Islam in Southeast Asia is complex and dynamic. Islam in Southeast Asia is significant not only as a religion but also as a political force. Religion and politics not only interact with each other in this area, one influences the other strongly to determine the shape of things. Religion, in fact, has become the chief instrument of assertion of one's identity in a multi-religious society and that of political legitimacy for ruling either and status quo's power. In Southeast Asia, Islam is the largest religion and it is the religion of predominant majority in some of the countries of this region like Indonesia and Malaysia, and of significant minority in some other countries like Thailand, Myanmar and the Philippines.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter deals with the historical background of socio-cultural of the region before the coming of Islam. The spread of Islam to various parts of coastal India set the stage for its further expansion to the islands of Southeast Asia. Arab traders and sailors regularly visited the port of Southeast Asia long before they converted to Islam.

The second chapter of the thesis analyzes Islam in contemporary Southeast Asia. In contrast to the Arab countries, Islam in Southeast Asia is far more multi-religious and multi-cultural. This diversity is exemplified in Muslim majority countries such as Brunei, and in Indonesia and Malaysia with their significant non-Muslim minorities as well as the Muslim minorities' communities of Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia,
and Myanmar. In Indonesia, Islam has become more visible in the political and institutional landscape, from the government to NGOs. Multiple and diverse voices discuss and debate the status and role of Islam in Indonesian society. Muslim scholars and professionals in Indonesia are producing some of the most creative thinking on religious and social reform, democratization, pluralism, and women’s rights in the Muslim world. In the mainland Southeast Asia Muslims are in minority position like Cambodia, Myanmar (Burma), the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. With the exceptions of Cambodia and Singapore, heightened ethno-religious identity in the face of discrimination by the dominant culture has led to abortive separatist violence which has been met with repressive reaction.

The third chapter discusses the role of Islam in Malaysian politics as well as the development of political Islam in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society of Malaysia.

The fourth chapter is the central theme of this thesis that is to examine and analyze the success and failure of Islamic religio-political movements in multi-cultural society of Malaysia. The failure of Islamic political party (PAS) to relate the universalistic vision of Islam to its socio-political situation has alienated the non-Muslim communities and strained its relationship with the Chinese-based political parties. PAS's parochialism and its inability to forge a working relationship with non-Malay political parties continue to be a stumbling block in its efforts to gain wider support among the Malaysian
electorate, both Malay and non-Malay. It is undeniable that the Islamic movement has been an essential force in the development of Malaysian society. PAS and the array of smaller organizations and groups have been actively involved in moulding social values and attitudes, and shaping public institutions and policies. Islamic organizations and groups have been reacting to policies and actions taken by UMNO leaders rather than playing a proactive role. The posture adopted by the Islamic groups is often apologetic, aimed at mitigating the negative influences of the developmental policies promoted by the government, rather than advancing an alternative developmental vision of their own.

The concluding chapter brings together the nature of Islam in Southeast Asia till political Islam in Malaysia.