the Islamic scholars was considered as an unusual pattern. Aceh certainly knows that Islam on the west coast of Sumatra was not too powerful and significant so that Muslim *mubaligh* (missionary) were required to introduce the fundamentals of Islam to the King and the local people. Therefore, this explanation becomes the hypothesis of Christine Dobbin that Islam has achieved the first and longest success among the entrepots of Mingakabau west coast. This place resembles an Islamic city in the Middle East. In the 16th century AD, in the port of Inderapura, it was easy to find port officials with an Islamic degree as well as teachers who were fluent in reading verses of the Koran. Still, in the 18th century AD, many brokers around the coasts and their families had extensive knowledge of Islam (Dobbin, n.d.).

Islam in Inderapura is more likely to be dominated by the palace which means that Islam was a royal religion. A very fundamental change when Islam became a royal religion was the changing of the Kingdom to the Sultanate, as well as the Islamic empire in the archipelago which politically attributed the kingdom with more Islamic names. Azra tends to relate these changes to the influence of the Ottoman Empire (Azra, 2002). In the 17th century AD, Aceh Darussalam had a very intense political relationship with the Ottoman Turks, so it was natural that this political-diplomatic relationship would affect the kingdoms under the authority of the Aceh Darussalam Kingdom. Hamka has his own analysis that the title of the sultan did not originate from the Ottoman Turks. He believes that the change of the title from King to Sultan began in the 13th century AD when Islamic political institutions had begun to rise. Through the conversion of the authorities in the Indonesian archipelago to Islam, the political entity that has been known as the "Kingdom" was officially called "Sultanate" (Hamka, 1981). Referring to sources about Islam in Inderapura as discussed above, it can be concluded that the change of the kingdom to the sultanate in Inderapura was more significant in the 13th century AD, because before Aceh ruled the Inderapura Kingdom, this sultanate has already existed and practiced a government system that was converted to existing Islamic government system.

The historical facts above provide an understanding that the Islamization in the Inderapura Kingdom was achieved through three periods. The first period is the arrival of Islam. Islam came to Inderapura brought by traders who came from Arab, docked at the port of Coromandel, reached Barus and spread towards Inderapura. The second period is the entry of Islam into Inderapura. At this time, Islam was brought by Sufis and professional missionaries. The third period is the development of Islam in the Inderapura Kingdom. During this time, Islam was developed by traders in a cooperation with political forces.

The reconstruction of the Islamization process above is different from the results of de Graaf's research which stated:

“...that Islam was propagated in South-East Asia by three methods: that is by muslim traders in the course of peaceful trade, by preachers and holy men who set out from India and Arabia specifically 1to convert unbievers and increase the knowledge of the faithful and lastly by force and waging of war heathen states” (de Graaf, 1970).

De Graaf's statement emphasizes that the process of Islamization in Southeast Asia was carried out in three ways; by merchants, by Sufis, and through political power expansion. De Graaf's which generalized the process of Islamization in Southeast Asia is not accurate because history is more likely to be peculiar (idiographic). De Graaf's theory might find reality in one area. In spite of that, it will be difficult to find the reality in other areas with different cases. Likewise, in the study of Islam in Inderapura, historical sources do not find any indication of violent conquest during the spread of Islam. Otherwise, history discovered that Islam was expanded by traders who were supported by political forces. De Graaf's theory was also conveyed by Tome Pires when explaining about Islam in Java. According to him, many *moors* killed Javanese authorities and appointed themselves as new authorities. Thus, they became the successor and took over the trade (Pires, n.d.). Western researchers are sometimes not objective in seeing Islam in the Indonesian archipelago and they equate Islam spread in the Middle East with Islam in the Indonesia archipelago, omitting the fact that the spread of Islam in the Indonesia archipelago has its own uniqueness both in the pattern of its spread and the strategy in dominating political power.

## C. CONCLUSION

From the description above, it can be concluded that in the 17-18th century AD in the kingdom of Inderapura the conversion to Islam was mostly succeeded by traders. To elevate this conversion, they married local women and negotiated with the authorized Sultan. The conversion process was carried out through three phases. First, the phase when Islam came to the Inderapura Kingdom, at this stage, traders had an important role in introducing Islam to the people and the royal circles. The Muslim traders who come to the Indonesia archipelago did not only trade but also had the responsibility to spread Islam. Second, the phase of the entry of Islam into the Kingdom of Inderapura, in this phase, the collaboration between merchants and professional missionaries (Sufis) began. When traders entered the inland of Inderapura, many people were interested in Islam. Thus, the merchant asked the Sufis to teach Islam to the public intensely. Third, the phase of the expansion of Islam, at this phase the political power and trade were synergized. Collaboration between merchants and the authorities affects the process of Islamization to be peacefully achieved because the intervention of the King encouraged his people and other kingdoms under his authority to be involved in the Islamization process.

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