

Understanding the Classical Malay Literary Framework: A Reappraisal of the Poetic Theories of Vladimir Braginsky and Muhammad Haji Salleh

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to understand the classical Malay literary framework through the analysis of different Malay literary texts. The study is based on an analysis of the works of Vladimir Braginsky and Muhammad Haji Salleh, along with the interpretation of selected classical Malay texts. The article seeks to highlight the critical systems in classical Malay literature and in *Puitika Sastera Melayu*. The study shows that in Braginsky's work, the author identifies the significance of studying classical Malay literature for understanding its central notion of beauty and "the beautiful" (*indab*) in Malay literary writings, as well as the concept of "self-awareness" and the concern of Malay writers for "the spiritual benefit" that is embedded in their writings. But in the works of Muhammad Haji Salleh, on the other hand, the author argues that the Malay literary theory, *Puitika Sastera Melayu*, was preconditioned by the inner structure of the society, which was embedded in the Malay language, milieu and philosophy.

Keywords

Classical literature, Malay literary texts, system, concept, Braginsky, Muhammad Haji Salleh

Introduction

Malay literature has provided the most viable and visible site for engagement with and utterances about the Malay vision and thoughts (Ibrahim 465). Leading Malay writers have used the literary medium to carry across their advocacy for and criticism of Malay culture and society to the larger Malay public. It has been suggested that Malaysian literature is helpful for individuals who depart from the dominant literature of the earlier era (Hamedî et al., 2015; Osman, 2014). Teachers, having Malay as their educational background, are familiar with both

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the style and the content of Malay literature, and how it articulates the anxieties, frustrations, experiences and hopes of the people. The prevalence of these themes evidently suggests that literature functions socially as a means for introducing action and reflection (Rasheed and Saat, 2016).

In oral and chirographic Malay literature, there are no theoretical articles or documents that prescribe literary concepts, standards, principles and styles. Modern Indonesian literature still follows this tradition and is usually composed on the basis of chirographic thoughts (Teeuw, 2013). Likewise, in the study of classical Malay literature, the oldest Malay manuscript is generally used to understand the core aspects of the Malay literature in ancient times (Al-Attas, 2014). The act of composing and subsequently producing a literary work presupposes the presence of concepts, standards, principles and styles. Patricia Kolaiti (2015) describes an approach to art and literature that is producer-oriented. There is a paradigm shift in her analysis of literature, with the focus shifting to the production, rather than (as is conventional) the reception of literature. It has been argued that texts of literature create a causal link between the artistic thought-state and the literary production.² For Malay literature, these thoughts are embedded in the lines, the rhythm, the characterisation and the repetition, as well as in the open sharing of sources, the transient view of life and the art of narration of a literary work. The *Puitika Sastera Melayu* or Malay literary theory is related to Malay worldviews and their social and political environments.³ Therefore, a well-founded understanding of Malay literature can only be reached through a comprehension of Malay literary theory. An alternative approach to the analysis of belief and knowledge has been presented by Trevor Eaton (2015), who discusses a mode of formation of literary semantics which he called the Trichotomy of Knowledge. It has been admitted that the system is more complex than the model of belief and knowledge. However, the higher scope of the multimodal system justifies this complexity.

According to Taib Osman (2014), the beginning of modern Malay literature is connected to the work of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi. Before the production of his writings, the major portion of the literature comprised tales from Persian or Islamic sources, stories of Indian origin, works on mysticism and Islamic theology, and accounts of native Sultanates. Often, these writings were termed as court literature, because they were produced and read in the court surroundings of the local Sultanates. Another substantial portion of the literature consisted of folk-tales that transferred from generation to generation as oral traditions. The literary framework for the writing of classical Malay literature conformed to Islamic values. In fact, “the self-awareness of Malay literature during the classical period was Muslim” (Braginsky, *The System of Classical Malay*

² See Kolaiti, “The Poetic Mind: A Producer-oriented Approach to Literature and Art.”

³ See Muhammad Haji Salleh, *Unsur-Unsur Teori Dalam Kesusasteraan Melayu Dan Nusantara*.

Literature 38). This article has studied the system of classical Malay literature. In doing so, it has depended mostly on Braginsky's (1993) analysis of the system of classical Malay literature and Muhammad Haji Salleh's (2000) *Puitika Sastera Melayu*. A study of the system of classical Malay literature is essential in the understanding and appreciation of the central notion of beauty and "the beautiful" (*indab*) in Malay literary writings, the concept of "self-awareness" and the concern of Malay writers for "the spiritual benefit" embedded in their writings.

Methodology

The study has adopted a qualitative research design in order to understand the classical Malay literary framework. The study is based on the analysis of the work and literature of Braginsky and Muhammad Haji Salleh, and also has an emphasis on classical Malay literature. The qualitative approach has been employed also to conduct an in-depth analysis of the different types of literature. The qualitative research design has assisted the study to prescribe the literary standards, principles, styles and ideas in oral and chirographic Malay literature. Critical works by different writers regarding literature in the modern Malay language has been incorporated in the study, to better understand the framework of classical Malay literature.

Results and Discussion

The Malay literature of the Islamic period (14th to 18th century) can be considered as the earliest examples of literature in the Malay language. Different Islamic ages have been classified into categories, including stories from the Qur'an, events about the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) and his companions, and also stories of defenders of the Islamic faith (Fang, 2013). Current studies related to the classical Malay literary system tend to treat literature as a discrete unit, analysing only structural elements such as technique, theme and rhythm. In these studies, the context tends to be considered only as a peripheral aspect. It has been argued by Ungku Maimunah (1987) that both the structural and contextual aspects of a text are essential for the study of literature and that they should be integrated in the study of literature.⁴

Malay classical literature dates from the period beginning in the second half of the 16th century and lasting through the first half of the 19th century. The most significant ideological phenomenon marking this period was the transition from the outward propagation of Islam to the deepening of the religious awareness of its believers. In the course of this transition, the exposition of the principles of Islamic theology, especially Sufi preaching, became dominant factors. Noriah

⁴ See also Ungku Maimunah's article in the June 2015 issue of *Asiatic*: "Persuratan Baru: An Alternative Paradigm to Western Literary Methodologies."

Taslim (2014) has reflected on the influence of religion on classical Malay literature. Her study focuses particularly on the *bikayat* romance. The two types highlighted in her study include hagiographical romance and fantasy romance. The author argues that these two types of romances demonstrate the substantial influence of religion in their textual elements. Braginsky (1993) argues that as Islamic awareness deepened, its influence on the literary process became ever stronger. As a result, many new religious, didactic, belletristic and historical works came into being. Moreover, several novel genres and genre forms emerged, as did whole new fields of literary activity. The entire corpus of Malay literature was reinterpreted in line with the conceptions of Islam. Such notions as the creative process, the function of beauty, the didactic value of literature and the models for creating literary works were affected by this process of self-reflection and re-imagining. This period witnessed the emergence of self-awareness in Malay literature.

G.E. Marrison (1995) emphasised that the work of Braginsky (1993) raises two fundamental questions on classical Malay literature. The first question is if an inherent system can be found in Malay literature, or for that matter, in any literature. Is it possible to codify the patterns and characteristics of a particular literature? The second fundamental question is how to define classical literature. In the context of Malay literature, the term was first introduced by the British scholars of the nineteenth century such as Winsted, Wilkinson and Skinner. These scholars were mainly concerned with the reconciliation of Malay customs and traditions with the colonial government.

Braginsky (1993) argues that like Muslim medieval culture in general, Malay culture did not conceptualise a separate general theory of literary activity, which was regarded as just one aspect of an integral concept of creation encompassing all activities. According to this concept, only Allah is capable of an act of creation; His all-pervasive omniscience is a depository of general ideas or archetypes (*ayan sabitah*) of all things, which in their turn are the loci of particular ideas of every individual thing. Malay culture understood Allah's creative power, or mercy (*rahmat*), as the source of these ideas' actual being and in this way projected them into the "world of things" (*alam mulk, alam syahadat*), where they are perceptible to the senses. Because humanity is to a certain extent endowed with the gift of prophecy, the individual, too, can become a receptacle of divine mercy, or divine light of inspiration. This light descends into the "spiritual heart" (*hati nurani, hati rubani*) illuminating (i.e. actualising) general ideas, which dwelt unmanifest therein before. Then in the soul, or in the "world of imagination" (*alam khayal, angan-angan*), they can be translated into a sequence of individual idea-images (*makna, ma'na*) visible to the inner eye. Human beings are also capable of correctly embodying these idea-images to create a literary work. The process of creation, Braginsky (1993) argues, thus consists of two phases: the first being receptive (the

perception of inspiration), the second agentive (the creation of things, i.e. literary texts). These two phases link, in the act of creation, the intelligible Creator and the human being who is considered as a mediator; this was precisely the function of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) as the primordial Logos (the Hakikat, or Nur, Muhammad, i.e. the Essence, or Prophetic Light, of Muhammad [P.B.U.H]), in whom divine knowledge was fully revealed for the first time, and which, like the trunk of a tree that supports its branches, became the foundation of all subsequent creation. Only through His intercession (*syafaat*) and blessing (*berkat*), i.e. His mediation, does divine mercy pour (*limpah*) into the “spiritual heart” of a poet.

According to Braginsky (2013), Malay literary self-awareness is motivated by two key doctrines. On one hand, the motivation comes from Muslim aesthetic doctrines; on the other hand, it comes from Indian doctrines. The discovery of commonalities between the two doctrines makes it possible to present new ideological systems. These endeavours have been the defining feature of Malay culture.

According to Braginsky (1993), there were two ways of passing through the receptive phase of the creative process. The first was for a writer-pundit to obtain the idea or general plan for a composition from some source of instruction. The perceived notion lived on in the pundit’s memory, from where it passed on to the imagination, which was “pre-trained” in a specific manner, and subsequently became fixed in words. The other way, mentioned more often in the preface to Malay texts, involved direct divine inspiration. In such cases, the main features were the author’s youth (youth was synonymous with lack of knowledge and sophistication) and the mercy of the Almighty who granted inspiration to an inexperienced youth totally dependent upon His will.

The data from the prefaces suggest that the direct perception of inspiration comprised the following stages:

1. A strong impulse of the poet to create a work and simultaneously a constant anxiety concerning whether the power to bring his undertaking to completion would be granted;
2. A meditative concentration (*tafakur*) on the divine power (*kekayaan*) and greatness (*kebesaran*) that underlie Allah’s granting existence to the entire multitude of things, or on Allah’s ability to create; this concentration is achieved by exerting one’s powers of thought (*fikir*) and of memory (*ingat*) to penetrate the world of spiritual essences; it is a state of interrupted prayer maintained in the poet’s soul;
3. The complete “switching off” of consciousness from external reality in an act of meditative prayer, made even more intense when practised in solitude and at night, a subsiding into sleep or a meditative oblivion akin to sleep;

4. The perception of a suddenly-descending light of inspiration (*cahaya nurani*), or another sign that one's soul has been enlightened (*hati yang safi*) (essentially, the same sensation as before); and
5. The arising or, to be more precise, the manifestation (*zahir*) in the poet's soul, now lit by spiritual light, of the images of the to-be-created work which, once recorded, in effect actually produce this work.

If the soul of the creator of a literary work, as the focus of imagination, has attained an enlightened state or has otherwise been properly “trained,” the idea-images of creative work will have flowed through it in an orderly sequence, and may then be embodied in a material substratum: the written or spoken word. The Malay theory of the agentive phase of the literary process can be reconstructed in the following manner. A literary work – a book, romance, or a poem – is regarded as a unity of two aspects, the external (*zahir, lahir*) and the internal (*batin*). In the first aspect it is a coherent system (*karangan, aturan*) of phonetic words (*kata, bunyi, lafaz*), possessing an actual being (*keadaan*) and perceived by the “external senses” (the eye, the ear, and so on); in its second aspect it is a system of meanings (*erti, isi, makna*), possessing a potential being; these meanings are actualised (*dinyatakan*) by means of phonetic words and perceived in their “plastic” form by the “inner senses” (*common sense* or *sensus communis*, the imagination, and so on). Composing a work consists of correctly coordinating (*dipatutkan*) the two systems. The term *patut*, with this meaning, is regularly used in numerous forewords, and the concept of correspondence between word and meaning is lucidly expounded in these forewords.

According to Braginsky (1993), there is a list of defects which one may encounter in a literary work, religious and moral as well as literary. These defects include a lack of coordination between the structure of contents and their expression, beauty and benefits. The first of these defects violates the mutual correspondence (*patut*) between the inner aspect of a word, or its meaning checked by reason, and its external aspect, or sound. In other words, either the meaning or a form of expression inappropriate to this meaning can be seen as defective in a literary work if this mutual correspondence is violated.

The coordination of the structure of contents with their expression solves a dual problem. Firstly, a stream of beautiful, shimmering images should be prevented from flooding the soul. The images perceived by the inner eye should be made to flow in an orderly fashion, in line with the literary conventions. Secondly, the expression of images in words should likewise be canonically correct. In order to cope with this task, an author should be possessed of an enlightened soul and an unflagging control of the creative process exercised by such practical reason (*akal, budi*) as is inherent in the “wise and knowledgeable” (*arif-bijaksana*).

A system of expression produced by the process of “coordination” could be direct (*madah sebarang*) or indirect (figurative). Indirect expression was considered a higher form than direct expression. Diversity (*banyak ragam*) of lexical units, conciseness (*mukhtasar*) and naturalness (*tidak dibuat*) of speech were regarded as important qualities of the system of expression. Both in its general principles and in its important details, the Malay theory of the agentive phase of the creative process is congruent with the basic precepts of the Arab “science of eloquence” (*ilm al balagha*). Beauty is one of the qualities with which a literary work could affect its recipient. Beauty was denoted by the term *indah*, and was believed to be a manifestation in the “world of things,” literary works included, of Allah’s absolute beauty. The beautiful was conceived as something unusual (for example, *ajaib*, *gharib*), whose plenitude or diversity of manifestations is duly ordered (*dikarang*) or harmonised (*merdu*). Because it is unusual, the beautiful arrests the recipient’s attention and induces love (*berahi*) for it in the recipient’s soul. The soul was believed to be especially keen in its reaction to the sound of beautiful music or of orderly speech, that is, to a literary work.

Another characteristic of a properly “coordinated” literary work, and one much more important than beauty, is “benefit” (*faedah*, *manfaat*), or, to be more precise, a series of benefits. In the Malay tradition, benefit stood for the moral message of a literary work contained in its deep structure, whether the work was of a secular or of a religious nature. Therefore, unlike beauty, it was perceived not by the senses but by reason or the “spiritual heart,” capable of penetrating “the world of the invisible.” A properly executed creative process produces a complex system of correspondences: the unmanifest Creator to the manifest Muhammad-Logos; general ideas (*ayan sabitah*) to individual idea-images (*makna*); the mental structure of a work to its verbal structure; benefit (*kamal*, *faedah*) and beauty (*indah*) to perception by the spiritual heart (*kalbu ruhani*), reason (*akal*) and soul (*hati*) (See Diagram 1). This system forms a kind of channel, extending from the author to God, the supplier of the creative energy, and from the author to the reader (See Diagram 2). The energy is “poured out” through the work of literature to the reader, where it is destined to exercise influence. Both the ascent to God and the descent to the reader are possible because the author addresses the Creator in prayer, as testified by the following passage from the *Hikayat Isma Yatim*:

Sometime later, at the will of the Most High, an idea dawned upon him, and he said to himself, ‘It befits me to compose a tale in which rajahs could be instructed, to win His Majesty’s mercy.’ Having so thought, Isma Yatim worshipped God the Most Glorious asking Him to endow him with reason perfect in matters of rule, to write those instructions. And by the Mercy of Allah and with the intercession of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H), he composed a perfect tale. (Braginsky, *The System of Classical Malay Literature* 38)

DIAGRAM 1

The Creative Process in Classical Malay literature

The "channel" formed by the complex system of correspondences, which is produced by a properly executed creative process, is illustrated as follows:

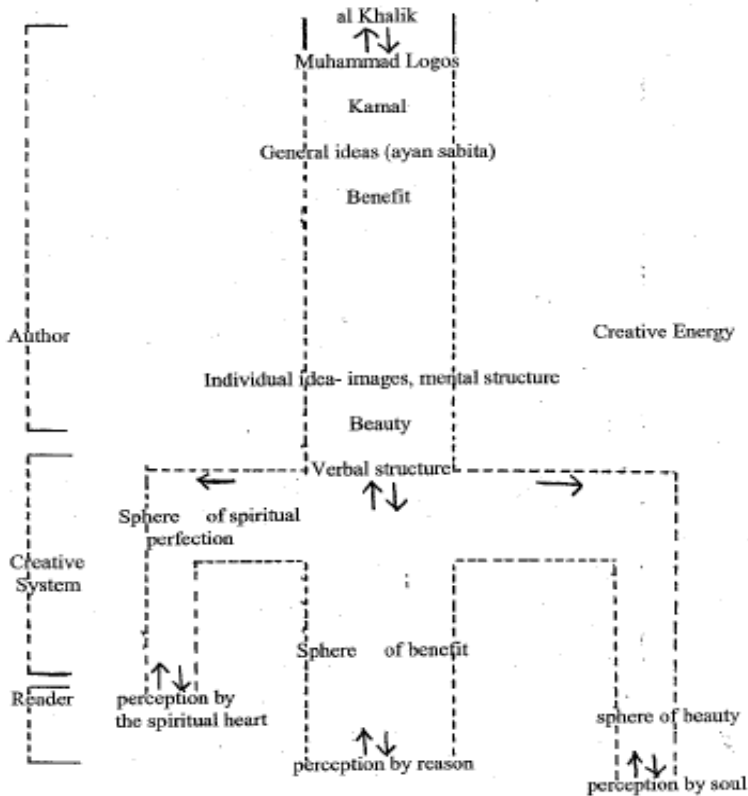
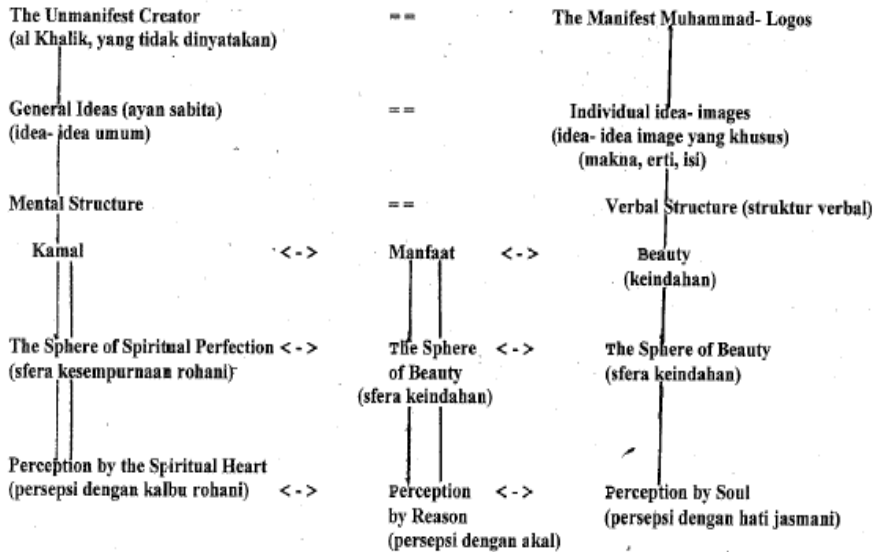


DIAGRAM 2**The Genre System of Classical Malay literature**

The traditional Malay concept of literature, Braginsky (1993) argues, was thus a single, integral and hierarchically arranged system. The term “single” is appropriate because, in spite of the diversity of its components (archaic and genuinely Malay, Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic), self-awareness of Malay literature during the classical period was Muslim. This compelled writers to reinterpret older works and create new ones that would be congruous with Muslim culture, or, at least, not at variance with its spirit. Ultimately, the goal was to introduce an Islamic sensibility in the literary works. It was of little importance whether such reinterpretation involved a more or less radical restructuring of a literary work or merely the addition of an “Islamising” foreword.

In their efforts to create works that would be “consolers of souls” (*penghibur hati*), or could impart “perfect reason” (*akal yang sempurna*), or “unlock the breasts of seekers with the key of His Being and decorate their spiritual hearts with His mysteries” (Braginsky, *The System of Classical Malay Literature* 39), and in their appeals to Allah who reveals Himself in Muhammad-Logos for help in their undertakings, Malay authors attained a certain stage of spiritual development, and

because of this their works were thought to influence a corresponding level of the reader's spiritual structure.

Moving on now from Braginsky's theory of classical Malay literature, Muhammad Haji Salleh (2000) is of the view that Malay literature should not be evaluated in accordance with Western standards of evaluation. This is because the Malay literary theory or *Puitika Sastera Melayu* as Muhammad terms it, was preconditioned by the inner structure of the society which created it, embedded in the Malay language, milieu and philosophy.⁵ According to Muhammad (2000), *sastera*, the Malay term for literature, like any other literature consists of three main elements: author (*pengarang*), the literary product (*karya*) and the addressees or readers (*kehalayak*). Therefore, an all-inclusive theory should take these three elements into consideration. David Lim (2005) also asserts that the study of Malay literature needs the development of a distinct Malay literary theory founded on Malay culture and Islamic belief. This would not only acknowledge the uniqueness of Malay culture, but also assert the need to differentiate it from Western theories. Muhammad (2000) admits that outlining a Malay literary theory is a scholar's most difficult task, "*tugas terberat sarjana.*" Nevertheless, he took up this challenge (2000) and formulated the following approach for the study of Malay literature:

1. Accumulate as many words (*kata-kata*) and terms (*istilah*) which are concealed (*tersirat*) in the flesh (*daging*) and muscles (*otot*) of a literary writing. This will enable a more authentic or genuine (*asli*) groundwork and a more appropriate (*lebih wajar*) orientation.
2. Muhammad (2000) also relied on concepts developed in European literature. Based on the fundamental terms in European literature, Muhammad (2000) took into account literature that was available only in the written form (*karya yang bertulis*). By doing so, a great part of the Malay literary tradition existing in the oral form was excluded from this discussion.

The Malay literary tradition appeals to aesthetics in language and the benefit factor in literary writing, which may embrace the author's vision (*wawasan*). This is what makes Malay literature different from European literature. Muhammad (2000) begins the discussion related to *Puitika Sastera Melayu* by attempting to find an appropriate understanding and definition of the terms *Kesusasteraan* and *Sastera*. The term *Kesusasteraan* generally refers to both oral and written literature, which bears the elements of fiction (*unsur-unsur cereka*) and is presented in an artistic form of language assisted by literary and linguistic devices (*seni bahasa serta pelbagai*

⁵ See also Quayum, "On a Journey Homeward: An Interview with Muhammad Haji Salleh," for a further discussion on Malay and Malaysian literature by Muhammad.

alatannya). Elsewhere, Muhammad (2000) mentions that unlike the Western theories of literary criticism, such as Formalism and New Criticism, which saw literary language as a set of deviations from a norm, a kind of linguistic violence, literature uses a “special” kind of language, in contrast to the “ordinary” language, which is commonly in use. There is no specific language for literature in Malay literature, “*Dalam sastera Melayu sebenarnya tidak ada suatu bahasa yang khusus untuk karya sastera*” (*Puitika Sastera Melayu* 38). For instance, folklore (*sastera rakyat*) or oral literature (*lisan*) when narrated verbally can easily make use of everyday language as exemplified in the story “*Si Kelambai*.” The stories of “*Cerita Raja Putih*” and “*Cerita Jabak dan Jabek*” however, apply the language of Mahmud Wahid (d. 1992), the last traditional Malay *penglipur lara* (oral narrator), which combines literary and everyday languages together. On the other hand, a more individual and formal language is used in the *Hikayat Malim Deman* and *Anggun Cik Tunggal*. The employment of techniques such as “meticulous description” (*pemerian*), comparison, metaphors, repetition and other linguistic and narrative techniques demonstrate a convention in Malay literature which is very clear (*cukup jelas*) and potent (*berpengaruh*). These initial concepts, derived from numerous conventions, were carried on for many centuries until they formed a tradition, which was cultivated into a social institution and signified the spiritual, intellectual and practical aspirations of the Malays (*Puitika Sastera Melayu* 38).

The above discussion in Muhammad’s treatise is followed by a discussion of the underlying functions of classical Malay literature. According to Muhammad (2000), these functions include, among others, the following:

1. Literature as the record of the nation (*Sastera sebagai Khazanah Bangsa*): *Sastera*, Muhammad argues, is the documented evidence of a nation’s knowledge, “*perakam ilmu sesuatu bangsa*.” By “knowledge” (*ilmu*), Muhammad (2000) implies the systematic and tested intellectual skills acquired by a nation, society or individual through a series of experiences. *Sastera* in this context does not shy away from offering a concept (*gagasan*), example (*contoh*) and direction (*petunjuk*) on how to develop into better, complete and constructive individuals. By doing so, *sastera* motivates humans to think and aim for perfection, progress and righteousness. This demonstrates the mental and spiritual development of a nation’s through its social and ethical response to literature.
2. Literature as a form and facet of intelligence (*Wadah dan wajah kebijaksanaan*): According to Muhammad Salleh (2000), Malay literature is historically, religiously and ethically very sensitive, “*Sastera Melayu, amat peka-sejarah, peka-agama dan peka-morality*.” Elsewhere, Muhammad asserts that although philosophy and morality are “isolated” (*mujarad*) and complex (*rumit*) issues, nevertheless, Malay literature has recorded its highest performance in these areas.

3. Literature as a “cure” and “entertainment” (*Penawar dan Penghibur*): According to Muhammad Salleh (2000), all classical Malay literature contains the elements of knowledge (*ilm*) and entertainment. However, the degree of knowledge and entertainment may vary from one writing to another. In *Sastera Kitab* (religious literature), for example, entertainment is not of the hedonistic kind, which concentrates on pleasure of the senses (*kesukaan deriaan*). However, entertainment aims at fulfilling the desire to know and understand, or to crave enlightenment or information. The pleasure, which lies in its narration, is either little or not there at all. In the literature of *mantera* (magic formula to charm) and prayer, the task of conveying “*alatan kehidupan*” (“tools for living”) is given priority. On the other hand, in the literature of narration (*cereka*), romance (*bikayat*) and *syair* (rhymes), the entertainment may take a more therapeutic form to “cure” those who are anxious (*rawan*), in grief (*duka*), in sorrow (*nestapa*) and in love (*bercinta*). Interestingly, the author himself or herself may be the one in need of the cure, as demonstrated in *Syair Siti Zubaidah*:

*Dengarkan tuan suatu peri
syair dikarang dagang yang ghari
bukan menunjukkan bijak bestari
sekadar menghiburkan hati sendiri* (Abdul Mutalib 1)

4. Literature to convey example and excellence (*Pembawa contoh dan unggul*): An author of Malay literature is also concerned with matters relating to human life. Presenting basic values and examples of smoother interaction among humans performs this function.

5. Literature as a form of significant speech (*Sastera sebagai ucapan bermakna*): Muhammad Salleh (2000) argues that it is through this form of literature that the intelligence of a nation can be expanded. Within this concept, literature becomes a library of wisdom produced out of the nation’s knowledge and their long inheritance of experience.

6. Literature as a source of aesthetic experience (*Pengalaman estetik*): Malay literature, according to Muhammad (2000), offers the audience and readers an aesthetic experience – an experience which enriches feelings and the very existence of human beings.

David Smyth (2000), however, argues that the search for a Malay literary theory does not have its basis in a single fundamental ideology or nostalgic traditionalism. If one looks at the scenario in totality, the situation is of great diversity. It is a picture of the emergence of two trends; the historical definition of the religion and the historical definition of the term “Malay.” These terms

define the basis of the contemporary literary Malay canon. This religious, historical and cultural framework may evolve through the process of additions and reinterpretations.

The Malay literary system gives emphasis to beautiful and beneficial language and content. Beauty and benefit are two essential qualities in a literary work. Beauty was believed to be a manifestation in the “world of things,” literary works included, of Allah’s absolute beauty. Benefit, on the other hand, stood for the didactic message of a literary work and was perceived by reason or the “spiritual heart,” capable of penetrating “the world of the invisible.”

Conclusion

The traditional Malay concept of literature is a single, integral and hierarchically arranged system which generates an intricate pattern of correspondences. This system is likely to create a type of channel which stretches from the author to the reader, and from the author to God who is the supplier of the originative energy. It impelled the writers to reinterpret studies performed earlier and generate an advanced theory which should be compatible with Muslim culture, or at least, not in discrepancy with its essence. The national literature in the Malaysian context is likely to be enhanced as an ethnocentric accomplishment that exposes persistent restraints concerning the aspects of race. It demonstrates the dignity of a nation through which the mother language of Malaysia continues to be affiliated only with the majority ethnic group i.e. Bumiputras. For the writers of Malaysian Literature in English (MLIE) (particularly the early generation of writers), the issue of national language and literature reflects the division of the country into two categories – those who speak Malay and those who do not, which further translates into those who are Malay and those who are not. It is shown by the research work of Abdul Rani (2007) that still there is a continuing rivalry among the heritage of Malay letters and Western perceptions about literature. While not disputing the certainty that still there is some propensity to acknowledge Islam, the fact remains that classical productions of literature are not likely to thoroughly subscribe to the legitimate values of Islam. On the other hand, Malay literature was not found to be ultimately free from the influence of Western philosophy and conceptions either. The classical Malay literature functioned as the record of the nation, a form and facet of intelligence, as a “cure” and “entertainment,” to convey example and excellence, as a form of significant speech and as a source of aesthetic experience.

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