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Malay World in the Kasih Bonda Kampung Paya Kami Poetry Collection

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Abstract

Siti Zainon Ismail is an author, a Malay cultural heritage researcher, an artist, a poet, a Malaysian painter, and the 14th Malaysian National Laureate. She produced many books of poetry. However, in this study, a book of poetry entitled *Kasih Bonda Kampung Paya Kami* was used as study material. The objective of this study was to identify and analyze the Malay world contained in this poetry collection. The approach of Poetics of Malay Literature by Muhammad Haji Salleh served as the basis of the study. The findings showed that first, the Malay world can be seen from a Malay house architecture that had the elements of creativity and inventiveness. Second, the customs of Malay family. In this case, the community was educated and behaved in accordance with the Malay customs such as the tradition to celebrate the birth and the purification. Third, the family economic aspect which was associated with the community's humble occupation the at that time.

Keywords: World, Malay, Poetry, Siti Zainon

Introduction

Siti Zainon Ismail is a familiar name in the world of Malay literature, especially in poetry. The anthologies of poetry she had produced are *Nyanyian Malam*, *Puisi Putih Sang Kekasih*, *Daun-daun Muda*, *Dongeng Si Siti Kecil*, *Kau Nyalakan Lilin*, *Bunga Putik Putih*, *Jurai Palma*, *Piazza di Spanga* and others. Subsequently in 2015, she once again produced an anthology of poems entitled *Kasih Bonda Kampung Paya Kami* (literal translation: Mother's Love of Our Swamp Village). This anthology contains five chapters that describe life in the Malay community, *Our Family*, *School Compound*, *Village Life*, *Let's Play* and *Celebration*. However, in this paper, the research focuses only on chapter *Our Family* such as *Sungai Gombak*, *Kasih Bonda*, *Rumah Nenek*, *Tiang Seri*, *Tembang Seruni Nenek Galuh*, *Rumah Kami*, *Mak Menjahit* and *Abah Bertukang*. The study will discuss in detail the Malay family home, Malay family customs and the Malay family economy. The objective of this study was

- to identify and analyze the Malay world contained in this poetry collection. The approach of Poetics of Malay Literature by Muhammad served as the basis of the study.

The term “world” described in the <http://prpm.dbp.gov.my/> refers to the realm inhabited by humans, the earth and everything on it. Whereas, ‘*Melayu*’ or Malay are etymologically derived from the word ‘mala’ which means ‘beginning’ or ‘early’ and the word ‘yu’ which means the first or the early state or country. This is based on the meaning of the word ‘ganggayu’ which means gangga state. In addition, there is also the opinion that the word ‘Melayu’ in Tamil means the highlands or hill. This is corresponded to what was recorded in the *Sejarah Melayu* that the Malay state was originally located at the Mount Siguntang in Palembang, South Sumatra. This state is also known as a country that gets a lot of rainfall because it is located between the two continents, namely Asia and Australia (Ellya, 2016).

Ismail and Muhammad (2000) defines a Malay as a person who practices Islam, whose lineage can be traced through to its ancestors in the Old Malacca Empire or any place in the archipelago of Malay, and he is now a resident of Malaysia. A Malay should inherit the traditional culture which introduced him as a virtuous human being. According to the Constitution of Malaysia in the Article 160 (2), Malay is the one with the religion of Islam, customary speaks the Malay language and practice Malay customs (Suhaimi, 1984). Malay Definition according to Ishak (2016) is a group of nations found in the Nusantara archipelago. The term ‘Malay’ refers to a race in Malaya and the term ‘Malayness (*keMelayuan*)’ on the other hands means a national group of people who practice their own traditions and customs. In the context of this analysis, the term Malay world is used to describe the Malay community life in Malaysia from various aspects such as political, economic and social.

In this paper, the Theory of Poetic Malay Literature (*Teori Puitika Sastera Melayu*) would be used as the basis for the study. This theory was founded by the National Laureate Muhammad (2006). According to Muhammad (2006), aesthetics (beauty) is the base of the underlying thought in Malay literature. The beauty highlighted as basic that theoretize Malay literature was seen from the genre of classical Malay poetry and prose. This is so because, the strength and excellence of classical Malay literature text lies in the beauty that is integrated into the works. The aesthetic features that is the core of the poetic Malay literature can be seen in the beauty in teaching or educating, beauty in expression of grief or sorrow, the beauty in storytelling, the beauty in feel and the beauty in authenticity.

The beauty of teaching or educating, according to Muhammad (2006), discusses the contents in the Malay literary works that convey a message, teaching and education to the readers or listeners. Beauty in the expression of sorrow or distress sees literary works as a tool of expression of emotions in describing hardships and sorrows (Muhammad, 2006). The beauty in storytelling, according to Muhammad (2006), discusses the narration of each content from the beginning to the end of the story. Whereas beauty in feel involves the feelings of the reader or listener. The beauty in authenticity looks at a Malay literary works that include the characteristics of classical Malay poetry of ‘*pantun*’ and ‘*syair*’ (Muhammad, 2006). The principles of the Poetics of Malay Literature Theory are summarized in Table 1 below:

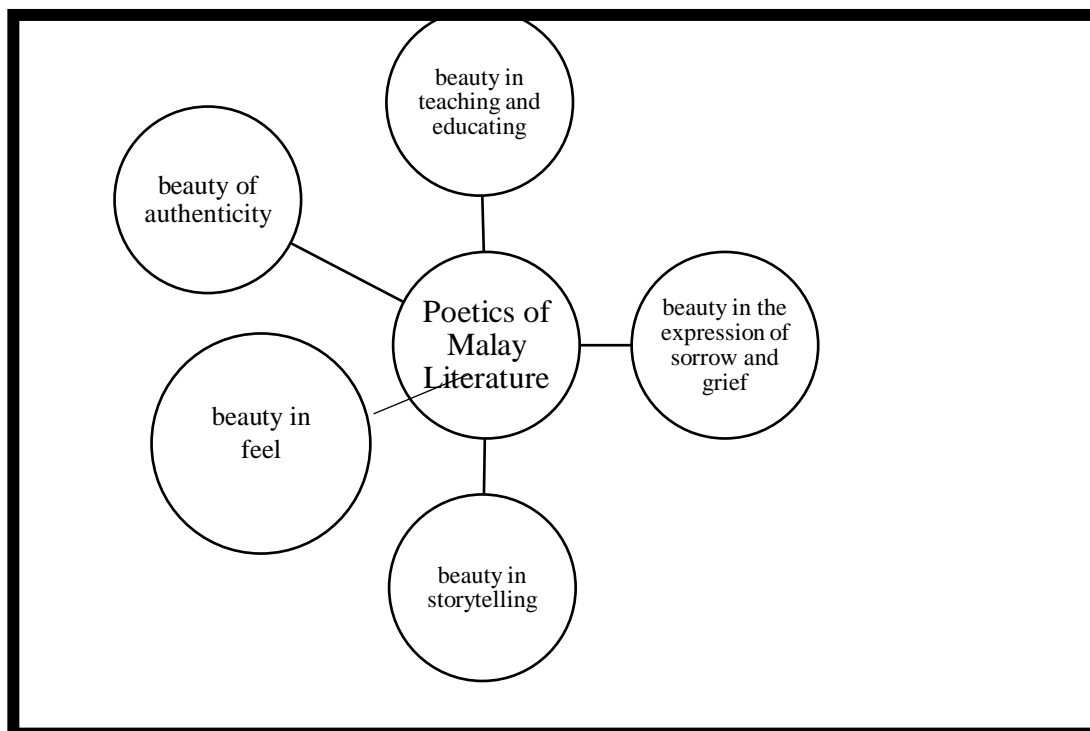


Figure 1: Poetics of Malay Literature (Muhammad, 2006)

Analysis and Discussion

Malay Family Home

House or home is an important aspect in talking about the Malay world. The Malay community is said to have an element of creativity in building the house. Simultaneously, the traditional Malay community is not only concerned with the elements of beauty, they even emphasize on various elements such as the shape, nature, lines, motion, pattern, color, space, networking, and so on to set up a Malay house. This is in line with the opinion of Azimin (2017), which stated that the traditional Malay house is quite unique and symbolic to express the symbolism of life. All these elements are to express beauty, symbolism, and meaning, which is symbolic to the closest intermediary to the distinctive visible element (showing ideas and feelings). In the poetry *Rumah Nenek*, *Tiang Seri* and *Rumah Kami*, Siti Zainon Ismail lifted the architectural beauty of traditional Malay houses. The beauty of the traditional house is illustrated through several features such as limas house (*rumah limas*), pillars (*tiang seri*), verandah (*serambi*), long lattice windows (*tingkap panjang berkisi-kisi*), ridge (*perabung*), roof tiles (*jelujur atap*), and others. This can be seen in the passage below:

Inilah rumah Melayu (This is a Malay house)
 tiang tinggi depan berserambi (high pillars with front verandah)
 anjung memanjang tingkap berkisi-kisi (elongated porch with lattice windows)
 di sini lelaki bersila berhari raya (here the men sit cross-legged for the celebration)
 kenduri Maulud Nabi (Prophet's birthday feast)
 Solat dan zikir buat Ilahi. (Prayer and remembrance for the Divine)
 (*Rumah Nenek* (Grandmother's House), pg 5)

mak bersandar di tiang seri (mom leaned on the pillar)
 pegang tiang kala sakit mendesak (hold the pillar when it hurts)

tiang seri rumah nenek bergoncang (grandma's house pillars are shaking)
(*Tiang Seri* (house pillar), pg 7)

Mulalah abah bertukang (dad started his carpentry)
 beli papan beluti ketam kayu (bought wooden planks and plane)
 abah tanam enam tiang (dad put six poles)
 paku dinding naikan perabung (nailed the wall and lifted the ridge)
 jelujur atap jadilah rumah bujang (roof tiled, made a bachelor house)
 tanpa anjung dan serambi (without verandah and porch)
 ruang tamu panjang (long living room)
 dua jendela di depan satu di rusuk (two windows in the front, one on the side)
 tegak sempadan dinding (upright boundary wall)
 dapur di tanah berpangkin dan tungku kayu (kitchen on the covered ground and wooden stove)
 jarak sepuluh langkah ke belakang abah gali telaga (ten steps to the back dad dug a well)
 bekerja sepuluh hari dengan teman-teman muda (worked for ten days with young friends)
 jadilah rumah bujang kami (made our bachelor house)
 (*Rumah Kami* (Our House), pg 11)

In addition to the physical aspects, the architectural of traditional Malay house also symbolizes harmony and unity in the community. Among them, the house is used as a place to carry out religious activities such as the Prophet's birthday celebration, prayers and remembrance of God. The mother's pillar room was used as a place for Nenek Alang to come and tell her grandchildren about fairy tales and old stories. Excerpts from *Rumah Nenek* (Grandmother's House) poem can be seen below:

Ruang ibu bertiang seri (Mother's room with a pillar)
 perempuan berkumpul gembira hati (women gathered happily)
 kalau Nenek Alang datang (when Grandma Alang came)
 dari Batu Arang (from Batu Arang)
 melimpah dongeng dan cerita lama (full of fairy tales and old stories)
 (*Rumah Nenek* (Grandmother's House), pg. 5)

According to the excerpt, Siti Zainon Ismail indirectly reflect the Malay world through the traditional architecture of the house which is not only beautiful on the outside but are also used as a place to foster harmony and unity among members of the community. In line with that, Salleh (2006: 34); stated that literary works are created to express beauty in feel. The beauty of the architecture of the Malay family home as a symbol of Malay world clearly left an emotional impact on the readers or listeners. This is because, the picture narrated by Siti Zainon Ismail leaves an impression of excitement, joy and beauty to the audiences.

Malay Family Customs and Traditions

'*Adat*' (custom or tradition) has a clear connection with the Malay world. According to Noraziti (1989), custom as a form of human behavior and way of thinking that has existed and practiced until it is considered as a tradition. Meanwhile, Zainal (1996) is of the view that the word '*adat*' which comes from the Arabic language carries the meaning of custom practiced in a society. This custom refers to human culture. Custom is also considered a social control

tool. This is because, since childhood, Malay community is educated to act according to custom requirements. On the other hand, anyone who tries to violate or deny the custom will be criticized and considered to have left his community (Aziz, 2001). Custom affinity in the Malay world is reinforced by the expression, 'biar mati anak, jangan mati adat' which means 'better your children die than your traditions'.

Based on the poetry *Tembang Seruni Nenek Galuh*, Siti Zainon highlight the Malay world through customs when celebrating the birth of a child. Siti's birth was celebrated with a hair cutting ceremony, *belah mulut* (lit: splitting the baby's mouth) and *berendoi* (cradle ceremony). Malay Customs is aligned with the teachings of Islam. For example, shaving aims to remove the baby's original hair which is considered dirty and will not grow well. This is in accordance with the Islamic teachings that emphasize aspects of hygiene and health. The custom of splitting the baby's mouth is done by turning a little piece of chicken liver that has been mixed with a little sugar and salt into the baby's palate. This custom is done so that the baby whose mouth is split will follow the behavior of the person who splits his mouth when he grows up (Rosli, 2017; Darwish & Abdeldayem, 2019). This can be seen in the excerpts below:

selepas solat Maghrib (after Maghrib prayers)
lelaki berdoa acara potong jambul (men pray, hair cutting ceremony)
para perempuan pun menyanyi (the women also sang)
syair Siti Fatimah puteri Nabi (poetry of Siti Fatimah the daughter of the Prophet)
Nenek Galuh sentuh hati ayam (Nenek Galuh touched the chicken's heart)
cecah gula dan garam ke bibir Siti (touch sugar and salt to Siti's lips)
biar cucu bijak berputih hati (let the granddaughter be wise and pure in heart)
(*Tembang Seruni Nenek Galuh*, pg 9)

Based on the excerpt of the poem, Siti Zainon Ismail indirectly displays the custom of celebrating the birth of a baby based on the teachings of Islam. Although the Malays practiced certain traditions, they always put Islam in every custom they practiced. It is compatible with the principles upheld by the Malay community, "*adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi kitabullah*" which means customary laws are based on religious laws; religious laws are based on the Qur'an. This also in line with the opinion of Muhammad (2006), who stated that literary works are produced to convey a sense of beauty in teaching or educating. The customs of celebrating babies' delivery in the poem is clearly intended to convey a message, teaching and education to every reader or listener that the Malay customs are exquisite and aligned with the teachings of Islam. It aims to inform young people of today, whom are increasingly forgetting Malay customs. This showed the Malay world is filled with instruction, guidance and advice to both readers and the community to keep the culture alive. In the Malay world, as long as the person is alive, they cannot escape from the traditions and customary environment. Adherence to customs is also a responsibility that must be borne by every member of the society (Abdul Kadir, 1993).

Siti Zainon Ismail also displays a custom or habit of traditional Malay that was cleaning clothes in the river. In a poetry entitled *Sungai Gombak, Kasih Bonda*, Malay women are portrayed as using the river as the source of life. The river is said to be a place for washing clothes and bathing. In this case, it can be explained that the Malay community has a close affinity with

the natural elements. According to Siti Zainon (1994), the use of natural elements such as rivers, water, sun, moon and others are related to the concept of 'about life and nature' – the poet's nature or the society's nature, but not the artificial nature (only imitating the nature). In addition, the poem can also be seen from an Islamic perspective. The river is used as a place to bathe and wash clothes. In this case, it clearly states that the life of the Malay community cannot be separated from Islam itself. This is because, cleanliness is half of faith as stated in surah Muddathir verse 4, the word of Allah which means, "Purify your garments."

In this regard, Azimin (2017) stated that Siti Zainon unconsciously or consciously proves that the concept of purity is a basic concept in life, especially in the culture of maintaining cleanliness, that is, maintaining cleanliness is part of faith and not just a custom practiced by Malay traditional community. This is said to be the Malay world's displaying a custom that is in line with the teachings of Islam. The situation can be seen in the poem *Sungai Gombak, Kasih Bonda* as follows:

Para ibu dan dara membasuh kain (Mothers and virgins wash clothes)
kami si kecil berlompatan mandi (we the little ones jumped and bathe)
menyelam berenang sesuka hati (dive and swim happily)
airmu jernih batu berkilau bersih (your water is clear and the stone shines clean)
jambatan gantung jadi titian (the suspension bridge becomes a connector)
menghubung kampung ke jalan raya (connecting the village to the road)
oh!sungai kasih hati (oh! river of love)
(*Sungai Gombak, Kasih Bonda* (Gombak River, Mother's Love), pg 3)

Accordingly, it can be stated that Siti Zainon applied the concept of purification as part of Malay culture in line with the demands of Islam. This is what illustrated the Malay world as very concerned with the hygiene and clothing of its people. In line with that, Muhammad (2006) says that literary works produced are to create a sense of beauty in teaching or educating the community to practice cleanliness as part of faith.

Malay Family Economy

In addition, the Malay world can also be seen in the economic aspect. The word economy comes from the Greek words *oikos* and *nomos*. *Oikos* means household and *nomos* on the other hand means planning or rules. In short, the economics carries the meaning a rule of the household (Amir, 2013). In a poetry entitled *Mak Menjahit* (Mother is Sewing), Siti Zainon Ismail described the activities of the Malay community's subsistence economy, such as sewing, carpentry and blacksmith. The community has a tradition of having non-permanent income to support their families. The wife also helps the husband earn a living by sewing clothes. The passage of the poem directly supported the notion of ethnographic position according to race, as adopted through historical influences i.e. in colonial times; Malay in the village, Chinese in the mine, and India in the farm (Azimin, 2017). This can be seen in the passage below:

Abah tukang besi (Father a blacksmith)
di bengkel kereta api (at the train workshop)
gaji kira hari (received daily wages)
mak pun harus mencari rezeki sendiri (mother also has to earn a living)

ambil upah menjahit (by sewing)
 baju kurung Mak Alang (baju kurung for Mak Alang)
 kebaya Mak Uda (kebaya for Mak Uda)
 Siti kecil juga dapat baju baru (Little Siti can also get new clothes)
 sisa kain dan perca. (from the leftover fabric and patchwork)
 (*Mak Menjahit* (Mother is Sewing), pg 13)

Based on the phrase " gaji kira hari (received daily wages)", it clearly shows the subsistence economic activity of the traditional Malay, which was in line with the proverb, "*kais pagi makan pagi, kais petang makan petang*", which means to live from hands to mouth. This shows that the Malay community was in deficiency, difficulties and hardships in search for a bite of rice. The situation is consistent with the opinion of Muhammad(2006), which stated that literary works are a manifestation of beauty in the expression of sorrow or distress.

Conclusion

Through the study of Kasih Bonda Kampung Paya Kami Poetry Collection by the National Laureate Siti Zainon, it can be concluded that the poetries clearly illustrated the Malay world. In the poem, Siti Zainon showed three main aspects that portray the Malay world, which are the home, customs and economy of the Malay community. The house is illustrated as the Malay world through art that is characterized by traditional Malay house that has pillars, porches, long latticed windows, limas house, ridge, and roof tiles that portrayed the element of beauty in the architecture of traditional Malay houses. In addition, home is used as a medium to foster harmony and unity in society. Meanwhile, Malay customs as a symbol of the Malay world can be seen through customs of purification and babies' delivery. The custom of celebrating the birth of a baby is in line with the teachings of Islam, in which the baby will go through the process of shaving the hair, splitting the mouth and the cradle ceremony. Customary purification reflects the closeness of Malay community with the elements of nature. The river is used as a source of life to do daily activities such as bathing and cleaning clothes. This concept of purity is in line with the teachings of Islam which emphasizes the aspect of cleanliness to its people. In addition, Siti Zainon portrayed the Malay world through economic or occupation. Subsistence economy is a form of economic activity in the community featured in the poem such as carpentry, blacksmith and sewing. This study also found that the theory of poetic Malay literature founded by the National Laureate Muhammad h is relevant for discussion about the Malay world as described in the analysis of the study.

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