

Morality and Salvation in Malaysia's Islamic Literature of The 1970s and '80s

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ABSTRAK

Salah satu kesan gerakan dakwah Islamiah di Malaysia pada dekad 70-an ialah usaha-usaha untuk merenung kembali definisi sastera menurut paradigma Islam dan mensejajarkan sastera Melayu yang selama ini didominasi oleh tradisi sastera Barat menurut perspektif Islam. Ini kemudian membuahkan apa yang dikenali sebagai Sastera Islam. Sastera ini memperakukan keesaan Allah dan segala-gala yang berkaitan dengan keyakinan ini termasuklah peranan manusia sebagai hamba Allah dan khalifah di atas muka bumi. Dalam usaha menterjemahkan falsafah ini ke dalam bentuk sastera, penulis mengungkapkan soal moraliti dan keselamatan diri dunia dan akhirat. Dalam konteks ini krisis moral individu itu diajukan sebagai punca segala kepincangan sosial sementara membetul dan mengatasi krisis ini pula dianggap sebagai penawar kepada kekacau-bilauan sosial. Sehubungan dengan ini, sastera yang terhasil itu mengambil bentuk yang tertentu, iaitu bentuk yang mendorong kepada pengukuhan kebenaran Ilahi.

ABSTRACT

A consequence of global Islamic resurgence or Gerakan Dakwah in Malaysia in the early 1970s was a concerted attempt to redefine literature according to an Islamic paradigm and to align Malay literature, which had long been dominated by Western influence, according to Islamic perspective. This in turn gave rise to what came to be known as Sastera Islam or Islamic Literature. This literature upheld unity of God and all that this profession of faith entailed, including man's dual roles as God's servant and vicegerant on earth. In giving literary expression to this philosophy, writers were apt to highlight the question of morality and salvation, seeing individual crisis of morality as the root cause of social ills and its redress as the panacea for social chaos. The literature took on a distinct form which lent itself to the avowed aim to bear witness to God's truth.

INTRODUCTION

The Terengganu Batu Bersurat of 1302 which dates the earliest Malay writing in the country heralded a rich tradition of letters. Anchored in and evolving out of this tradition, the national literature of contemporary multi-ethnic Malaysia is defined as “creative works written in the national language (that is, Malay) and with Malaysian background”. Literatures written in other indigenous languages such as Murut, Kelabit, Bidayuh, Melanau and others are categorised as *Sastera Daerah* (Regional Literature) while those in English, Chinese and Tamil are *Sastera Sukuan* (Sectional Literature). In 1971, Malay as the medium of instruction in the national education system was enforced in full. At the same time English and vernacular schools, particularly at the secondary level were phased out, thus severely affecting production of literatures in these languages. Malay literature or the national literature, on the other hand, was buoyed by the education system which effectively made the language, and by extension Malay literature, available to and within reach of society as a whole. At this stage of its development, the national literature is largely produced by Malay/Muslim writers with little participation from the non-Malays/non-Muslims. It is within the context of the dominance of Muslims that the Malaysian literary world was to witness the phenomenon of *Sastera Islam* (Islamic Literature) in the 1970s and ‘80s,¹ a phenomenon which brought in its train, among other things, the production of Islamic novels, the focus of this study. It is the aim of this paper to explore the question of morality and salvation as manifested in Malaysia’s Islamic novels. It seeks to examine how this question is couched and presented, particularly in terms of the philosophical underpinnings which inform the works, the mode of story-telling adopted and the narrative devices employed. In highlighting these points the paper also seeks to establish the link between form and content and the contexts in which they were produced. To this end the paper will firstly look at the background and discourse of *Sastera Islam* or Islamic Literature before discussing manifestations of morality and salvation in Malaysia’s Islamic novels.

ISLAMIC LITERATURE IN MALAYSIA: BACKGROUND AND DISCOURSE

Contemporary worldwide Islamic revivalism was not without its impact on Malaysia, which witnessed the emergence of the *Gerakan Dakwah* or the Dakwah Movement in the early 1970s. The term *dakwah*, from the Arabic *da’wa*, means to invite or call, to Islam. Within the Malay/Muslim

community to which the movement was confined, *dakwah* was perceived in terms of the urgent need to "return" to Islam, which was seen as "*addin*" or the complete way of life. Although initially confined to young students on university campuses, the movement soon gained ground among a cross section of the community to emerge as a distinct phenomenon. In no time it manifested itself in a variety of ways, including a new dress code, various activities which were recognisably *dakwah*-oriented and the formation of *dakwah* groups. One such group was Darul Arqam whose "Islamic village" aimed to offer an alternative life-style, one characterised by close adherence to the tenets of Islam. It was at this time too that government Islamization policy began to take shape, a process facilitated by an expanded religious bureaucracy which was monitored, and overseen by the Religious Affairs Section of the Prime Minister's Department. Outside the government, Islamic banks, hospitals and insurance companies began to make their appearance which, although modest in number, nevertheless served to reinforce the broad sweep of the *dakwah* appeal. All these manifestations served to underscore the importance of Islam in contemporary Malaysia.

The literary scene, in its turn, demonstrated a similar enthusiasim to "return" to Islam. It was felt that modern Malay literature which had long been influenced by the West and therefore inconsistent with Islam, must be realigned accordingly within the Islamic perspective. Against the backdrop of past lapses, the need for a literature consonant with Islam could not have been more urgent. Given this very conducive literary climate, discussions of Islam and its literature began to dominate the literary scene. At the forefront of the discourse were religious scholars such as Mohd. Kamal Hassan, Muhammad Yusuf Zaki and Uthman al-Muhammady, whose religious expertise were eagerly sought after, notwithstanding their marginality to literature. Indeed, their presence invested the discourse with a credibility necessary to just such an enterprise. The sustained discussions on the subject paved the way for what came to be known as *Sastera Berunsur Islam* or literature incorporating elements of Islam. Further refining soon followed, and in 1977 the writer and critic Shahnnon Ahmad, once a member of Darul Arqam, wrote an article titled simply "Sastera Islam" (Islamic Literature). Whilst not an exhaustive study, the article nevertheless treated the subject of Islamic literature in a focussed way and highlighted several crucial points. It also helped to crystallise the notion of *Sastera Islam*.

That Islamic Literature had captured the imagination of the Malay literary world was evident in the various literary activities and groups which emerged in its wake. For example, Gabungan Penulis Islam Malaysia (GAPIM—Federation of Malaysian Islamic Writers) was founded

in May 1976 to boost production and appreciation of Islamic Literature. Literary activities began to take on a distinct character in so far as the Islamic identity was consciously cultivated and projected. For example, the Islamic orientation of Islam in “Islam Sebagai Sumber Sastra” (“Islam As The Source [of inspiration] For Literature”), the theme of the 1978 Literature Day, could hardly be missed. Further, a categorical stand vis-a-vis Islamic Literature became manifest when some magazines openly sought Islamic works or denied publication to works which were deemed to be non Islamic. The extent of the appeal of Islamic Literature was perhaps best reflected when *dakwah* groups, for whom literature was marginal, became actively involved in Islamic Literature. It was thus that the 1970s resounded with calls for Islamic Literature.

The notion of Islamic Literature, as crystallised by Shahnon Ahmad’s article mentioned above, is often enunciated with reference to a few Quranic verses from surah al-Shuara (26):224-228:

And the Poet,
It is those straying in Evil,
Who follow them:
Seest thou not that they
Wander distracted in every
Valley?-
And that they say
What they practise not?-
Except those who believe,
Work righteousness, engage much
In the remembrance of God,
And defend themselves only after
They are unjustly attacked.

(Yusof Ali’s translation)

The verses which draw attention to two types of poets underscore the Islamic concept of man as having two roles, namely those of servant (*hamba*) and vicegerent (*khalifah*). His role as servant calls for his total submission to Allah and none other. As a vicegerent on earth, it is incumbent upon him to encourage or enjoin good and to discourage or prohibit evil, a role which goes beyond himself to others in a relationship characterised by care and concern for the well-being and welfare of others. Thus, a Muslim is bound in everything he does by the dual concerns to submit to God and thereby earn His pleasure and to ensure the safety and well-being of his fellow human beings. Within this perspective, his literary activity is thus a form of *ibadah*, or worship. Grounded in this philosophical framework, Shahnon Ahmad (1981:3) attempts to define Islamic Literature as follows:

Literature produced in the name of Allah and for mankind. The two expressions "in the name of Allah" and "for mankind" are closely interrelated for when we produce literature in the name of Allah, we believe instinctively, without doubt, that everything which Allah commands of us (through the Quran and tradition) is for man's well-being and happiness. As such, we can conclude that Islamic Literature is literature in the name of Allah and for the good of mankind as a whole (this and subsequent translations are mine).²

The definition above underscores the concept of *tauhid* or belief in the unity of Allah, the Truth as set down by the Quran and Tradition and the concept of man's two roles of servant and vicegerent. This philosophical underpinning makes Islamic Literature, necessarily the work of Muslims, an endeavour to enjoin the reader to appreciate the truth, glorify God and thereby earn His pleasure. With this preoccupation as its ultimate objective, Islamic Literature is variously referred to as *Sastera Tauhid* (Literature of Faith), *Sastera Muqaddas* (Sacred Literature) and *Sastera Dakwah* (Dakwah Literature).

LITERARY MANIFESTATION OF MORALITY AND SALVATION

It is against the backdrop of the Islamic Literature discourse with its emphasis on literary activity as an act of worship, an emphasis which makes incumbent upon man his dual roles of servant and vicegerent, that the paper will now turn to its literary manifestations. To this end the paper has chosen to examine 10 novels which were winning entries of various Islamic novel writing competitions. They are *Mengejar Kedamaian* by Abdul Manap Abdul Malik, *Ku Ingin Kasihmu* by Siti Hawa Mohd. Hassan, *Tok Bilal* by Ibrahim Omar, *Masuk Ke dalam Cahaya* by Abdullah Hussein,³ *Hidayah* by Harun Haji Salleh, *Bahimiyah* by Nora,⁴ *Arbain* by Sabda S,⁵ *Nurul Hidayah* by Hasan Ali and *Mereka Yang Tertewas* by Hasanudin Md. Isa⁶ and *Di sebalik Sebuah Kubah* by Harun Haji Salleh.⁷ Organised by various bodies, both within and outside the government, these competitions aimed to make more Islamic works of satisfactory quality and quantity available to the reading public, particularly the young. Further, it was hoped that these reading materials would cushion the negative impact of works which, as pointed out earlier, were largely influenced by Western literary tradition.

It is pertinent to note that these competitions were advertised specifically as *Peraduan Menulis Sastera (Novel) Islam* (Islamic Literature [Novel] Writing Competition) or sometimes referred to as *Peraduan Menulis Sastera (Novel) Islam* (Competitions for Writing Literature [Novel] Incorporating Islamic Values). In addition, the advertisements, which appeared in newspapers and literary magazines,

often made clear what was expected of manuscripts submitted for the competitions, particularly in reference to the Islamic orientation of the competitions. The advertisement for the Trengganu competition, the first of such Islamic novel competition to be held, specified that:

the works produced must reflect and uphold Islamic thoughts in various aspects of man's life such as social, belief, moral, economic, political and the like⁸.

Couched differently, but with a similar emphasis, the competition for Hijrah also stressed the role of Islam in literary works:

The main objective of the competition is to tease the imagination and intellect vis-a-vis the role of Islam in creating local or regional culture and its ability to resolve conflicts which arise.

It also aims to revive Islamic vocabulary for the important purpose of Islamic intellectual treasury.⁹

Further, "the characteristics (sic?) sought for, particularly for creative writings, are truth, justice and beauty"¹⁰

Besides the advertisements, the process of judging the manuscripts similarly demonstrated the preoccupation with the role of Islam as well as the literary merit of manuscripts submitted. For example, the judges' report for the Hijrah competition, made available to the public upon announcement of results, made clear the criteria used:

With regard to the Islamic elements in narratives, the panel in general, is firm and is of the opinion that the ways, life-style and worldview according to Islam as *ad-din* must be accorded a particular and absolute place, without sacrificing aesthetic presentation. The thematic exploration of Islam as *ad-din* may be conducted at various levels, but the more popular and rather obvious is that which concerns the relationship among fellowmen where the rule "Allah's benevolence alone that triumphs" serves both as basis and resolution.¹¹

Elsewhere, the various panels of judges would echo the definitions of Islamic literature (novel) enunciated in the advertisements above.¹²

It is clear that, consistent with the discourse of Islamic Literature, these competitions were underpinned by the philosophy which sought to uphold Islamic moral order in which Islamic values served both as recourse and succour. Manifested in fictive terms, they must also be aesthetically pleasing.

The pronouncement of the judicious blend of form and content notwithstanding, it is worthwhile to note the underlying importance attached to Islamic content, an emphasis not altogether surprising given

the context of the production of the novels, both within and outside the literary world. The slant towards religious content is perhaps reflected in the panel of judges in which religious scholars sometimes outnumbered literature scholars, as seen, for example, in the Hijrah competition where the third and final set of judges were made up of two literature and three religious scholars with another as reserve. Perhaps a more concrete example of the importance of content may be seen in the judges' report of the Sabah Hijrah Novel Writing competition. In giving *Malina* third prize, the panel of judges pointed to the narrative's conclusion which it viewed as disappointing. *Malina* tells the story of a protagonist of the same name, a strong woman dedicated to the ideals of Islam. Her dedication won her the affection of a Christian man who decided to embrace Islam. Her family's plan to marry her off to her cousin broke her heart, and she fell ill and died. The judges found this conclusion unsatisfactory. According to them, "Death for this devout woman, without doubt, renders the writer's message unclear".¹³ Accordingly, in recommending the novel for publication, a standard practice for works which won competitions, the judges, among other things, sought for the protagonist's death to be scrapped and the character retained "in order to invoke a positive effect on the theme".¹⁴ Last but not least, the certificate awarded winning entries was a recognition of the works as an "expression of upholding Islamic ideals via the written medium"¹⁵. This in turn pointed to the importance of proper content which must not diverge from the Islamic moral order.

As noted earlier, in no other competitions were first prizes awarded except for the Sabah Hijrah competition where *Di sebalik Sebuah Kubah* won first prize. Whilst it is true that withholding the first prize would appear to be the norm in literary writing competitions,¹⁶ it is nevertheless interesting to note the reasons forwarded by the judges by way of explaining the omission. In almost all the competitions, judges lamented what they perceived to be the absence of a clear understanding of what an Islamic novel was. This was said to be due to writers' inability to blend harmoniously content and form. In addition, writers' lack of knowledge limited them to subjects which were of common knowledge, thereby offering little challenge to readers who demanded more "meatier stuff".¹⁷

Having mentioned the judges' reservations, it is only fair to point out that their judgements have also come under scrutiny. Alias Zaidi, for example, questioned some of the judges' credibility, arguing that some of the works which were not selected were far superior to those awarded prize.¹⁸

The weaknesses and reservations mentioned above notwithstanding, these novels were solicited, judged and later disseminated to the reading

public as Islamic novels. (Jackets of these novels bore the fact that they were winning entries of Islamic Novel Writing Competitions). In this context then, the texts, products of conscious attempts to produce Islamic literature, may be seen as representing what have come to be perceived as Islamic novels. And it is in this sense that manifestations of morality and salvation in fictive terms are to be examined.

It is worth repeating that in light of the context in which the novels were produced, in particular the pervasive *dakwah* orientation and the Islamic Literature discourse, the philosophical underpinning which points to man's dual roles is crucial, for they constitute the crux of his human activities and concerns. His role as servant to God and none other liberates him from viewing any other being as his Superior. Similarly, his role as vicegerent liberates him from self-centredness for it necessarily focuses his attention not only on himself but also on others whose welfare and wellbeing it is his duty to protect. Therein lie the morality expected of him and the salvation that such a morality promises.

These two crucial roles are manifested in various thematic preoccupations in the novels. It would appear that the question of individual conduct and its consequences seems to attract writers' attention. This is manifested in terms of moral turpitude, lack of religious upbringing and the consequent moral degradation, greed for worldly ends at the expense of other loftier considerations and such-like preoccupations generally associated with the "sensate culture", all of which are regarded as deadening and morally bankrupt. On the other hand, there are stories of moral fortitude and courage, of inner strength which does not buckle under pressure and act of righteousness and piety. The moral underpinning is upheld when good triumphs over evil as seen in repentance and similar acts of moral improvement, spiritual fulfilment or contentment, harmony and the like: or, in contradistinction to the beneficent result of the Islamic way of life, sad or humiliating end awaits those who choose to spurn Islam or neglect its injunctions.

The question of moral turpitude and its manifestations, for example, are clearly highlighted in *Bahimiyah*. The novel centres round the wealthy Tofan family and their life-style which is painted as negligent of religious duties and injunctions. Datuk Tofan builds his business empire on shady deals and corrupt practices. Married with three children, he engages in illicit sex with his domestic help, and when she bears his child, marries her only to divorce and oust her out of the house. He then takes as his second wife his Chinese and non-Muslim secretary with whom he has an extended affair. He makes no attempt to acquaint his convert second wife with Islam, and prides himself for having brought a non-Muslim into the Islamic fold.

Datuk Tofan neglects his first wife and children and devotes himself to his second wife upon whom he showers both love and wealth, including buying her a disco-cum-pub. His first wife spends her time gambling with other wealthy wives who are similarly neglected by their husbands and are bored with their lives. His daughter, Diah, spurned by a boyfriend, takes a series of lovers, while his younger son, Nafiq is a nightclub entertainer and a drug addict who repeatedly robs and threatens his mother. The narrative highlights Khairul, the elder son, as the exception to the Tofan household. An overseas-trained lawyer, Khairul joins a *dakwah* group upon his return from England and dedicates his legal firm to helping the poor and needy. He befriends the caretaker of a mosque and his daughter, Siti Marhamah. Soon the mosque and their humble abode, a sharp contrast to his parents' luxurious bungalow, become his preferred home, a place where he deepens his knowledge of Islam. Strengthened by his spiritual commitments, and undaunted by his family's disdain and condescension, Khairul never tires of helping his family to "return" to Islam, and the narrative abounds with instances of his good deeds.

The story progresses to show simultaneously the gradual but sure decline of the Tofan household, and Khairul's heightened awareness of his role as a Muslim and the obligations and commitments that go with it. The Tofan family structure begins to fray when Datuk Tofan, on the instigation of his second wife, divorces his first wife, who later dies. He then loses his luxurious bungalow at a gaming table to a Datuk Tan with whom his second wife has an affair. On discovering the tryst Datuk Tofan kills his wife. While awaiting his trial Datuk Tofan repents his past lapses. He is reunited with his child who turns out to be none other than Siti Marhamah whom her mother had abandoned at the mosque when Datuk Tofan ousted her out of his house. Meanwhile Nafiq who carries on an affair with the family domestic help, is determined not to see the family house change hands. The conclusion of the story has Nafiq burn the house down. Little does he know that together with the house he also burns his father, Datuk Tofan who, out on bail, has quietly come home. The narrative juxtaposes Khairul's Islamic way of life and that of his parents and siblings which is characterised by acrimony, deceit, greed, gambling, illicit sex, murder and the like, all of which are categorically proscribed by Islam. In the midst of the Tofan chaos Khairul and those allied with him stand as the moral constant which provides the yardstick by which other characters are judged and rewarded or punished accordingly. The conclusion of the story which has the house, bought with ill-gotten money, end up a heap of ashes, bespeaks the moral bankruptcy of the life-style with which it is associated.

Similar manifestations of negligence of Islamic injunctions or, its opposite, pious observance of religious duties, are also seen in *Masuk Ke dalam Cahaya*. Indeed, the juxtapositioning of good and evil is distinctly captured in the novel by the inclusion of Satan and his followers in a fictive world peopled by human beings. *Masuk Ke dalam Cahaya* tells the story of a village, Kampung Cahaya or Village of Light whose God-fearing inhabitants live out their lives in accordance with Islamic percepts. The narrative moves back and forth from the tranquil village to the world of devils where Satan presides and delights in the reports filed by Greed, Envy, Hate, Deceit and the rest about the havoc they wreak among mankind. In their list of success stories, Village of Light stands as a great challenge. After several failed attempts by his followers to lead the villagers astray, Satan himself takes on the job of ruining the village. Satan and his followers take the form of human beings, and after building a palatial house in the village, lure the villages with such offerings as beautiful girls, abundant alcoholic drinks, permissive relationships and the like, to which some villagers succumb. Concerned about the turn of events, the villagers redouble their spiritual strength and vigilance, and chanting Quranic verses they confront and overcome the evil intrusion. Satan has to concede defeat to a band of villagers whose weapon of deep religious convictions renders his satanic powers impotent.

Another aspect of the preoccupation with morality and salvation is depicted in the pitting of Islam against other religions or beliefs, as seen in *Hidayah* and *Arbain*. *Hidayah* tells the story of twin brothers of a pagan hill tribe who were separated in their childhood. Found by a Muslim family, Ustaz Mazran grew up to be a religious teacher, a fact borne out by the title "ustaz" (religious scholar) by which he is known. At the school to which he is newly posted, he meets the beautiful Mary Munang, a fellow teacher who is a Catholic. Their relationship incurs the wrath of Francis Unggai who, being a fellow Christian, feels he has more claim to Mary's affections. The story highlights the several debates and discussions on Islam and Christianity between Mazran and Mary, and the latter's inner conflict. Mary's gradual attraction to Islam is concretised in the final episode in which, following Francis's attempted rape, she flees to Mazran's house. Her pendant in the shape of a cross which breaks off in the flight is left by the roadside, symbolically foreshadowing her severance from the Catholic faith. The conclusion of the story has Mary embrace Islam and marry Mazran, and the latter's reunion with his long lost brother who turns out to be Mary's former boyfriend, Father Alexander Tawai, who chooses celibacy and the priesthood.

In a similar vein, *Arbain* pits Islam against Christianity as seen in the many sustained debates between Arbain of the title, an Islamic religious scholar, and several Christian priests. Arbain's cogent arguments which render the priests speechless and his many successes in bringing the wayward back to the Islamic fold, serve to underscore the triumph of Islam and its superiority. This triumph is concretised in Munika's disavowal of her planned calling to the Christian church in order to embrace Islam and marry Muawiyah, Arbain's "lost" friend who has "returned" to Islam. Emphasising a similar point, *Masuk Ke dalam Cahaya* offers an alternative life-style to that of Islam, one posited as attractive and full of fun. However, this alternative is soon proved to be hollow when at the end of the story Satan's big house and his beautiful girls turn out to be a heap of ashes and ragged prostitutes, a blinding mirage which the narrative's moral underpinning clearly rejects. *

Besides issues of individual conduct and religious conflicts, manifestations of morality and salvation are evident in the various attempts to effect the "return" to Islam which go beyond the self to others, consistent with the role of vicegerent. These attempts are confined to individuals or, going beyond the individual, *the ummah* (community of believers) as a whole as seen in endeavours for communal benefit.

An example of the role of vicegerency of the first kind is amply demonstrated in the character Arbain who brings religious solace and comfort to those in trouble, a task made that much easier by his chosen career as an *Ustaz*, a religious official attached to a religious department. For example, Arbain helps Zabur whose marriage is on the rocks to regain self-respect and stability in his life. Besides Arbain, Anuar of *Mengejar Kedamaian*, Khairul of *Bahimiyah* and Anjang Wahid of *Ku Ingin KasihMu* stand for the kind of *dakwah* work that reaches out to others on a more or less personal and individual basis. In varying degrees of emphasis, the novels studied abound with stories of deeds rendered others in selfless acts motivated by no other desire than to seek God's pleasure.

Going beyond the individual, *Mereka Yang Tertewas*, *Tok Bilal* and *Di Sebalik Kubah* focus on the role of vicegerency expressed in a broader reach of communal good. By and large, in the novels studied this role is depicted in terms of building mosques, religious schools, prayer houses and the like. The three novels forward individuals who have to face untold hardship in carrying out their duty as good Muslims. Their efforts are thwarted at every attempt but they neither flinch nor falter in the mission to spread God's words. Tok Bilal of the title, for example, suffers physical assault and imprisonment while Lebai Pa of *Mereka Yang Tertewas* sacrifices his hard-earned money to finance the construction of a mosque. Similarly, Haji Jamalul of *Di Sebalik Sebuah Kubah* is subject

to humiliation and verbal abuse and finally dies, while the perpetrator of his suffering and subsequent death grapples with his guilty conscience and despair. In all the instances cited, the characters' respective undertakings stand proud as testimony to their dedication and religious piety. By the same token, these conclusions also underscore the philosophical underpinning which upholds Islamic values.

The above examples demonstrate the use of various thematic preoccupations by way of highlighting the question of morality and salvation. Sins and transgressions against Islamic injunctions are couched in terms of gambling, womanising, moral indecency, sex, drinking, deceit, hypocrisy, criminal acts as well as murder. On the other hand, moral rectitude is pictured in decency, honesty, filial piety, diligence, selflessness, care and concern for others and such like qualities. The examples further posit that negligence of religious duties or moral transgressions result in despair, pain, anguish, chaos and absence of peace and contentment. On the other hand, the Islamic way of life ensures peace, harmony, fulfilment and a meaningful life. Further, the positive effects so generated are not confined to the individual concerned only but embrace those around him, thus linking the individual and his fellow human beings in a dynamic relationship underpinned by a deep sense of social responsibility.

In giving literary manifestations to the issue of morality and salvation, the question of a suitable form is a relevant consideration. The religious orientation of a literary undertaking as underlined by the concept of *ibadah* and the element of didacticism, as well as the need for moral clarity in literary works, call into play various narrative devices and techniques. Whilst it is beyond the scope of the present paper to discuss in detail the forms of the novels studied, it is however possible to point out some devices deemed appropriate for a literary production such as an Islamic novel. Indeed, this discussion would highlight a few of the devices which may be seen to be associated with Islamic theological discourse.

The employment as fictive characters of religious scholars and officials such as *ustaz*, *bilal* (a muezzin), *imam* (leader of a congregational prayer), *siak* (caretaker of a mosque) and the like, or the use of prayer houses, mosques and religious schools as pivots around which narratives are woven, is pertinent. The use of such institutions and officials clearly associated with Islam lends itself to the employment of Islamic modes of discourse or conventions.

One such convention is the sermon. Whilst this device has fallen into disfavour in modern Malay literature, its revival in the Islamic novels studied would suggest a perception of its appropriateness for an Islamic creative work. To be sure, its use in the narratives is by and large

confined to what may be termed as recognisably religious instances, such as in discussions on Islam or in interactions with or among religious officials. Used in this way, the sermon may indeed seem "natural" and the "sermonising effect" made less blatant. On the one hand, this points to creative manipulation of readily available resources. On the other, its use serves to reinforce the philosophical underpinning of the creative endeavour.¹⁹

Besides the convention of the sermon, the religious orientation evident in thematic preoccupations, as mentioned above, also serves to facilitate the use of the Quran and Tradition, the two sources of Islamic knowledge and value system. This in turn makes possible the use of stories available in them as well as Quranic verses. The writers studied readily avail themselves of this rich tradition at their disposal. Besides familiarity, particularly to Muslim readers who constitute the bulk of the reading public, as mentioned above, these stories and Quranic verses carry a sense of cogency and authority not available in other discourses. For example, *Masuk Ke dalam Cahaya*, the title of Abdullah Hussein's novel, is a phrase from the Quranic verse Al-Baqarah: 257. Indeed, the novel is prefaced by the verse before the narrative proper begins. The strategic positioning of the verse serves as a signal to the moral thrust of the narrative, one whose validity is beyond doubt as affirmed in fictive terms by the novel itself.

Another device employed is the use of concepts and terminology which are recognisably Islamic or are associated with Islamic theology. A case in point is the title *Bahimiyah*. An Arabic term, it refers to a particular level of man's desires and is described as "of or like an animal". This refers to characteristics generally found in animals which are distinguished by the absence of reason or intellect. In animals such characteristics are manifested in the desire to eat continuously and to mate irrespective of place and time. In Islamic understanding, characteristics of *bahimiyah* are evident in those negligent of Islamic duties and responsibilities.

As mentioned above, the examples cited do not claim to exhaust the devices used. Indeed, the examples examined are both selective and limited. However, their discussion is intended to draw attention to particular narrative devices evident in the novels studied. Further, their persistence in several winning entries of Islamic Novel Writing Competition over several years would suggest their importance in the conception of an Islamic novel. This contention is strengthened by Mohd. Affandi Hassan's open recommendation of the sermon as a legitimate narrative device.²⁰ All these would point to the presence of conventions regarded as suitable and appropriate for Islamic novels, and employed as such. In the context of the question of morality and

salvation in the novels studied, these devices serve to facilitate its exposition in fictive terms.

CONCLUSION

The *dakwah* movement which urges for a “return” to Islam initiates within the literary world a concerted effort to relocate modern Malay literature, long dominated by Western influences, within Islamic perspective. The Islamic Literature discourse so generated emphasises literary activity as an act of worship, consistent with man’s dual concerns for God’s pleasure and welfare for his fellow human beings. This philosophical underpinning, similarly employed to inform Islamic Novel Writing Competition, brings to the fore works with a distinct character. The form demonstrates a comfortable adoption and adaptation of certain conventions generally associated with Islamic theological discourse. This facilitates the exposition of morality and salvation, a dominant thematic preoccupation, in terms of negligence of or adherence to Islamic values and injunctions. Positing the religion as both recourse and succour, these works affirm in fictive terms Islam’s vitality and dynamism, and its relevance to both the individual and society as a whole. In highlighting these points the novels uphold that Islam is life-affirming as opposed to life-denying.

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NOTA

1. For further information, see my “*Sastera Islam: Malaysia’s Literary Phenomenon Of The 1970s And ‘80s*”, *The Muslim World*, Vol. LXXIX, nos. 3-4, pp.232 – 248. materials on *Sastera Islam* here have been drawn from this article which examines the context, discourse and conventions of *Sastera Islam* as a whole. The present paper examines specifically the question of morality and salvation in winning entries of various Islamic Novel Writing Competitions. See also my “The Notion Of *Dakwah* And. Its Perceptions In Malaysia’s Islamic Literature Of The 1970s And ‘80s”, *Journal Of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. XX, No. 2, September, 1989, pp.288.

2. “Sastera dicipta kerana Allah untuk manusia. Dua ungkapan “kerana Allah” dan “untuk manusia” cukup erat kerana bila bersastera kerana Allah dengan sendirinya kita yakin tanpa berbelah bagi bahawa setiap yang diperintah

oleh Allah (melalui al-Quran dan al-sunnah) adalah untuk kesejahteraan dan kebahagiaan hidup manusia. Kerana itu sastera Islam dapat kita simpulkan sebagai sastera kerana Allah berhikmah untuk manusia sejagat". See Shahnnon Ahmad. 1981. *Kesusasteraan Dan Etika Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Fajar Bakti, p. 3.

3. These are winning entries of the Islamic Novel Writing Competition organised by the Trengganu state government in 1978 in conjunction with the 1978 *Hari Sastera* or Literature Day whose theme was "Islam Sebagai Sumber Sastera" (Islam As Source (of inspiration) Of Literature). There were no first or second prizes. *Mengejar Kedamaian* won third prize of \$3000.00, while the others won consolation prizes of \$1000.00 each.

4. These are winning entries of the Islamic Novel Writing Competition organised in 1980 by the Religious Affairs Section of the Prime Minister's Department to commemorate 15 centuries of Hijrah (the Muslim calendar). There were no first or second prizes. *Hidayah* won third prize of \$5000.00 while *Bahimiyah* and *Mencari Jalan Keluar* by Ahmad Dugol won consolation prizes of \$2000.00 each. (The latter novel is not available for study here).

5. This novel won third prize – there being no first or second prizes awarded – at the Novel Daruliman I Competition sponsored by the Trengganu State government and jointly organised by Persatuan Sasterawan Trengganu (PELITA – Trengganu Writers' Association) and GAPENA (Gabungan Perasatuan Penulis Nasional – The Federation Of Writers' Associations).

6. These two novels won consolation prizes at the Islamic Novel Writing Competition jointly organised in 1988 by Yayasan Pelajaran Islam (YPI – Islamic Education Foundation) and Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka.

7. This novel won first prize of \$5000.00 at the Sabah Islamic Novel Writing Competition held in 1981 to commemorate 15 centuries of Hijrah. *AAH* by Hussein Kasau and *Malina* by Obasiah Haji Osman which won second and third prizes respectively and *Mujahid Kinabalu* by Hussein Kasau, *Bunga Daun Puding* by Siti Rahmah G Ibrahim, *Bulat Datang Menggelek* by K Bali Abdul Rahim Abdullah, all three of which won consolation prizes, are not available for study here.

8. "—karya yang dihasilkan mestilah mencerminkan dan menegaskan pemikiran Islam dalam kehidupan manusia samada dalam aspek kemasyarakatan, aqidah, moral, ekonomi, politik dan sebagainya", 'Sayembara Novel Islam Bermula' *Utusan Zaman*, 8.10.78.

9. "... tujuan utama peraduan ini untuk mencungkil ilham dan daya pemikiran tentang peranan Islam dalam pembentukan kebudayaan tempatan atau serantau dan keupayaannya menyelesaikan segala masalah yang timbul", *Berita Harian*, 11.11.1980.

10. "... ciri yang dikehendaki, khususnya bagi peraduan penulisan kreatif ialah kebenaran, keadilan dan keindahan", *Utusan Malaysia*, 8.11.1980.

11. "Berhubung dengan unsur-unsur Islam dalam karya cereka, Panel secara umum tetapi tegas beranggapan bahawa cara, gaya hidup serta pandangan hidup menurut Islam sebagai *addin* mestilah mendapat tempat yang tertentu dan mutlak, tanpa mengorbankan nilai-nilai seni persembahannya. Penerokaan tema Islam sebagai *addin* ini boleh dirintis melalui berbagai tahap, dan yang popular

serta agak mudah ialah yang hanya mengenai hubungan antara manusia di mana hukum “keredhaan Allah sahaja yang bakal menang” menjadi asas bertolak dan kesimpulan”, *Laporan Panel Penilaian: Peraduan Mengarang (Novel) Siri II (1981) Anjuran Jawatankuasa Perayaan Sempena Sambutan Abad ke-15 Hijrah Peringkat Negeri Sabah*.

12. See, for example, the definition of Islamic Novel forwarded by the panel of judges for the Hijrah competition at the national level: ..karya yang mencerminkan dan menegakkan kebenaran serta ketinggian Islam dalam kehidupan manusia, yang merangkumi aspek-aspek akidah, ekonomi, politik, sosial, pelajaran dan budaya, *Laporan Peraduan Mengarang Novel Berunsur Islam Sempena Abad 15 Hijrah*, pp.3-4. (...works which reflect and uphold Islamic truth and superiority in man’s life, including the aspects of belief, economy, politics, education and culture). See also the Finance Minister’s speech at the prize-giving ceremony which stressed the marriage in Islamic literary works of turth and beauty. (“Sastera Melayu Tidak Terletak Konsep Semata-mata, *Mingguan Malaysia*, 30.10.1983).

13. “Kematian gadis yang kuat beriman ini, tidak syak lagi telah mengkaburkan amanat penulis”, *Laporan Panel Penilai: Peraduan Mengarang (Novel) Siri II Anjuran Jawatankuasa Perayaan Sempena Sambutan Abad ke-15 Hijrah Peringkat Negeri Sabah*, p.5.

14. “...watak Malina terus dihidupkan bagi menimbulkan kesan yang positif; kepada tema”, *Laporan Panel Penilai Peraduan Mengarang (Novel) Siri II (1981) Anjuran Jawatan kuasa Perayaan Sempena Sambutai Abad ke-15 Hijrah Peringkat Negeri Sabah*, p.6.

15. “...sebagai pernyataan menegakkan cita-cita Islam melalui penulisan”. See certificate awarded by the Religious Section of the Prime Minister’s Departmen, 1982.

16. This point has been raised by several critics. See, for example, Alias Zaidi’s “Novel Berunsur Dakwah: Seorang Lagi Bakat Baru Lahir”, *Utusan Zaman*, 10.8.80, in which he refers to what he calls the “kedekut” (tight-fisted) culture, which makes judges reluctant to award first prizes. He argues that the prizes already allotted by the organising committee should be disbursed by way of encouraging writers. He points out that the taste of a few judges need not necessarily concur with that of the reading public, and that it should be left to history to judge the literary merits of the winning works.

17. Elsewhere I have argued that this narrow scope is due in part to the prudence which necessarily makes writers cautious lest they misrepresent Islam, or far worse, falsify it altogether. See my “Sastera Islam: Malaysia’s Literary Phenomenon Of The 1970s And ‘80s”, *The Muslim World*, Vol. LXXIX, No. 3-4.

18. The present writer’s own comparisons of novels which won second and third placings with those that won consolation prizes would also urge her to question the judges’ verdict. In a different context altogether, *Salina* which had to concede to *Musafir* which won second prize at the 1956 Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka competition, was, in subsequent literary development, judged far superior, and was translated into several foreign languages. (For more information on the subject, see my “Perihal Kesasteraan Novel *Salina*: Satu

Undangan Untuk Merenung Kembali Tradisi Kritikan Kita?" SARI, 11 (1993). The same was true of *Desa Pingitan* and *Lingkar*. The latter, judged worthy of a consolation prize only, was later hailed as far superior to *Desa Pingitan*. The politics of the "literariness" of these novels is an issue which merits attention but is outside the scope of the present paper.

19. Mohd. Affandi Hassan, a respected creative writer and critic, contends that in light of the philosophical underpinning of truth and beauty, and the incumbency of man's dual roles, Islamic literature must necessarily exemplify this Islamic truth and beauty. He thus initiates a new genre which he calls ESPEN, a combination of the two words "esei" (essay) and "cerpen" (short story). The marriage of the essay mode of discourse to creative writing underscores the importance of responsible and meaningful content, in the true Islamic tradition of elucidating the truth within the Islamic perspective. Among the literary conventions he recommends for use in *espen* is the sermon. He argues that writers need not be defensive or apologetic about its employment if it facilitates the ultimate objective of celebrating truth. Affandi also writes an *espen* by way of demonstrating the new genre. It is interesting to note that unlike the Islamic discourse which recognises as Islamic literature only works written by Muslims, *espen(s)* may be written by non-Muslims as well. (See Affandi Mohd. Hassan. "Kesan Dari Satu Majlis Forum", *Dewan Sastera*, September, 1989, for his *espen*. See also his articles, review articles and rejoinders which cover various aspects of the subject such as Islamic literary approach, the teaching of literature, a model of Malay poetics and others. The articles referred to include the following: "Pendekatan Estetika Daripada Pendekatan Tauhid I - VI", *Dewan Sastera*, January - June, 1990; "'Espen' Satu Genre Baru Kesusasteraan", *Dewan Sastera*, October, 1989; "Medan-medan Dalam Sistem Persuratan Melayu: Satu Huraian Kaedah Dan Tafsiran I - V", *Dewan Sastera*, March - July, 1991; "pemikiran Dan Pendekatan Dalam Kritikan Melayu I - IV", *Dewan Sastera*, January-April, 1989.

20. This contention is strengthened even more by the new genre *espen* which would suggest a perceived need for a particular style or mode of literary expression, one consistent with the demands of such a work as Islamic literature. Whilst it is true that the genre is still new and its impact or lack of it has yet to be determined, its introduction at this juncture into discussions of Islamic Literature would, as pointed out above, suggest a perceived inadequacy or unsuitability of literary vehicles extant and the need for one which would allow the full potentials of Islamic literature to be made manifest. It also underscores the fact that the Islamic literature debate is far from over. Whilst this question merits attention, it is, however, beyond the scope of the present paper.

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