

Arabic and Indonesian Islamic Literature: A Comparative Study of Aesthetics, Genres, and Cultural Acculturation

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<i>Article history:</i> Received 16-12-2025 Revised 25-05-2026 Accepted 13-06-2026 Correspondence Address: alfaamhammad18@gmail.com	Islamic literature has served as an important medium for expressing <i>tawhid</i>, spirituality, and Muslim cultural identity across diverse societies. This study examines the historical development of Islamic literature in Arabic and Indonesian traditions by comparing their aesthetics, themes, and Islamization strategies. Using a comparative literary approach and descriptive-qualitative library research, the study analyses poetry, prose, <i>hikayat</i>, <i>suluk</i>, and modern Islamic literary works from both traditions. The findings show that Arabic Islamic literature evolved from classical Sufi poetry into contemporary ideological narratives marked by theological complexity, while Indonesian Islamic literature developed through cultural acculturation reflected in <i>hikayat</i>, <i>gurindam</i>, and adaptive popular literature. Although both traditions share transcendental orientations and function as instruments of Islamic dissemination, they differ in aesthetic expression, symbolic structure, and the intensity of Sufi influence. The originality of this study lies in its comparative mapping of the historical and aesthetic intersections between Arabic and Indonesian Islamic literature, contributing to Islamic cultural literacy and cross-cultural literary studies. Keywords: Islamic Literature; Arabic Literary; Indonesia Literary; Comparative
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ملخص	
يمثل الأدب الإسلامي وسيلةً مهمّةً للتعبير عن التوحيد والروحانية والهوية الثقافية الإسلامية في مختلف المجتمعات. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تتبع التطور التاريخي للأدب الإسلامي في التقليدين العربي والإندونيسي من خلال المقارنة	

بين جمالياته وموضوعاته واستراتيجيات أسلمته. واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الأدبي المقارن مع توظيف البحث المكتبي الوصفي التحليلي، وذلك من خلال تحليل الشعر والنثر والحكايات (الحكايات (وكتب السلوك والأعمال الأدبية الإسلامية الحديثة في كلا التقليدين. وتُظهر النتائج أن الأدب الإسلامي العربي تطوّر من الشعر الصوفي الكلاسيكي إلى السرديات الفكرية المعاصرة ذات الأبعاد اللاهوتية العميقة، في حين تطوّر الأدب الإسلامي الإندونيسي عبر مسار التثاقف الثقافي الذي تجلّى في الحكايات والغوريندام والأدب الشعبي الإسلامي المعاصر. وعلى الرغم من اشتراك التقليدين في النزعة الروحية ووظيفتهما بوصفهما وسيلةً للدعوة الإسلامية، فإنهما يختلفان في التعبير الجمالي والبنية الرمزية ومستوى التأثير الصوفي. وتكمن أصالة هذه الدراسة في تقديم خريطة مقارنة للتقاطعات التاريخية والجمالية بين الأدبين الإسلاميين العربي والإندونيسي، بما يساهم في تعزيز محو الأمية الثقافية الإسلامية ودراسات الأدب العابر للثقافات.

كلمات أساسية: الأدب الإسلامي؛ الأدب العربي؛ الأدب الإندونيسي؛ الأدب المقارن

Introduction

Literature serves as a crucial medium for expressing the cultural, ethical, and spiritual values of society (Nahidin & Faroid, 2024). Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, literature functions not merely as artistic expression but also as a cultural instrument of *da'wah* that transmits Islamic worldviews and moral consciousness. Through aesthetic language, symbolism, and narrative imagination, Islamic literature is capable of cultivating spiritual awareness, strengthening social ethics, and reinforcing the principle of *tawhīd* in the lives of readers (Tasnimah et al., 2023). In this sense, literature occupies an important position in the formation of Muslim cultural identity across different historical and geographical contexts.

Scholars generally define Islamic literature (*al-adab al-Islāmī*) as literary expression grounded in Islamic epistemology and ethical values while maintaining artistic and aesthetic quality (Chairullah, 2019). Islamic literature is therefore not confined to explicitly religious texts but also includes poetry, novels, prose, and other literary genres that represent themes of divinity, morality, social justice, suffering, and spiritual struggle. Literary works that embody values such as compassion, justice, resistance to oppression, and consciousness of God may consequently be categorized within the broader framework of Islamic literature (Kholis, 2021). This understanding demonstrates that Islamic literature is both doctrinal and cultural, adapting itself to the socio-historical realities of Muslim societies.

One of the most influential forms of Islamic literature is Sufi literature (*al-adab al-ṣūfī*), which portrays the transcendental relationship between humans and God (Syofyan, 2024). Sufi literary traditions emphasize spiritual purification, divine love, and metaphysical contemplation, positioning God as the ultimate and absolute reality. In the Nusantara context, this tradition developed into *sastra suluk*, literary works narrating the spiritual journeys of Sufi figures during the Islamization period (Salam, 2022). Meanwhile, in the Arab world, Sufi literary expression evolved through classical mystical poetry represented by figures such as Jalaluddin al-Rumi, Ibn al-Farid, and al-Hallaj, whose works profoundly influenced later Islamic literary aesthetics.

The diversity of concepts such as prophetic literature, transcendental literature, and religious literature reflects the epistemological dynamics surrounding Islamic literature in Indonesia (Suraiya, 2017). These terminological variations indicate that Islamic literature is not a monolithic category but a flexible and contextual literary discourse shaped by local cultural experiences and intellectual traditions (Aziz, 2020). Such diversity becomes more visible when Islamic literary traditions in the Arab world and Nusantara are compared, as each region developed distinct literary forms, symbolic

structures, and modes of spiritual representation despite sharing the same Islamic theological foundation.

Previous studies on Islamic literature have generally focused on isolated regional traditions, theological themes, or moral dimensions rather than conducting systematic cross-cultural literary comparisons. Chairullah (2019) and Kholis (2021), for example, primarily discussed the conceptual foundations and ethical orientation of Islamic literature within Indonesian literary discourse, without examining its relationship to broader Arabic literary traditions. Salam (2022) and Syofyan (2024) concentrated on Sufi spirituality and transcendental symbolism, yet their analyses remained confined to local expressions of Islamic mysticism. Meanwhile, scholarship on Arabic Islamic literature has predominantly explored theological narratives, mystical poetics, or ideological discourse within Arab literary contexts.

Although several studies have touched upon Islamization and cultural adaptation in literature, comparative investigations between Arabic and Indonesian Islamic literary traditions remain fragmented and largely thematic. Existing studies rarely examine how Islamic values are aesthetically constructed, symbolically negotiated, and spiritually represented across different cultural

environments shaped by distinct historical experiences. More importantly, little attention has been paid to the intersection between literary aesthetics, Sufi symbolism, and cultural localization in both traditions. This gap positions the present study as an attempt to provide a more integrative comparative framework that connects historical development, aesthetic structure, and spiritual worldview within Arabic and Indonesian Islamic literature.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using the comparative literature method to examine the representation of Islamic values in Arabic and Indonesian literary traditions. The research is grounded in the perspective that Islamic literature is not merely a theological or moral discourse, but also an aesthetic and cultural expression shaped by historical experience, spirituality, and socio-cultural contexts. Accordingly, the study focuses on how Islamic values are aesthetically constructed, spiritually represented, and culturally negotiated within different literary environments (Rickinson & May, 2009).

To ensure methodological rigor and avoid broad generalization, the research corpus is limited to selected representative texts from classical and modern Islamic literary traditions in both Arabic and Indonesian contexts. The

Arabic corpus consists of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī's *Mathnawī*, Ibn al-Fārīd's *Nazm al-Sulūk*, selected mystical writings of Ibn 'Arabī, Najīb al-Kīlānī's *'Azrā' Jākartā*, and selected novels of Najīb Maḥfūz. Meanwhile, the Indonesian corpus includes Hamzah Fansuri's Sufi poetry, *Suluk Wujil*, *Suluk Bonang*, Raja Ali Haji's *Gurindam Dua Belas*, Ahmad Fuadi's *Negeri 5 Menara*, HAMKA's *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah*, Ahmad Tohari's *Kubah*, and A.A. Navis's *Robohnya Surau Kami*. These texts were purposively selected based on their strong representation of Islamic spirituality, literary influence, historical significance, and socio-cultural reception within Islamic literary traditions.

The primary data of this study consist of poetic texts, prose narratives, *hikayat*, *suluk*, philosophical writings, and modern Islamic novels drawn from the selected corpus. Secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, manuscripts, and previous scholarly studies related to Islamic literature, comparative literature, Sufi aesthetics, and cultural Islamization. Data collection was conducted through library research and document analysis by examining the historical, philosophical, spiritual, and aesthetic dimensions embedded within the literary texts.

The analysis was carried out descriptively, comparatively, and

interpretatively through several stages: text selection, thematic classification, comparative reading, and critical interpretation. The study specifically analyses themes of *tawhīd*, spirituality, morality, social criticism, Sufi symbolism, and cultural adaptation, while also examining aesthetic structures, narrative strategies, and modes of Islamization in both literary traditions. Comparative analysis focuses on identifying patterns of continuity, transformation, convergence, and divergence between Arabic and Indonesian Islamic literature in terms of spiritual worldview, literary aesthetics, and socio-cultural function.

To ensure data validity, the study applies source triangulation by comparing interpretations across various academic references, consulting experts in Arabic and Indonesian literature, and verifying analytical findings against original texts and supporting scholarly literature. This approach is intended to strengthen interpretative accuracy and maintain analytical consistency throughout the comparative process.

Result and Discussion

Typology and Comparative Dynamics of Islamic Literature

Based on the literature review, Islamic literature can be classified into several major genres that reflect the relationship between aesthetic expression and ideal Islamic values. This classification demonstrates how Islamic

teachings are represented in various forms of literary works in both the Arab world and Indonesia. Five main genres have been identified: literature of Islamic teachings and spirituality, literature of praise for Islamic figures, literature of Islamic movements and institutions, Islamic social criticism literature, and popular religious literature (Kamil, 2023).

Islamic Teachings and Spirituality Literature

This genre emphasizes the function of literature as a medium for internalizing *tawhīd*, ethics, and Islamic spirituality (Syarifuddin et al., 2025). Its main themes include mystical experiences, the search for life's meaning, and the human relationship with God through Sufism. In the classical Arab tradition, works by Abu al-‘Athahiyah and Rabi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah highlight themes of *zuhd* (asceticism) and worldly impermanence, while Jalaluddin Rumi's poetry conveys universal messages of divine love and interfaith tolerance (Nastiar, 2023).

In Indonesia, works by Hamzah Fansuri and the *suluk* of Sunan Bonang present a synthesis of Sufi teachings and local culture. These works demonstrate literature's role as a bridge between aesthetic expression and spiritual awareness, rooted in the principles of *tawhīd* and *ma‘rifah* (Purnomo, n.d.).

Literature of Praise for Islamic Figures

This genre serves to strengthen religious identity and the collective memory of Muslims by honoring exemplary figures (Ahmed, 2021). Praise works such as *al-Barzanji* and *al-Burdah* by al-Bushairi show reverence for Prophet Muhammad SAW while emphasizing the importance of prophetic exemplars in social life. In the Nusantara, *manāqib* texts of Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani, recited in various rituals, demonstrate the localization of religious expression. This genre highlights the performative dimension of Islamic literature: the works are not only read but also recited as part of cultural worship and as a means of moral cultivation within the community.

Literature on Islamic Movements and Institutions

This genre highlights the role of literature as a medium for articulating Islamic ideology, representing institutions, movements, and social practices of Muslim communities (Hasan et al., 2018). Works such as *Azra Jakarta* by Najib al-Kailani depict Islamic political struggles as symbols of resistance against injustice, while *Negeri Lima Menara* by Ahmad Fuadi emphasizes the role of pesantren as educational institutions integrating religious values with modern advancement (Aldiansyah et al., 2023). In the Malay tradition, *Bustan as-Salatin* holds historical significance and also conveys Islamic perspectives on power and

morality. Through this genre, literature functions both as a documentary and ideological instrument in shaping the narrative of Islamic civilization.

Islamic Societal Critique Literature

Islamic social critique literature serves as a medium of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* within socio-cultural contexts (Abdurrahman, 2003). This genre demonstrates moral sensitivity toward societal deviation, injustice, and hypocrisy that contradict Islamic values. In the Arab tradition, *al-Luzūmiyyāt* by al-Ma'arri criticizes the misuse of religion and commercialization of worship, while *Zuqāq al-Midaq* by Naguib Mahfouz reflects spiritual stagnation in urban society. In Indonesia, the short story *Robohnya Surau Kami* by A.A. Navis and the novel *Jihad Terlarang* by Matahari Timoer reveal the irony of religiosity devoid of social awareness. These works underscore the ethical function of Islamic literature as moral critique of social realities that deviate from justice and balance.

Popular and Religious Cultural Literature

In addition to the four main genres, popular religious literature presents Islamic values through modern and widely accessible media. These include song lyrics, films, and popular novels that convey da'wah messages through contemporary aesthetic approaches. For instance, religious songs by Bimbo such as

Tuhan, or works by Rhoma Irama like *Haji* and *Kiamat*, communicate messages of tawhīd and morality through expressive musical language. This phenomenon demonstrates the adaptive expansion of Islamic literature to evolving media and public tastes while maintaining its spiritual and educational functions.

The classification above illustrates that Islamic literature encompasses a wide spectrum of expression, ranging from contemplative Sufi forms to socially critical and popular works. Each genre reflects the efforts of Muslims to affirm their spiritual, social, and cultural identity through aesthetic language. Thus, the diversity of forms and functions of Islamic literature not only reflects the richness of the global Islamic literary tradition but also underscores literature's role as a medium for dialectics between divine values and human realities across cultures.

Literature Aligned with Islamic Values

Literary works that do not explicitly include Islamic symbols or terminology can still be categorized as aligned with Islamic values if they convey themes of goodness, humanity, and universal virtue consistent with Islamic principles. This view is based on the *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* principle “*al-aṣl fī al-ashyā’ al-ibāḥah*” (everything is permissible unless explicitly prohibited). Accordingly, literary works that do not contradict Islamic values can be regarded as

part of the Islamic literary corpus (Sunhaji, 2015).

A concrete example is *Laskar Pelangi* by Andrea Hirata, which *depicts* the educational struggles of Muhammadiyah schoolchildren in Belitung, pursued with religious zeal and sincerity. Although not explicitly propagating Islam, the work reflects Islamic ethos through dedication to learning, moral integrity, and social service. In the Arab tradition, Ṭāhā Ḥusain's works, such as *al-Majdūlīn* and *al-Ayyām*, also embody humanistic and educational values aligned with Islamic principles, despite lacking formal religious instruction.

Furthermore, Abdurrahman Ra'fat al-Basyā's concept of *at-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī* (Islamic worldview) broadens the scope of Islamic literature into conceptual and thematic domains (Hikmawati, 2018). She divides the representation of Islam in literary works into three main dimensions: (1) *At-taṣawwur al-islāmī li al-Khāliq ‘Azza wa Jalla: representation of God as the Supreme Being, Creator, and Sustainer of the universe*; (2) *At-taṣawwur al-islāmī li al-Kawn: Islamic perspective on the universe as an orderly system under divine will*; and (3) *At-taṣawwur al-islāmī li al-Insān: depiction of humans as noble, rational beings with the responsibility of stewardship on Earth*.

This paradigm provides an ideological and aesthetic foundation enabling Muslim authors to express a comprehensive divine perspective through the harmonious relationship between humans, God, and nature. Consequently, the classification of Islamic literature is not only thematic but also encompasses philosophical dimensions that enrich the interpretative horizons of literary works from an Islamic perspective.

Islamic Literature within the Wealth of Arabic Literature

The classical Arab period marks the early emergence of Islamic literary forms, particularly during the Prophetic era. Early Muslim poets such as Ḥassan bin Tābit, Ka‘ab bin Mālik, ‘Abdullāh bin Rawāḥah, and an-Nābighah al-Ja‘dī produced works praising Prophet Muhammad SAW, affirming tawḥīd, and depicting significant events in early Islamic history (Murtadho, 2025). For instance, Ka‘ab bin Mālik composed poetry about the Battle of Uhud, while an-Nābighah al-Ja‘dī expressed devotion to Allah SWT through spiritual verses (Kamil, 2022).

Praise poetry for Prophet Muhammad became the most influential genre, emerging as a response to satirical poetry (*hijā’*) directed at the Prophet by Quraysh poets. Ḥassan bin Tābit, the Prophet’s court poet, distinguished himself with *Banāt Su‘ād*, portraying the Prophet as a

guiding light in the era of darkness. This tradition continued through al-Būshīrī’s *Qaṣīdah al-Burdah* and al-Barzanjī’s *Qaṣīdah al-Barzanji*, still recited in *dhikr* assemblies and Mawlid celebrations across countries including Indonesia (Saukani & Hakim, 2024).

Beyond praise poetry, classical Arabic literature also includes works emphasizing ethics and spirituality. ‘Alī bin Abī Tālib, for instance, is renowned for his eloquence and spiritual depth through collections of sermons and advice in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, integrating tawḥīd, philosophical reflections, and rhetorical beauty. This tradition later evolved into Sufi literature, emphasizing moral values such as *zuhd* (asceticism) and divine love (*maḥabbah*), expressed through poetry and prose. Key figures include Ibn ‘Aṭā’illah as-Sakandarī, who conveyed spiritual wisdom through aphorisms:

العطاء من الخلق حرمان, و المنع من الله إحسان

"The offerings of beings are impediments, whereas the tribulations of Allah are benevolent."

Subsequent figures include al-Ḥallāj (858–922 CE), expressing the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence) in mystical poetry (Iyer, 2023); Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (973–1057 CE), critical of societal morality; and ‘Umar Khayyām (1048–1131

CE), popularizing the *rubā'īyyāt* form to Persia and the Nusantara. During the 12th–13th centuries, Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240 CE) and Ibn al-Fāriḍ (1181–1233 CE) emphasized the universal dimension of divine love, elevating Sufi literature to the pinnacle of Islamic spiritual expression (Rahimi & Siahkuhian, 2024).

In the modern era, Arab Islamic literature has become increasingly diverse. Sufi literature has been revitalized by poets such as Ahmad Ṣāfi an-Najjāfī (1894–1977 CE), while social critique literature emerged through works by Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī (*Yaum al-Ḥisāb*) and Najīb Maḥfūz (*Khān al-Khalīlī*), portraying moral and spiritual conflicts in urban Egyptian society (Iyer, 2023).

Another modern figure, Najīb al-Kailānī (1931–1995 CE), combined Islamic idealism with social realism in his novels *‘Aẓrā’ Jākartā* (1974) and *Dumū‘ al-Amīr* (1980), highlighting ideological struggles and tensions between authority and Islamic spiritual principles. Beyond prose and poetry, modern Islamic literary expression also extends to religious music (*nasyid*), such as works by Maher Zain and Sami Yusuf, which convey love for the Prophet, closeness to God, and moral and humanitarian messages (Elias, 2018).

This transformation illustrates that Arab Islamic literature continues to evolve with

changing times while remaining anchored in spiritual and ethical values as its aesthetic and moral foundation. The pinnacle of modern Arab Islamic literature is exemplified in the works of Najīb al-Kailānī. In *‘Aẓrā’ Jākartā* (1974), he addresses ideological struggles in Indonesia, while *Dumū‘ al-Amīr* (1980) depicts the tension between power and Islamic spiritual principles. These works reflect the intellectual maturity of modern Arab Islamic literature, demonstrating its capacity to engage contemporary social issues without detaching from the foundational values of revelation.

Moreover, beyond prose and poetry, modern expressions of Islamic literature in the form of religious music (*nasyid*), including songs by Maher Zain and Sami Yusuf, can be regarded as contemporary religious poetry, conveying devotion to the Prophet, closeness to God, and messages of morality and humanity. This evolution confirms that Arab Islamic literature continues to adapt to contemporary contexts while maintaining spiritual and ethical principles as its core aesthetic and moral foundation (Elias, 2018).

Islamic Literature within the Context of Indonesian Literary Heritage

The introduction of Islam to the Nusantara in the 7th century CE significantly influenced local language, culture, and literature. Arabic, initially used as a liturgical

language for Qur'anic recitation and religious practice, evolved into a language of knowledge, facilitating the dissemination of Islamic texts through networks of scholars and Muslim traders. This development marked the beginning of classical Islamic literature in Indonesia from the 13th century onwards, particularly along the coasts of Sumatra and Java.

Literary forms that emerged during this period included *kitab* (religious treatises), *suluk*, *hikayat*, and works that integrated Islamization with Hindu-Javanese traditions. A key figure was Sunan Bonang (Syekh Makhdum Ibrahim, d. 1530 CE), a pioneer of *serat suluk* containing Sufi poetry on spiritual journeys toward God. His works, such as *Suluk Khalifah*, *Suluk Regol*, and *Suluk Wujil*, were written in Javanese *macapat* verse, blending local symbolism with Sufi metaphysics. The use of Arabic terms such as *faqīr* and *maḥabbah* marked a linguistic transition from Old Javanese to Central Javanese, reflecting an effort to contextualize Islamic teachings for local comprehension.

Classical Javanese Islamic literature also resulted from Islamizing Hindu-Javanese narrative sources, such as the *Mahabharata*. Sunan Kalijaga (d. mid-15th century) reinterpreted the *Bratayuda* epic as *Brantayudha Jayabinangun*, a spiritual allegory emphasizing the struggle to uphold justice.

Characters of the Pandawa symbolized the pillars of Islam, while the magical weapon Kali Mahusada was transformed into *Kalimasada* (the shahādah). Each Pandawa figure, Yudhistira, Bima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sadewa, symbolized the shahādah, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage, respectively.

By the late 16th to early 17th century, Hamzah Fansuri emerged as a pioneer of Malay Sufi poetry. In his four-line AAAA rhymed *pantun*, he explored themes of *fanā'* (self-annihilation), divine love, and mystical ecstasy. His works adapted Arabic terms and Sufi concepts from figures such as Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and al-Ḥallāj into classical Malay, incorporating over 800 Arabic terms across approximately 400 lines of poetry. During the same period, *Hikayat Syah Mardan* blended Indian heroic tales with Sufi allegories emphasizing Islamic moral values.

In the 18th century, Yasadipura II of Surakarta reinterpreted the *Dewa Ruci* narrative as an allegory of spiritual journey. The character Bima's quest for the water of life symbolized self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment. Sufi-inspired stories about Syekh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jailani were widely adapted into prose and *pupuh* poetry, still recited in Javanese religious ceremonies, illustrating the enduring influence of Sufism on spiritual consciousness.

The Malay Islamic literary tradition reached its peak in the 19th century with Raja Ali Haji of Riau. Through *Gurindam Dua Belas*, he emphasized spiritual and social values, including the importance of knowledge, divine awareness (*ma'rifah*), ethics, worship, and social responsibility. He also encouraged poets to include their names in their works, highlighting individual accountability in literary creation. This period demonstrates that Nusantara Islamic literature not only absorbed global Islamic traditions but successfully integrated them with local wisdom, establishing the foundation of Indonesian literary aesthetics and spirituality.

In the 20th century, Indonesian Islamic literature underwent transformations in form and orientation. Sufi themes merged with modern reflection and social critique. Sanusi Pane (1905–1968) in *Madah Kelana* expressed the spiritual quest toward God, centering the heart as the locus of divine awareness. Amir Hamzah (1911–1946) in his poem *Pada-Mu Jua* conveyed human existential longing before God, continuing the classical Malay Sufi poetic tradition.

Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA, 1908–1981) expanded the horizon of Islamic literature through novels such as *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah* (1936) and *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*,

combining da'wah, social critique, and Islamic values. His novels narrate love and suffering while conveying moral messages about tawhīd, justice, and individual freedom.

During the Angkatan 45 period, religious expression became more existential. Chairil Anwar (1922–1949) in *Doa* depicted spiritual surrender, while Amal Hamzah wrote *Desire is God* (Rosidi, 2018), reflecting the struggle between reason and desire in line with the Islamic concept of *jihād an-nafs*. In prose, Achdiat Karta Mihardja's *Atheis* illustrated the clash between traditional Islam and modern rationalism, while A.A. Navis in *Robohnya Surau Kami* critiqued religiosity lacking social sensitivity.

The 1970s–1980s witnessed increasing diversity in Indonesian Islamic literature. Danarto's *Dinding Anak* introduced a magical-Sufi symbolic style, Kuntowijoyo developed the concept of prophetic literature through *Khotbah di Atas Bukit* (1976), emphasizing prophetic mission in literary work, and Ahmad Tohari's *Kubah* (1980) depicted the ideological and spiritual transformation of characters from political activism to religious consciousness. Abdul Hadi W.M.'s poetry (*Tuhan Begitu Dekat*) carried strong Sufi undertones, while Sutardji Calzoum Bachri explored spiritual symbolism experimentally.

Islamic literature also manifested in music and popular culture. Rhoma Irama's song *Katakan Tuhan Itu Satu* and religious songs by Taufiq Ismail (*Tuhan* by Bimbo; *Ketika Tangan dan Kaki Berkata* by Chrisye) expressed Qur'anic values in modern media. Meanwhile, works addressing social issues and radicalism, such as *Demi Allah Aku Jadi Teroris* (Damien Dematra, 2009), *Temanku Teroris?* (Noor Huda Ismail, 2010), and *Jihad Terlarang* (Mataharitimoer, 2021), reflect contemporary spiritual and social challenges.

In the contemporary era, Islamic literature has become more communicative and accessible. Asma Nadia, in the short story *20 Tahun Cinta*, addresses moral values and self-discipline in social life, while Ahmadun Yosi Herfanda's *Takbir Para Malaikat* portrays characters striving to awaken religious consciousness among urban communities. These works demonstrate that modern Indonesian Islamic literature not only expresses personal faith but also serves as a medium for cultural reflection and social critique, representing the spiritual dynamics of society amid globalization.

Comparative Analysis of Arabic and Indonesian Islamic Literature

This comparative study aims to examine patterns of expression, thematic approaches, and aesthetic orientations in two Islamic literary

traditions: Arabic and Indonesian literature. Both traditions are rooted in the same source of values, Islamic teachings, but they have developed within distinct cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. These differing backgrounds generate points of convergence in spirituality and social function, while also producing divergences in aesthetic structure and expressive strategies.

Significant Parity

A fundamental similarity between the two traditions lies in their spiritual orientation and transcendental consciousness as the core of Islamic literary expression. Both Arabic and Indonesian literature are grounded in the principles of *tawhīd*, ethical awareness, and existential longing for God. In the Arabic literary corpus, this is evident in the works of Sufi poets such as Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyah, Jalaluddin Rumi, Ibn al-Farid, and Ibn 'Arabi, who articulate divine love (*'ishq ilāhī*) and mystical experiences of *fanā'*, the annihilation of the self in the presence of God.

A similar spiritual sensibility is reflected in Indonesian tradition through the Javanese *suluk* of Sunan Bonang, the poetry of Hamzah Fansuri, and the religious poems of Amir Hamzah, which position the search for divine meaning at the center of human existence. Ideologically, both traditions view literature as

a contemplative path for understanding the relationship between humans and God.

Both traditions also utilize literature as a medium for *da'wah* and social transformation. In the Arabic context, works such as *Qaṣīdah al-Burdah* by al-Bushairi and the novels of Najīb al-Kailānī illustrate Islam's moral and political function as a force against social decay and ideological oppression. Similarly, in the Indonesian tradition, this function is apparent in Kuntowijoyo's *Khotbah di Atas Bukit* and Ahmad Tohari's *Kubah*, which convey moral messages and social critique within an Islamic ethical framework.

Contextual and Aesthetic Disparities

The primary differences between the two traditions lie in cultural context, language function, and aesthetic orientation. Arabic Islamic literature developed in the birthplace of Islam, where Arabic served as both the language of revelation and a medium of Islamic intellectual discourse. Consequently, Arabic literature exhibits a strong religious-intellectual character, with universal Sufi symbolism, complex rhetorical structures, and profound philosophical argumentation.

In contrast, Indonesian Islamic literature evolved in the periphery of the Islamic world through processes of *da'wah* and cultural acculturation. Its expression is syncretic and local, integrating *tawhīd* teachings with

regional symbolism. The languages used, Malay, Javanese, and other local tongues, were crafted as cultural *da'wah* media through *macapat*, *hikayat*, *gurindam*, and *pantun*. Thus, Arabic Islamic literature represents Islam as a philosophical system, whereas Indonesian Islamic literature interprets it as a practical cultural and spiritual practice.

In Arabic tradition, Islamization occurred internally, as the language and literary structures had been integrated with Islamic civilization since the early period. The aesthetics and symbolism of classical Arabic poetry (*qasidah*) were Islamized during the Prophet's era through the works of poets like Hassan bin Thabit and Ka'ab bin Malik. Conversely, Islamization in Indonesia was external and adaptive. Figures such as Sunan Kalijaga Islamized the *Mahabharata* narrative into a spiritual allegory of *tawhīd*, without erasing Hindu symbols, but reinterpreting them to reinforce Islamic values. This demonstrates that Indonesian Islamic literature developed through a culturally hermeneutic approach, while Arabic Islamic literature remained more textual and doctrinal.

Genre Variation and Media Transformation

Traditionally, Arabic Islamic literature is dominated by poetry (*qasidah*), philosophical prose, spiritual epics, and ideological novels featuring Sufi principles, praise of the Prophet,

social critique, and modern Islamic political dynamics. Recent developments also include musical expressions such as contemporary *qasidah* and *nasyid* by Maher Zain and Sami Yusuf, combining religious lyrics with modern musical styles without diminishing spiritual depth.

Indonesian Islamic literature, in contrast, exhibits more diverse and flexible forms. Genres such as Sufi poetry, *suluk*, *hikayat*, pesantren novels, social-religious short stories, and devotional songs reflect the dynamics of modern Islamic literature. Adaptation to popular media, through works by Bimbo, Rhoma Irama, and collaborations like Taufiq Ismail–Chrisye, extends *da'wah* reach via communicative and accessible mediums. This indicates that Indonesian Islamic literature functions not only as a religious expression but also as a cultural vehicle for conveying spiritual values and social critique.

Comparing the two traditions affirms that both are rooted in the spirituality of *tawhīd*, yet differ in cultural expression and communicative function. Arabic Islamic literature is theosophical, reflective, and conceptual, whereas Indonesian Islamic literature is dialogical, adaptive, and practical. Together, they form two complementary poles in the global Islamic literary heritage: one reinforcing theological depth, the other

broadening Islam's cultural outreach in multicultural societies.

Comparative Synthesis Based on *At-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī*

To further sharpen the comparative analysis, the findings can be synthesized through Abdurrahman Ra'fat al-Basyā's concept of *at-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī*, which conceptualizes Islamic worldview through three interconnected dimensions: God (*al-Khāliq*), the universe (*al-Kawn*), and human beings (*al-Insān*). This framework helps explain that Arabic and Indonesian Islamic literature share a common theological foundation rooted in *tawhīd*, while simultaneously developing different aesthetic structures, symbolic mediations, and cultural expressions.

In the dimension of *al-Khāliq*, both Arabic and Indonesian Islamic literature position God as the center of spiritual consciousness and literary imagination. Arabic Islamic literature, particularly in the works of Jalaluddin Rumi, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and Ibn 'Arabī, represents God through metaphysical contemplation, divine love, and mystical union. Meanwhile, Indonesian Islamic literature articulates the divine through spiritual journey, ethical devotion, and localized Sufi symbolism as reflected in *suluk* traditions and Hamzah Fansuri's poetry. Although both traditions emphasize *tawhīd*, transcendence, and spiritual

longing toward God, Arabic literature tends to develop philosophical and metaphysical representations, whereas Indonesian literature is more symbolic-cultural and adaptive to local traditions.

In the dimension of *al-Kawn*, both literary traditions perceive nature as a manifestation of divine signs (*āyāt*) and spiritual reflection. Arabic Islamic literature frequently portrays the universe as a cosmic manifestation of divine order and metaphysical reality through abstract and cosmological symbolism. In contrast, Indonesian Islamic literature interprets nature through local cosmology, ecological harmony, and indigenous cultural imagery integrated into Islamic spirituality. This distinction indicates that Arabic Islamic literature remains closely connected to philosophical cosmology, while Indonesian Islamic literature develops through stronger processes of cultural localization and contextual adaptation.

Meanwhile, in the dimension of *al-Insān*, both traditions portray humans as moral and spiritual beings responsible for ethical conduct and self-purification. Arabic Islamic literature often emphasizes existential struggle and mystical perfection, depicting humans as spiritual beings striving toward divine proximity. Conversely, Indonesian Islamic literature tends to represent humans within

communal and cultural realities, emphasizing moral negotiation, social harmony, and contextual religiosity. As a result, Arabic Islamic literature appears more contemplative and metaphysical, whereas Indonesian Islamic literature develops in a more dialogical, performative, and socially adaptive direction.

The similarities and differences between the two traditions are also visible in their da'wah functions and aesthetic orientations. In Arabic Islamic literature, literary works frequently function as theological reflection and ideological resistance, characterized by qasidah traditions, mystical symbolism, and rhetorical density. Meanwhile, Indonesian Islamic literature functions more as cultural Islamization and social education through adaptive literary forms such as *hikayat*, *suluk*, *pantun*, and other performative narratives. Although both traditions employ symbolism and spirituality as central literary devices, Arabic aesthetics tend to be more philosophical-textual, while Indonesian aesthetics are more performative-cultural and accommodative toward local traditions.

The synthesis above confirms that Arabic and Indonesian Islamic literature are interconnected through the same transcendental worldview while differing in cultural articulation and literary mediation. Arabic Islamic literature tends to prioritize

metaphysical depth and theological abstraction, whereas Indonesian Islamic literature develops through adaptive cultural negotiation and socially grounded spirituality. This finding demonstrates that Islamic literature is not a monolithic literary category, but a dynamic and culturally negotiated expression of Islamic civilization across different historical and geographical settings.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Islamic literature in both Arabic and Indonesian traditions represents a dynamic cultural expression shaped by Islamic values, literary aesthetics, and historical processes of cultural interaction. Although both traditions are rooted in the same theological foundation of *tawhīd*, they developed through different literary trajectories and socio-cultural environments, producing distinct genres, symbolic structures, and aesthetic orientations. Arabic Islamic literature tends to emphasize philosophical reflection, Sufi symbolism, and rhetorical complexity, while Indonesian Islamic literature evolves through cultural adaptation and localization reflected in *hikayat*, *suluk*, *pantun*, religious songs, and modern Islamic narratives.

The findings reveal that Islamic literature functions not only as religious expression but also as a medium of cultural negotiation and social transformation. In the

Arabic tradition, literature often serves as metaphysical contemplation and ideological critique, whereas in the Indonesian tradition it operates more dialogically through the integration of Islamic teachings with local cultural forms. This process of cultural acculturation enabled Islamic literary expression in Nusantara to become more adaptive, inclusive, and socially accessible without losing its spiritual orientation.

Furthermore, this study confirms that the diversity of Islamic literary forms reflects the flexibility of Islamic civilization in responding to different cultural and historical settings. Islamic literature therefore should not be understood as a monolithic literary category, but rather as a plural and evolving tradition continuously reconstructed through intercultural interaction, aesthetic creativity, and spiritual interpretation.

For future research, more specific studies are needed on literary genres and symbolic systems that have not been comprehensively explored in this article. Future scholars may conduct structural-semiotic analyses of particular genres such as *suluk*, *hikayat*, Sufi poetry, contemporary Islamic novels, or digital Islamic literature to examine narrative strategies, symbolic representations, and cultural adaptation in greater depth. Further comparative studies may also investigate the

transformation of Islamic literary aesthetics within popular culture, social media, and transnational Muslim literary networks in the contemporary digital era.

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