

**ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND ITS
CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE**
A Discourse on Selected Issues

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[A Discourse on Selected Issues]

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The Impact of Islam on the Malay Language

Ismail Bin Mamat

This essay is inspired by a theory on the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (hereafter al-Attas). In his influential work, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago*, al-Attas has set forth a definitive general theory on the Islamization of the Archipelago. He argued that the coming of Islam to the Malay Archipelago was the most momentous event for Malays and constituted a new period in their history when the process of Islamization occurred. He first defined the term "Islamization" in his study entitled "*The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri*."¹ A work on the metaphysical system of Hamzah Fansuri, the greatest Malay poet and Sufi who lived at the end of the 16th century. Islamization, according to al-Attas, involves "the liberation of man first from magical, mythological, animistic and national-cultural traditions opposed to Islam, and then from secular control over man's reason and language. The man of Islam, therefore, is he whose reason and language are no longer controlled by magic, mythology, animism, his own national and cultural traditions opposed to Islam, and secularism. He is liberated from both magical and the secular worldviews."²

The process comes through a transformation of key terms and concepts in the worldview of a Muslim. Insofar as the Malay Archipelago is concerned, al-Attas observed three important elements in the Islamization process: first is the transformation of the Malay Hindu-Buddhist aesthetic worldview into the more rational, scientific and universal 'Islamic' worldview; second is the role of language in the processes of Islamization and conversely, de-Islamization; and third is his emphasis on Islamic

¹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1970).

² Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 1978; reprint, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), p. 44.