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The Present Image of Society in The Novels of National Writers

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Abstract

Literary works are sociocultural documents that display the image of a society concerning its environment. The objectives of the study was to identify and analyze the image of society in the novels of national writers. In this study, the researcher examined the culture of society then and now, which was described in the novels of national writers in Malaysia such as S. Othman Kelantan in his novel entitled *Wajah Seorang Wanita* (The Face of a Woman) and *Ruang Perjalanan* (Travel Space). Additionally, the novel *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* (Thorny Path) by Shahnun Ahmad. The culture that surrounded the society in Malaysia was related to the spirit of the neighborhood, family, and traditional medicine. The spirit of neighborhood among the Malay community in the village was still strong. They cared about each other. From the aspect of family, the Malay community in the village respected each other between family members. The wife would help the husband in continuing their family survival. However, in the novel *Ruang Perjalanan*, S. Othman Kelantan showed that there was a rift in family relationships when family matters were managed by the 'Ciku' robot. This was symbolic of the modernization that was changing the values of tradition.

Keywords: Literature, Image, Society, Environment

Introduction

From time to time, Malaysian society undergoes life changes. Advances in science and technology have greatly influenced people's lives. Every society will experience a life change. Change occurs when there is an outside influence entering the life of a society which then triggers new things.

In this regard, Malaysian society cannot also escape life changes. There is no denying that life changes affect the traditional values that have been built by society for so long. In general, the culture of life that was influenced by the tradition is the custom or culture of life that is passed down from one generation to another through the process of socialization.

According to Selat (1997: 35) tradition also determines the values and morals of the society, the rules about what is right and wrong, which ones should be praised and glorified, and which should be despised and hated by society. The concept of tradition also includes a world view that involves beliefs about the question of life and death and the occurrence of nature and its

creatures. In other words, the concept of tradition is closely related to cultures, such as the belief system, values, and the ways of thinking of a society.

Accordingly, culture or *thaqafah* (Arabic), *budaya* (Malay), or *kultur* (German) is human. The question of culture is the question of human beings. Only humans are cultured, animals are uncultured. The essential difference between man and animal lies not in his body but his spirit. The spirit manifests itself in the mind which is the connection between the mind and the spiritual feelings. Therefore, from the spirit, a definition of culture can be formulated, that is, the way of thinking and the way of feeling that expresses itself in the whole life of a group of people forming a society. This definition can be shortened by the way of thinking, the way of feeling in life, and can still be further summarized as a way of life (Gazalba,1983: 26-27).

In conclusion, culture is a "way of life". So for the Malay community, the tradition of 'belonging (*semangat kekitaan*)' is very strong. The spirit of *gotong-royong* (communal work), working together with each other is a manifestation of this spirit. In this paper, the author will look at the culture of life of society then and now in the novels of national writers.

The objectives of the study was to:

1. identify the image of society in the novels of national writers.
2. analyze the image of society in the novels of national writers

The Culture of Society's Life Then and Now in the Novels of National Literati Neighborliness

In the novel *Wajah Seorang Wanita*, S. Othman Kelantan's work recalled the village community in the past that practiced the spirit of a strong neighborhood. They always said greetings to each other no matter where they were. Their closeness was clearly illustrated by the author, even at the well in wet clothes, they would greet each other. They would talk a few words and say hello. In addition, to strengthen the *siratul rahim* (bonding), they visited each other.

Here, the genuine Muslim neighbors are still intact. There are no boundaries. No job boundary. No boundaries of ranks, class, or caste. No boundaries of status and stratification of the middle class, technocrats, and bureaucrats.

(pg.2)

They only came to show the presence of unity and brotherhood that had been forged for decades without any flaws. That's it. They didn't have to think about the turmoil of the country. They didn't have to think about dire situations in international relations.

(pg.3)

Based on the quote above, it could be seen that they had a strong sense of neighborhood. However, from another aspect, it could be seen that the village community still practices a closed attitude. In every conversation they had when they met, they never talked about things out of their daily lives. Even if they met in a coffee shop, the issue of their discussion was 'about tobacco, about fish, about anchovies, about the son of that one working in the big city,

the grandson of someone marrying a district officer, about whatever that was light and didn't add their memory load. Here we could see the way of thinking of the society was still behind. They didn't even think about how to progress in life.

However, the Malay community in the village was very concerned about each other. They were quick to help if any of their neighbors were in trouble. This could be seen when Siti Musalmah's son Muhammad was ill.

Even when in the kitchen, Siti Musalmah could not do anything well without the help of Mek Nar and Siti Bidah and some other people whom she was too lazy to remember. They had prepared something necessary for lunch. Actually, Siti Musalmah did not have to bother to cook in the kitchen because there were people who would help her every day as long as she told them. But Siti Musalmah did not like to disturb them. However, since Muhammad was ill, the neighbors began to gather here at night. And, her house was not quiet because there always were neighbors who came to help. What worried Siti Musalmah was that she seemed to have no enthusiasm to go to the kitchen since Muhammad was getting worse. She had to get up when her brother-in-law mentioned so.

(pg. 131)

At the same time, S. Othman Kelantan in the novel *Ruang Perjalanan* showed that neighborhood relations were getting looser, especially in the city. The present society especially in the city mostly did not care about neighborhood relations. Advances in science and technology could change everything. Humans had not had time to greet each other. This phenomenon could be seen in the novel *Ruang Perjalanan*.

Humans seemed like they were losing feelings. They did not have time to greet each other. Neighborhood relationships were replaced with live satellite channels coming into the rooms. Each focused on the latest information in the technological developments of the future. Their relationship was closer to the libraries from any region of the world.

(pg. 13)

This was different from the Malay society in the past which was very concerned with the life of the whole society rather than the individual. Mutual interests were more important than individual interests. Members of the traditional Malay community had strong neighborhood ties. The positive traditional values that were emphasized in the traditional Malay society were the spirit of helping each other and a sense of understanding. However, S. Othman Kelantan through his novel, *Ruang Perjalanan* showed that this kind of neighborhood relationship no longer existed in modern society. S. Othman Kelantan's longing for the spirit of the traditional community's neighborhood could be seen in the passage below.

I would mostly dream about the lushness of the village that I had left behind since I first fully became a citizen of the city. I lost the harmony of neighbors who liked to greet each other. And because of this, I would always dream of being in a village full of guava trees, rambutan, durian, langsung, longkong, sapodilla, *keriat (Aglaia korthalsii)*, *cermai* (Star gooseberry) with the screams of children and a mixture of birdsongs; budgie, iora, hummingbird, tree sparrow, magpie, and a thousand species of animals and wildlife. That beauty I had always dreamed of and living in my dreams.

(pg.42)

Family

In addition, in the novel *Wajah Seorang Wanita*, S. Othman Kelantan displayed the leadership of a woman who faced various life challenges. For example, the role of a single mother leading a relatively large family. In this novel, the author described a single mother who lost her husband at a young age in her early 30s and had to support three children, three siblings, and several nephews. A diligent woman who nurtured and educated her children to read Al-Quran and pray herself. She even reminded them of the torments of hell in conscious wrongdoing. Similarly, Shahnnon Ahmad in the novel *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* showed traditional characters who represented the farmers who had their own thoughts. For example, Lahuma, whose name according to Shahnnon Ahmad comes from the word *huma* which means a paddy field was the head of a family who could not be separated from his land to support the family. This could be seen in the passage below.

That land was his land ... There was no other land. There was no other land for him and his family. Life and death in his homeland.

On the family aspect, Shahnnon Ahmad tried to display strong family ties among the traditional Malay community. Concerning this topic, Abdul Halim Othman (1993: 62) stated that the role of parents is greater in the family of traditional society than the modern society. This is because the role of educating in modern society is shared with families, schools, and other social institutions. However, in the same modern society, there are still differences in relationships and family atmosphere between one family and another due to the influence of factors such as social structure, cultural values, religious values, socioeconomic status, employment, and personal.

Husbands and wives helped each other to survive. Although Jeha was still weak, she still wanted to help her husband cut down the bushes. The author also used dialogue techniques by using short sentences accompanied by the use of informal language and interspersed with comparative language styles such as "pale as death". By using every day's spoken language, the storytelling atmosphere becomes more natural and the characters became more alive. Therefore, the aesthetic effect becomes more beautiful. This can be seen in the passage below.

"Besok tentu aku boleh tolong menebas juga. Geruh ular itu dah tak ada," balas Jeha.

"Biar aku sorang dululah menebas," bantah lakinya Lahuma.

"Tapi aku pun besok dah boleh pergi."

"Kau masih lemah. Tengok mukamu dalam cermin. Pucat macam orang mati."

"Tapi kalau kau sorang, bila nak habis ekas semai itu?"

"Kan kau tak kuat lagi."

("Tomorrow, I can help cut the bushes as well. The sore is gone," replied Jeha.

"Let me do it alone, first," Lahuma, her husband, protested.

"But I can go tomorrow."

"You are still weak, look at your face in the mirror. As pale as death."

"But if you're alone when sowing of the seedlings will start?"

"You're not strong yet.")

This is different from today's society. Society has now changed. In the novel *Ruang Perjalanan*, S. Othman Kelantan described changes after changes that occurred in the family of the Malay community due to intermarriage with foreign women. Changes could also occur as a result of collisions with outside influences. This caused the values of society to change completely. The family system was becoming increasingly loose and individualistic. This phenomenon was becoming increasingly popular in the present era of life. S. Othman Kelantan's concern about the lives change of his community due to the rapid development was voiced in the novel *Ruang Perjalanan*. This could be seen in the passage.

... And I haven't seen my daughter-in-law for a month. I never asked. And as usual, if my daughter-in-law was not present in the room or the condominium, it meant she had been out of the country for a month or two or almost a year. My son accepted that fact as his normal future.

Based on the above statement, the Malay family represented by 'my son' could accept the changes brought about by his wife who was a foreigner. His wife was free to go anywhere at any time for a while. It turned out that the traditional values of the eastern society that were built for so long had completely collapsed. Such a thing happened because of the lack of religious education imparted in the souls of the children. Education-based on science and technology alone could only produce human beings with a 'robotic' soul.

Traditional Medicine

Most villagers loved to use traditional medicine. They believed in the use of village medicines. These people were afraid to go to the hospital. In the novel *Wajah Seorang Wanita*, S. Othman Kelantan described an old mother who liked to use witch doctor and shaman. Although her pain was quite severe, she still did not want to go to the hospital.

I looked intently at my mother's calves. The ulcers had climbed high. Her flesh streaked with blood and pus and seemed to rot. The flesh turned black and seemed to freeze there.

(Pg. 29)

My mother likes to use witch doctor and shaman and traditional Malay medicine.

(Pg. 30)

In addition, rural communities also lack exposure to modern medicine. Shannon Ahmad in his novel *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* portrayed the character of Lahuma, who refused to be sent to the hospital to receive modern treatment. Only shamans were called in to treat Lahuma's disease. With superficial knowledge due to lack of exposure, Lahuma had sliced his leg to remove the nibung (*Oncosperma tigilarium*) thorn, causing his legs to become more swollen. This could be seen through the dialogue technique below.

"Apa yang dah jadi dengan kakimu?"

Lahuma hanya memandang ke atas.

"Kau belah kakimu?"

Lahuma memandang ke atas juga.

"Kau menghiris kakimu dengan pisau cukur?"

"Duri itu terpaksa kucolek keluar."

"Tapi, bisa pisau cukur lebih dahsyat dari duri."

("What happened to your feet?")

Lahuma just looked up.

"Did you slice your leg?"

Lahuma still looked up.

"You cut your leg with a razor?"

"I had to pull the thorn out."

"But a razor can be more noxious than a thorn.")

Based on the two novels above, the traditional Malay community was very confident in the traditional medical system, namely the services of shamans and witch doctors. Believing the abilities of shamans and witch doctors had been engraved in the community for generations.

Economy

From an economic point of view, the Malay community still practiced agriculture inherited from generation to generation. For example, in the novel *Wajah Seorang Wanita*, Pak Su was described as having a large paddy field long ago and never bought rice. In addition, the source of side dishes was fish from the river near his house. The family was also diligent in raising chickens and ducks.

Pak Su had a large paddy field and had never bought rice. *Baluh padi* (Building to store rice) stands tall in front of the house, as big as the house. Just pick up the paddy from the *baluh* if there was a shortage of rice. The side dishes were also not difficult to get because their house was surrounded by rice fields and

about 50 yards, there was also a river. From this source they easily get fish. And, Siti Salasiah herself is also diligent in raising chickens and ducks.

(pg.252)

Apart from the novels produced by Othman Kelantan, the researcher also examined the novels written by Shahnnon Ahmad. Shahnnon Ahmad through his novel *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* also talked about the economic resources of the traditional Malay community, namely planting paddy.

Paddy was the main source of income in Lahuma's village. This could be seen through Lahuma's internal monologue. The author used the anaphoric language style of repetition at the beginning of the line as an assertion that the economic resource of the rural community was paddy.

"Nasi pemberian Tuhan," fikir Lahuma. Datuknya dulupun bergantung hidup pada nasi juga. Dia juga serupa. Padi ditanam. Padi dijemur. Padi ditumbuk. Padi dimasak. Dan padilah yang menyambung hidup mereka sejak zaman berzaman ini. ("God-given rice," thought Lahuma. His grandfather used to depend on rice as well. He was similar, too. Rice was planted. Rice was dried. Rice was pounded. Rice was cooked. And it is rice that helped them continue their lives since generations before.)

(pg: 2)

Shahnnon Ahmad also used dialogue techniques in expressing his thoughts on the economic resources of his community, namely paddy or rice cultivation. An everyday conversational language that used short and medium-short sentences created a more natural atmosphere in the storytelling and enliven the characters involved and therefore the aesthetic effect becomes more beautiful prominent. The dialogue was the most dominant style or technique of utterance used by Usman Awang to enliven the characterization of his characters throughout the development of the plot. This rice is seen in the passage below.

"Banyak orang di kampung ni nak tanam padi Malinja. Kata mereka buahnya montok-montok dan gemuk-gemuk," sambung Lahuma.

"Secupak berapa?"

"Mana nak tahu, tapi tentu tak lebih dari seringgit."

"Nak tanam Malinja kesemua empat belas relung itu?" "Kita campur-campur apa gaduhnya. Tujuh Malinja. Tiga Siam. Tiga Serindit dan serelung lagi tu kita tanam pulut saja..."

("Many people in this village want to plant Malinja rice. They said the rice is plump and fat," continued Lahuma.

"How much?"

"I don't know, but of course it's nothing more than a ringgit."

"Want to grow Malinja in all fourteen recesses?" "We mixed them up, what's the problem. Seven Malinja. Three Siamese. Three Serindit and another recess, we just plant glutinous rice...)

(pg:10)

The importance of rice as a source of income for the villagers can be seen through the character of Jeha. The fighting spirit to acquire rice can be seen through Jeha's internal monologue. The anaphora language style of repetition at the beginning of a line gave a clear picture to the reader.

...Aku akan mencabut semai di belukar bila cukup umur. Aku akan junjung ikatan-ikatan semai itu ke baruh. Aku akan menanam semai-semai itu baris demi baris. Aku akan sulam mana-mana batang padi yang tumbang. Aku akan cabut rumput yang berlumba-lumba naik dengan padi. Aku akan mengejar tiak bila padi menguning. Aku akan mengetam dan menggemalkan padi itu. Aku akan mengusung gemal-gemal itu masuk jelapang. Aku akan mengirik padi-padi itu hingga renggang dari tangkai. Aku akan menjemur padi-padi itu hingga kering. Aku akan menumbuk padi itu hingga jadi beras.

(I would uproot the seedlings in the bush when they were old enough. I would bring on my head bunches of seedlings to the paddy field. I would plant the seedlings row by row. I would replace any fallen rice stalks. I would pull up the grass that was competing to grow with the rice. I would chase away the sparrow when the rice turns yellow. I would cut and harvest the rice. I would carry the harvest to the granary. I would thresh the rice until it was separated from the stalk. I would put the rice under the sun until dry. I would pound the paddy into rice.)

(pg.49)

According to Shahnnon Ahmad, to Malay farmers such as Lahuma and Jeha, rice carried very deep meaning. Rice is their life. They believed that without rice, they could no longer live in this world because rice was what connects the breaths of their lives. It was the rice that developed their spirit to rise against all the obstacles in front of them. To poor farmers like Lahuma, rice was a major factor that could extend the life of a husband, wife, and children. In their way, the farmers had to face all the disasters that befell them. These disasters could be in the form of droughts, major floods, strong winds, hungry birds, venomous snakes, worms, wild boar, locusts, crabs, caterpillars, and insects. Lahuma could not avoid the attacks of these natural enemies. He was ready to face any disaster that would befall him.

Therefore, life to Lamuha was to resist the onslaught of the enemies of nature. Life to him had no other purposes. For him, victory in life means defeating the attacks of the enemy and filling his granary with rice. This was seen through Lahuma's internal monologue.

...sekurang-kurangnya darah dalam tubuhnya itu akan keluar secukupnya untuk mengisi perut-perut lintah-lintah yang banyak itu.

"Kau hisap darahku, kau akan ku bunuh habis-habisan," suara hatinya merintih lagi.

(... at least the blood in his body would come out in small amounts to fill the stomachs of the many leeches.

"You suck my blood, I will kill you, completely," lamented him again.)

...Tapi kalau sekalipun ternampak ketam-ketam itu merangkak keluar, Lahuma tidak akan menetak.

(... But even if the crabs were seen crawling out, Lahuma would not chop them.)

"Kau akan kubunuh kalau kau mengamuk batang-batang padi mudaku nanti. Akan kuhenyak dengan tumit kasarku ini. Akan kutumbuk dengan hulu parangku ini. Akan kutangkap dan kurebus sampai terkoyak-koyak perut dan kulitmu."

("I would kill you if you rage against the young rice stalks later. I would crush you with my rough heels. I would pound you with the head of my machete. I would catch and boil you until your stomach and skin were torn.")

(pg:7)

Based on the quote above, it was clear Lahuma would fight against his enemies. The high fighting spirit to defeat his enemies could be seen through the repetitive language style. The words 'I would ...' were repeated several times to reinforce the usage effect. The repetitive language style could also be seen on page 39. The author once again raised this problem. This time, Jeha's fighting spirit could be seen in his soul.

Jeha naik berang kembali. Ketam kalau datang terpaksa ditentang. Tiak kalau datang terpaksa ditentang. Banjir kalau datang terpaksa ditentang. Kemarau kalau datang terpaksa ditentang.

Jeha was furious. Crabs, if they came, they had to be fought. Sparrows, if they came, they had to be fought. Flood, if it came, it had to be fought. Drought, if it came, it had to be fought.

However, in this novel, S. Othman Kelantan described the attitude of Kelantanese women, who since ancient times, had a high business spirit. This could be seen through the character of Siti Musalmah. Beginning with a small-scale business, she finally managed to open her shop. Among the items traded were copper or tumbaga, silver, cloth, and jewelry.

Siti Musalmah at that time had rented a warehouse or retail space in Jalan Pendek, Kota Bharu.

(pg.358)

In the novel *Ruang Perjalanan*, S. Othman Kelantan, also tried to raise the question of the rapid technological advancement that could erode the moral values held by eastern society. The passion for pursuing modernization from all angles made human beings no longer aware of what they were doing. Human feces were processed into foods such as biscuits, chocolate, instant noodles, bread, and flour. This phenomenon was not unusual and may occur in the future. This production could strengthen the economic development of the country. This phenomenon could be seen in the following passage.

It should be mentioned that Harmonies Food Industry opened about five years ago in Kuala Lumpur. This industry processed human excrement that used to be wasted. Or at least at that time, it was just used as urea fertilizer. When HFI was set up in a joint venture between the Malaysian government and a Korean company, excrement, especially in the Klang Valley, including Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, was processed into food.

(pg:97)

Advances in the economic field had also caused the country to be surrounded by a world of bricks. Everything was controlled by computers and machines. No more human labor. This was very different from the life of a traditional society. These differences were illustrated in the passage below.

Dalam keterapunganku di anjung, anakku menyebutnya balkoni, kondominium itu, aku amat merindui dunia lama yang penuh dengan suara burung-burung dan jerit pekik kanak-kanak. Aku merindui hembusan bayu dalam derapan jatuhan embun pagi yang bsah. Aku Merindui kuakan kerbau dan embuan lembu, rakan taulan daripada jiran-jiran petaniku yang seluruh hidup merka berkeringat untuk mengekalkan kesihatan yang tulen. Aku merindui kesan tapak kaki anak-anakku yang ramai di halaman rumah kerana bermain kapal terbang, tangkap ibu,bola katuk dan coh. Dan lebih daripada itu ialah kerinduanku pada keramaian hidup berjiran dan saling menceritakan kesusahan dan kesenangan bersama. Alangkah indahnya masa silam bangsaku dengan bentuk keharmonian kejiranan dan kesejukan pohon-pohon dengan basahan embun dan kicauan burung-burung dalam pelbagai bunyi dan nada lagu. Alangkah merdunya ia. Alangkah harmoninya. Alangkah!

Immersed in my mind on the portico, my son called it the balcony, the condominium, I sorely missed the old world full of the sounds of birds and the screams of children. I missed the

breeze and the wet morning dew. I missed the herds of buffaloes and cows, the companions of my peasant neighbors whose whole lives had been laboring in maintaining pure health. I missed the footprints of my many children in the backyard for playing airplanes, hide and seek, and other traditional games. And more than that was my longing for the hustle and bustle of the neighborhood and telling each other the hardships and pleasures together. How beautiful was the past of my nation with the neighborhood harmony and the coolness of the trees with the wetness of the dew and the chirping of the birds in various sounds and tones of the song. How melodious it was. What a harmony. What!

(pg:6)

In addition, a result of the development of science and technology was the widespread use of robots to replace human energy. On one hand, this development was very good because it could replace human energy and ease the human burden. On the other hand, robot services that replaced human energy could also lead to negative implications. For example, the robot named "Ciku" that always brings food for "me" indirectly disrupts family ties. "I" is served by robots rather than by the affection of family members. These new values had completely changed the traditional values of the previous society. This could be seen in the passage below.

This robot named Ciku, every morning, noon, evening, and night, would bring food for me. It was silent but would emit a warning sound if I had not touched the food after twenty minutes. The warning was in the form of the chirping sound of the magpie which I was very pleased to listen to.

(pg. 10)

Conclusion

Based on the study, the culture of the Malay community was also affected by external influences, such as Hindus since the 13th century, Islam since the 15th century, and the colonialists and western civilization. However, Islam had the biggest influence in shaping the identity of the Malay community. For the Malay community, courtesy and politeness are a sign of one's integrity. The Malay community's view of life revolves around the principle of harmonies, such as peace and balance between beliefs, practices, and behaviors. However, there is no denying that the advancement of science and technology and the influence from the west also bring changes to society. This study can contribute to the development of Malay morality and propriety in Malaysia by highlighting the novels of National writers.

Theoretical and Contextual Contribution of This Research

This study has identified the identify the image of society in the novels of national writers and analyze the image of society in the novels of national writers. This study had determined that, the culture that surrounded the society in Malaysia was related to the spirit of the neighborhood, family, and traditional medicine. For the Malay community, courtesy and politeness are a sign of one's integrity. Therefore, this study is important to contribute the

development of Malay morality and propriety in Malaysia by highlighting the novels of National writers.

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