INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT

OPEN ACCESS JOURNAL

Vol 15, Issue 4, (2026) E-ISSN: 2226-6348

Understanding the Symbolic Expressions in Islamic-Themed Malay Poetry: A Study on "Jangan Kau Simpan Dunia Itu Di Istana Hatimu"

Muhammad Hilmi Jalil

Institut Islam Hadhari, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

Email: hilmi@ukm.edu.my

DOI Link: http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v15-i4/29251

Published Online: 08 November 2026

Abstract

The main challenge faced by poetry readers is to interpret the symbols contained in a poem, where the symbols have different possible meanings according to the context of culture, religion, history, and intellectual traditions. In the poem "Don't You Keep the World in the Palace of Your Heart" by H.B. Johar, contain words that are symbols of meaning based on Islamic values. Thus, this paper tries to bridge the gap between the literal meaning and the spiritual purpose contained in the poem. The four words to be analyzed are palace (istana); palm (telapak tangan); stock (saham); and expanse (hamparan). The data analysis uses symbolic interpretation contextually, through three layers of analysis. The findings of the study found that this poem has a connection with spiritual values based on Islamic teachings, it also uses symbols in people's daily lives to convey spiritual messages, understanding literal or physical meaning can simply limit the interpretation of the poem and potentially give wrong meanings. The reader's in-depth knowledge of the concepts and teachings of Islam can help the reader understand the poem well and accurately.

Keywords: Poetry, Palace, Palm, Stock, Overlay

Introduction

In the world of literature, poetry plays a role as a form of literature that conveys thoughts, moral values, philosophy of life, as well as the worldview or view of the nature of a society. If we look at poetry in the Malay world, it is not only a medium that conveys the beauty of language, but more than that, it also plays a role as a tool or medium to educate the community, convey divine da'wah, and also convey religious values to be applied by members of the community (Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, 1989). In the context of Islamic poetry, it can be seen expressions that show the relationship between humans and Allah SWT. It can also be seen expressions that describe the life of the world, describe death, describe noble morals, describe the quest for knowledge, and also describe the process of shaping the human soul. All of these religious messages are conveyed in Malay poetry through various forms, including advice that is directly channeled through metaphors, metaphors, and symbols (Parman & Marni, 2021; Zekrgoo, 2024). Therefore, Malay Islamic poetry should be

read as a work that is aesthetic, has religious thoughts, and spirituality in the texts of the poem (Braginsky, 2011).

Efforts to interpret poetry texts in the Malay realm where the poetry texts have Islamic values undoubtedly require challenges in the context of the method and art of interpreting the texts in depth and detail. Especially when poetry texts have polysemitic religious symbols, i.e. have various layers of meaning. Although a symbol in a poem has its own meaning in the cultural, historical, and intellectual framework, but in the Islamic Malay poetry tradition, the symbols placed in the poem are deeply rooted and are related to the tradition of Sufism. Undoubtedly, this situation becomes the main challenge faced by poetry readers is to give interpretation and meaning to the symbols or symbolism contained in a poem (Parman & Marni, 2021).

A symbol depicted in a poem has different possible meanings according to the context of the culture, religion, history, and intellectual traditions of a society (Parman & Marni, 2021; Zekrgoo, 2024). In the context of Malay poetry, it is certain that it has its own context according to Islam and Malay culture itself. A word may have a literal meaning in the use of common language, but in a poem with Islamic elements, the words or symbols have a specific meaning related to the discourse of Sufism (Parman & Marni, 2021; Ula, 2016). For example, the term boat we describe in a poem can refer to a water vehicle in a literal sense, but in a boat poem, the boat verse can serve as a symbol of the human journey in life and spirituality (Ahsin & Suryadilaga, 2020; Zulhelmi, 2017). Similarly, other terms such as light, the term road, the term homecoming, the term bird requires special scrutiny of the context before its spiritual meaning can be determined (Parman & Marni, 2021; Ula, 2016). Therefore, the failure of the reader to identify the layers of meaning in a word has the potential to cause the reader to understand the poem only on the surface (Parman & Marni, 2021). At the same time, the reading of it takes place in a context without appreciating the thoughts that the creator of the poem wants to convey.

Because poetry readers tend to process or give meaning to the texts of the poem purely on the surface, it is necessary to conduct a study of the poems to ensure that the message or themes desired by the creator of the poem reach the reader of the poem with the desired meaning (Parman & Marni, 2021). Where these meanings are not just superficial or literal meanings. More than that, they have a meaning behind the physical clues, which ultimately lead to the reality, Islamic values or Islamic Sufism which are purifying the soul and dedicating themselves to Allah SWT (Yusoff et al., 2018).

The study in this paper will try to bridge the gap between the physical meaning or literal meaning of a word and the spiritual meaning or purpose contained in a poem, i.e. an Islamic poem or a spiritual poem. Usually, Sufism poems use language that has various meanings, in many layers, where a word or symbols represents a deeper value, which is spiritual in nature, which can have an impact on the development of a human being (Parman & Marni, 2021; Ula, 2016). The meaning of these physical symbols cannot necessarily be identified through the method of a language alone, but must be experienced through an understanding of religious values or elements of Sufism in Islam. Therefore, if a reader does not know and understand the true tradition of Sufism, it is possible for them to translate an image or symbols based solely on the meaning of the surface, without being connected to the

concept, understanding or spiritual value that the author intends or wants to convey (Parman & Marni, 2021; Zekrgoo, 2024). Such is the focus of the study in this paper.

Responding to the above needs and problems, this paper attempts to examine the symbolic mechanisms and methods found in Islamic poetry in the Malay realm. In a focused way, this paper analyzes the poem " Jangan Kausimpan Dunia Itu Di Istana Hatimu ", a work whose main motive is to connect the elements of worldly life (material) with the afterlife (spiritual). With the approach of deconstructing the layers of symbolic meaning in this poem, this paper will try to show how the ethical framework and tradition of Sufism can reveal the spiritual architecture of the poem in more depth, going beyond the reading at the surface level in order to show its substantive call to release one's attachment to the world and realign one's way of life in this world.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative text analysis method with a semantic analysis approach and symbolic interpretation based on Islamic spiritual values. The text that has been selected as the study material is based on the poem "Jangan Kausimpan Dunia Itu Di Istana Hatimu" by Johar (2015) in the book " Kumpulan Puisi Yang Menjadi Sufi ".

Jangan Kausimpan Dunia Itu Di Istana Hatimu
Jangan kausimpan dunia itu
di dalam istana hatimu
letakkan saja
di telapak tanganmu
agar mudah kautukarkan duniamu
sebagai saham buat akhiratmu
namun usah pula kaujadikan akhiratmu
sebagai saham buat duniamu
kelak kau akan rugi
untuk memiliki kedua-duanya
Berbuatlah kebajikan untuk dunia
kerana dunia adalah hamparan yang tiada
teruskan berbuat amal untuk akhirat
kerana akhirat tidak akan berakhir
Orang arif menilai dunia ini
sebagai alam khayali
yang tidak ada wujudnya
siapa yang mencintai dunia
tidak mencintai Tuhannya.

The following is the English translation of the poem above.
Do not keep the world in the palace of your heart
Don't save the world
Inside the Palace of Your Heart
just put it down
in the palm of your hand
so that you can easily exchange your world

As a Gift for Your Afterlife
but do not make it your hereafter
A Gift for Your World
Someday you will lose.
to have both
Do good for the world
Because the world is a spreadsheet that doesn't exist
Continue to do charity for the hereafter
because the hereafter will not end
Wise people judge this world
as an imaginary realm
which does not exist
Who loves the world
does not love his God

The selection of this poem is based on the need to study the gap between the literal meaning and the spiritual meaning of a term in the poem. Where the author of the poem uses expressions such as palace (istana); palm (telapak tangan); stock (saham); and expanse (hamparan). These four expressions have a variety of meanings that need to be analyzed implicitly based on the basis of Islamic teachings including the knowledge of tasawwuf. At the same time, with a thorough understanding, it allows the reader to understand how the language of daily life is used to convey thoughts about human relations with the world and the hereafter. The analysis of this study focuses on the use of metaphors, symbols, and expressions that have religious and spiritual connotations (Parman & Marni, 2021; Ula, 2016). Next, this study tries to connect the elements of language in poetry with the overall context of relevant Islamic works and values.

The data collection procedure for this study is carried out through documentation and careful reading of the text. Specifically, there are four steps implemented for data collection. First, the text transcription step, which is the process of copying the text of the poem from the original manuscript by maintaining the order of lines and duplicates; the second is a thorough reading of the entire poem text to identify the main themes, especially the relationship of humans with the world, the hereafter and God; the third is the process of recognizing significant expressions in the text of the poem by marking words that have implicit, symbolic or Sufistic connotations; and the fourth is data categorization, which is the process of classifying expressions based on categories such as heart symbols of worldly life, the hereafter, charitable metaphors as well as expressions related to man's relationship with Allah.

Meanwhile, the data analysis uses symbolic interpretation contextually, through three layers of analysis. The first layer is to identify the common meaning of a word or expression based on the use of the Malay language; the second layer is to study how a word or expression is used outside the literal meaning to construct a picture of human life, thoughts or conditions, based on Islamic teachings; and the third layer is to assess the relationship of symbolic meaning with relevant Islamic teachings, based on the context of poetry and textual evidence. By carrying out the analysis procedure through these three layers, it allows the

researcher to show how an expression moves from the meaning of everyday language to an abstract meaning.

Findings and Analysis

In the poem Jangan Kausimpan Dunia Itu Di Istana Hatimu, there are four expressions or words that need to be understood correctly that have a literal meaning and also at the same time have different meanings compared to the literal meaning. The first word is your palace (istana); the second word is in the palm of your hand (telapak tangan); the third word is stock (saham) and the fourth word is expanse (hamparan). These four words need to be analyzed according to the method that has been set, namely there are four layers of data analysis, the first is the researcher gives the literal meaning of the ordinary meaning of the word based on the expression of the ordinary Malay language. While in the second layer, the researcher will give the word a metaphorical and symbolic meaning to the four words. In this situation, the researcher will try to examine in depth how the word should be used outside or beyond the explicit meaning or literal meaning to build a picture of life, thoughts or the human condition. While in the third layer, the researcher will establish a meaning that is closely related, closely related to spirituality and the elements or values of the Islamic religion itself. What is certain is that the meaning is different from what is found in the word in writing. Therefore, the researcher will evaluate the relationships of symbolic meanings based on the teachings of Islam and the concept of Sufism that is related or relevant to a concept. Based on the concept, an explanation will be given according to the suitability of the word and concept (Parman & Marni, 2021; Ula, 2016).

As for the first expression in the poem that needs to be analyzed based on Islamic values and also the basis of Sufism, the word 'palace' (istana) has various meanings. Literally, a palace is a very important building for a kingdom that has the highest role in the administration of a kingdom, in today's context of a country where surely the palace is very beautiful and many people want to enter the palace. The palace is inhabited by the king and his family only, ordinary people find it difficult to enter the palace. So, the palace is literally a building that has a very high privilege in a kingdom that houses the big decision-makers of the kingdom. Certainly, from a physical point of view, the palace is very beautiful and dreamed of by many people. However, the meaning is a literal meaning of the palace. What is meant in this poem, if we see that the word palace is combined with the word palace after it with the word your heart and becomes an expression of the palace of your heart. The symbolic meaning that is in the word palace of your heart is a picture, a symbolic one to the heart as a very important space and places the main things about a human being. This heart is the heart of man, the main place that functions to make the final decision for the owner of the heart, the cause of the actions that will be done by man, everything is based on the heart. It is the heart that determines what the human tendency is, followed by the actions of the man who owns the heart. Surely the person who owns the heart will make sure that only the important things should be in the heart. Thus, the meaning of the palace found in this poem is not a beautiful physical palace that can be occupied, inhabited by the human body but it is a concept that is closely related to Islamic Sufism where the heart must be purified from all evil and decorated with all goodness (Yusoff et al., 2018).

The second phrase in poetry that needs to be interpreted correctly to give the correct meaning to the reality behind the expression is the word 'palm' (telapak tangan). On the

surface, palm means the inside of the human hand which is located between the wrist and the base of the finger. It is usually used to perceive something through touch such as detecting texture, pressure and vibration. It also functions as a human limb that plays the role of holding, grasping, carrying or handling things such as pens, spoons and paper. These are all literal meanings of the word palm. If the reader of the poem hears or reads the word palm alone without analyzing the meaning behind the palm, it will cause the true meaning and intention of the creator of the poem not to reach the reader of the poem. Therefore, the symbolic meaning that needs to be understood is that the palm means that a person is able to control something and at any time can let go of something that he is holding. In the context of this poem, everything related to the world is placed on the palm of the hand so that the position of the world can be controlled by man. Man can manage the world without man being bound to the will and blessings of the world that deceives man. Thus, at any time man can hold the world in the palm of his hand and at the same time at any time one can stay away or get rid of the world from the palm of his hand. So the affairs of world management are only managed with good for the benefit of man himself, but man is not deceived and drowned by the blessings of the world. In the context of Islamic poetry, the palm demands concepts related to the knowledge of world management, tauhid, spirituality, zuhud and qanaah. Through the expression of the palm, a Muslim is taught to bind his whole heart to Allah SWT alone and all the beauty and blessings of the world are only part of the things that need to be managed, without any absolute attachment between the world and humans themselves (Parman & Marni, 2021; Zekrgoo, 2024).

The third meaning of the word that needs to be interpreted according to Islamic values in the poem is the word 'stock' (saham). If we look at the literal meaning of the word shares, it can be understood as part of one's ownership of a business entity. It could be that a person wants to buy shares so that he becomes part of the owner of that business entity. Therefore, the person who buys shares, directly owns part of the stake in a business. In the future, he has the potential to make a profit through the business activities, which are obtained through dividends or an increase in the share price, it may also be that the shares owned have a risk of loss. Therefore, the meaning is not a meaning that needs to be understood by the reader of the poem. The word stock in poetry has a figurative meaning, which is something that is worked on or utilized by a person in the present as a supply to obtain or obtain results in the future. Thus, the creator of the poem has used the concept of stock investment which has become a habit in human life to explain the relationship between one's practices in this world and its relationship with the end of human life in the future in the hereafter. Thus, the meaning of shares contains spiritual value, where a good practice in the world done by a person can be a supply in the hereafter (Ahsin & Suryadilaga, 2020). With this practice, it is possible to enjoy or be gifted with the blessings of heaven by Allah SWT in the hereafter. For example, a person who has wealth, he gives alms to help the poor who are in great need, gives alms to help people who seek knowledge, makes roads that will be used by the public, and so on. Although it seems like a loss to spend money without profit in this world, but the act of assistance becomes a share for the hereafter, a share for him to enjoy a good day of the hereafter as promised by Allah SWT. That is the meaning of the metaphor or the intention behind the word stock in poetry.

'Expanse' (hamparan) is the third word that needs to be analyzed according to Islamic values so that the readers of the H.B Johar Poetry Group are able to understand its meaning

accurately. Literally, the expanse means something that is laid out or presented physically, or it refers to something that is laid out on a surface or area. For example, a stretch of mats that is laid out on the floor of a house or a stretch of grass, an area that has grown or covered with grass that has spread out widely, as well as the expanse of the sea, the sea surface that stretches out wide in front of the eyes. However, to understand the Islamic values behind H.B Johar's poems, it needs to be analyzed symbolically or figuratively when understanding the expanse as a world that serves as a space or field where people live their daily lives and do all kinds of practices whether good or bad. By looking at the expression before the word exparan, 'do good for the world', symbolically, the expanse can be referred to the world as a space or field of human life and at the same time, the spiritual meaning behind the word exparan is a world that is an opportunity or field for humans to do all good practices without doing bad practices in preparation for the hereafter (Ahsin & Suryadilaga, 2020). Thus, the expanse shows a physical object or image that is commonly used by humans on a daily basis in the Malay language. Instead of. In this poem, it serves as a metaphor for a concept or for a more subtle understanding, which is the world as a field of practice for humans to do good and stay away from any evil.

From the point of view of novelty of this study, it is successfully producing a more detailed analytical approach to analyze the text of poems with Islamic elements. The method successfully explores the meaning through 4 stages, namely based on the original meaning of the word followed by understanding the figurative meaning and also infused with spiritual meaning and producing lessons based on Islamic values from a symbol in the poem. This approach is able to facilitate the reader to understand the poem in depth. At the same time, this approach can also be a guide to avoid misunderstandings that may occur when the reader of the poem reads poems with Islamic elements. In this context, this study has explained that the words that are commonly used in society such as the palace of your heart, palms, stocks, and overlays are not just ordinary words, but they have spiritual meanings and implicit religious values.

This study is also able to contribute to society and knowledge, especially the Malay Muslim community. Where this study has succeeded in connecting literary elements with religion, Malay poetry becomes a bridge for the Malay community to understand the teachings of Sufism and Islamic values more easily and more effectively. In addition, this paper also succeeded in proving that poetry is not just a tool of entertainment or beautiful words, but more than that, poetry with Islamic elements, can be a tool to educate the community. Thus, poetry also plays a role in guiding the reader's soul by giving reminders and useful guidance to the community so that they are not too complacent in the pursuit of material things and possessions.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the four words in the poem Kumpulan Puisi Yang Menjadi Sufi by H.B Johar, it has several layers of meaning, where the physical meaning of a word is different from the symbolic meaning of the word, besides that the meaning has to do with spiritual values based on Islamic teachings. This poem also uses symbols in people's daily lives to convey spiritual messages, the understanding of literal or physical meaning alone can limit the interpretation of the poem and may give the wrong meaning to the intention behind the creation of the poem. The reader's in-depth knowledge of Islamic concepts and teachings can help the reader understand the poem well and accurately. Overall, the challenge in decoding

symbols in Islamic poetry lies in the reader's ability to connect the meaning expressed with Islamic values or the spiritual message implied behind an expression or word.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express their gratitude to Institut Islam Hadhari, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, for funding the research project (RH-2026-003), entitled 'Generation Z's Misunderstanding of Islamic-Themed Poetry: An Analysis of Its Causes and Strategies for Improvement.', which led to the publication of this article.

References

Ahsin, M., & Suryadilaga, M. A. (2020). Interpretasi sufistik atas hadis melalui sastra dalam Syair Perahu karya Hamzah Fansuri. Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis, 21(1), 193-216. https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2020.2101-10

Braginsky, V. (2011). Light, sound and fragrance: The impact of Sufism on the aesthetics of traditional Malay literature. Malay Literature, 24(1), 51-69. https://doi.org/10.37052/ml.24(1)no3

Johar, H. B. (2015). Yang menjadi sufi. Pustaka Kanzun Mahfiyyan.

Parman, M., & Marni, N. (2021). Sufi symbols in poems of Ibn Arabi and Hamzah Fansuri. UMRAN-Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies, 8(2), 21-38. https://doi.org/10.11113/umran2021.8n2.498

Ula, M. (2016). Simbolisme bahasa sufi (kajian hermeneutika terhadap puisi Hamzah Fansuri). Religia, 19(2), 26-41. https://doi.org/10.28918/religia.v19i2.748

Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir. (1989). The notion of "dakwah" and its perceptions in Malaysia's Islamic literature of the 1970s and '80s. Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 20(2), 288-297. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463400018130

Yusoff, A., Azmi, A. S., Ahmad, H., Amat, R. A. M., & Ahmad, W. A. W. (2018). Purification of soul (Islah al-Nafs) in the Quran: An analysis of Al-Ghazali's method. Advanced Science Letters, 24(4), 2848-2850. https://doi.org/10.1166/asl.2018.11075

Zekrgoo, A. H. (2024). The confused whale of the China Sea: Water symbolism in the works of Hamzah Fansuri. Al-Shajarah, 29(1), 79-98. https://doi.org/10.31436/shajarah.v29i1.1828

Zulhelmi. (2017). Karakteristik sastra sufi Hamzah Fansuri: Kajian terhadap Syair Perahu. Jurnal Adabiya, 18(2), 30-48. https://doi.org/10.22373/adabiya.v18i35.1203