

THE RURAL-URBAN DICHOTOMY IN MODERN MALAY LITERATURE: ORIGINS AND FORMATION IN THE PRE-WAR PERIOD*

UNGKU MAIMUNAH MOHD. TAHIR

SINOPSIS

Kertas ini membincangkan beberapa faktor yang terlibat dalam penghasilan sastera Melayu sebelum Perang Dunia Kedua. Polisi pendidikan, pola demografi, aktiviti-aktiviti ekonomi serta iklim sosial dan politik semasa telah sama-sama mewujudkan satu corak sastera yang tertentu. Sastera yang dihasilkan memperlihatkan dikotomi yang jelas antara kampung dan kota, khususnya dari segi persepsi pengarang terhadap persekitaran mereka.

SYNOPSIS

This paper discusses the various factors involved in the production of Malay literature before World War II. It argues that education policy, demographic pattern, economic activities and the overall social and political climate combined together to bring about a distinct literary form. Malay literature demonstrated a clear rural-urban dichotomy, manifestations of which were especially evident in the writers' perception of their surroundings.

The approach commonly adopted in a study of modern Malay literature has always been to see literary works as "ciptaan istimewa" (special creation) by "individu-individu istimewa yang peka" (special individuals who are sensitive). This approach, which concentrates mainly on describing theme, plot, characterisation, diction, imagery and such-like components of criticism, sees literary works as products which are of "universal validity" and are able to touch the soul of mankind. Given this universal relevance", the approach further legitimizes studying literature outside the context which gives it birth: in short, literature is considered as a phenomenon which is a-historical and a-social. This paper subscribes to the premise that a study of literature necessarily involves placing it within the context which produces it. If focuses on the historical and social forces which surround literature as important categories in the study of literature. Further, it seeks to show how these forces shape and determine the literature produced, especially in terms of its content and form.

*The material for this article is drawn mainly from Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, Antara Kampung dan Kota: Rural Bias in the Novels of Shahnun Ahmad. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1984.

EDUCATION IN COLONIAL MALAYA

Traditional Malay society was rigidly divided into two classes, the ruling and the ruled. This division was based on birth and was strengthened by belief and custom. It was believed, for example, that rulers were vested with divine majesty or *daulat* and that any infringement or *derhaka* of this *daulat* would incur a *tulah* or retribution. This served to consolidate the ruler's position as one which brooked no challenge. Custom also helped to perpetuate the stratification by laying down as desirable and proper such conduct as absolute obedience and respect for elders and chiefs. The subject class was therefore obliged to serve their superiors without question. In this highly stratified society, control of virtually all aspects of life lay in the hands of the ruling class. The subject class or *rakyat* had to pay taxes on land and produce and perform *kerah* or compulsory labour for the ruling class. Mobility from the lower to the upper strata, while not altogether impossible, was rare. This was basically the system which prevailed when the British came to the Malay states.

British penetration of Malaya started in 1786 with the foundation of Penang which, together with Melaka and Singapore, later came to be grouped together as the Straits Settlements in 1826. In 1874, the British signed the Pangkor Engagement with the Sultan of Perak, and this saw to the appointment of a British Resident to advise the Sultan on all matters of government except those which pertained to Malay religion and culture. The British recognised that political stability was necessary for the development and subsequent exploitation of the country's natural resources and wealth. They thus saw as their principal purpose the creation and maintenance of law and order along the lines of the Western-type government. Alongside this aim, but of less importance, was the advancement of the Malays, a policy which was to be achieved without destroying the fabric of Malay life within its traditional framework. This dual purpose, introducing innovations where necessary on the one hand, and preserving traditional Malay life, on the other, was to characterise British occupation of the Malay states, particularly those which later came to be known as the Federated Malay States (Pahang, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Perak).

In implementing this policy, the British retained, and in fact, reinforced the demographic pattern prevalent in the country. Prior to the coming of the British, the bulk of the population, ethnically Malay, were engaged in subsistence level agricultural production of wet rice in the rural areas. Some were fishermen and petty traders. A few lived in the towns especially around the royal courts and worked as petty bureaucrats and artisans. Initially, some Malays were engaged in tin-mining. However, when the Chinese entered this field, the Malay old-fashioned method of panning for surface tin was soon rendered economically unviable beside the Chinese water-pump which was able to mine underground. Further improvements in methods of mining and cheap labour imported from China, accompanied by greater world demand for tin, led to further expansion of the industry,

a process accelerated by British economic infiltration which relied heavily on Chinese middlemen. By the middle of the nineteenth century tin-mining was a large scale enterprise virtually controlled by the Chinese and employing Chinese labourers. These mining areas soon developed into urban centres such as Taiping and Ipoh with a population overwhelmingly Chinese.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, rubber was introduced into Malaya. The Malays, however, were discouraged from entering this new field both by their rulers and the British, and laws to this effect were passed. Tamil labourers were thus imported from India to work the rubber estates, and rubber industry soon expanded, accelerated especially by the pre-war rubber boom. With the intensification of British capitalist infiltration, tin-mining and rubber industry became full-scale capitalist enterprise with commercial centres concentrated in the urban areas, thereby stimulating their growth even further. Meanwhile, the Malays remained in their subsistence low-level agricultural economy which was confined mainly to the rural areas.

The growth of urban centres and settled population inevitably drew attention to the need for education for the children of these urban dwellers. As in the Straits Settlements earlier, the missionaries undertook to set up schools, especially English schools, seeing in this the means to spread the gospel. Bryson observed that "the missionaries were there to preach the Gospel and seek converts to Christianity as a first duty; education was merely a means to that end" (Bryson 1970: 14). The association with Christianity of schools in general, and English schools in particular, was not without its effect on the Muslim Malays. It engendered hostility and opposition to education and effectively alienated the Malays from the only "modern" education available to the general population. So strong was the opposition that when missionaries offered secular education, the Malays tended on the whole to shy away from it.

Alongside the missionary schools, the British colonial government also started government-aided English schools. This came about in the face of the need for English-educated low-level clerical and subordinate staff, both in the bureaucracy, state and federal levels, and the private sector. Such posts thus far had been filled by clerks and other functionaries expatriated from the Indian Civil Service and from Ceylon. With increased British involvement in the Malay states, the need for such staff became more acute, and it was considered economical to train local people to fill in these subordinate posts. So between 1883 – 1885 a few government English schools were opened in Perak and Selangor.¹ In opening these schools, however, the British were careful to do so sparingly and to confine them to the ur-

¹It was clear that the British intended to tread carefully in the sphere of education, a caution reflected in Swettehnam's stern warning: "The one danger to be guarded against is an attempt to teach English indiscriminately". (in Loh 1975: 15).

ban areas. They represented a small exception to the overall thrust of the education policy of the colonial government during this period.

The passing of the Elementary Education Bill of 1870 in England signified British adoption of the principle that the State was morally and legally entitled to provide education for its people, a principle that was gaining ground in Europe. In line with these developments in Britain, the colonial administrators in late nineteenth century Malaya began to turn their attention to the question of an expanded state education system. Significantly, for the colonial administrators, state education meant education for Malays, the indigenous population of the country. Furthermore, in conformity with their policy of preservation and innovation, the British devised an education policy which would retain intact the class division and the demographic pattern already existing in the country. This meant the provision of two quite separate and distinct education systems, one for the elite and another for the masses. Where education for the masses was concerned, the British held fast to their policy of preserving the fabric of Malay traditional society and its peasant base. Introduction of education, especially English education for the masses, would be seen as a breach of this policy. The colonial administration in Malaya thus shrewdly adopted a policy of vernacular education for the Malay peasantry. As R.H. Kenion, an Unofficial member of the Federal Council remarked:

The great object of education is to train a man to make his living ... You can teach Malays so that they do not lose their skill and craft in fishing and jungle work. Teach them the dignity of manual labour so that they do not all become kranies (clerks) and I am sure you will not have the trouble which has arisen in India through over-education. (in Roff 1967: 136).

The adoption of this principle meant that Malay vernacular education remained, at best, at rudimentary level. Catering mainly for boys², the schools provided a four-year primary education, and teaching was confined to the three Rs. Alongside these "subjects", school vegetable plots were used to provide elementary instruction in agriculture. Pupils were also taught habits of cleanliness, punctuality and obedience. Aside from its poor intellectual content, Malay vernacular education was to suffer from other handicaps, not the least of which was government neglect. Housed usually in makeshift premises, schools were badly equipped with instructional materials, the only reading material available being the daily, *Utusan Melayu*. The teachers were ill-trained and were poorly paid. However, in spite of, or indeed because of this poor standard, Swettenham, the Resident-General, was satisfied with it, considering it "sufficient for the ordinary requirements of Malay boys, who will become bullock-wagon drivers, padi growers, fishermen, etc." (in Chai 1964: 249).

²Malay parents were reluctant to send their daughters to school for fear that the latter would write love letters. The first fully-funded state school for girls was not opened until nearly thirty years after the first boys' school.

The British efforts to keep the Malay masses tied up to the fields were clearly successful. With their Malay education, they were effectively cut off from employment in the government, the profession and the commercial world, all of which made knowledge of English compulsory. The efficacy of the education policy in minimizing the aspirations of the Malay masses was to occasion Birch, the Resident of Perak, to comment:

It is very satisfactory to know that this system does not over-educate the boys ... (who) almost all followed the avocations of their parents or relations, chiefly in agricultural pursuits (in Roff 1967: 25).

If Malay vernacular education met with the approval of the British, clearly it did not satisfy the bulk of the Malay population. The reality of their education soon made itself felt. The fact that it wrought little economic benefit was thrown into greater relief by the economic prosperity enjoyed by the other races. In the light of this reality, Malay demand for English education soon became vocal. Between 1913 – 1916 several requests for English education were forwarded to the colonial administration, all of which were turned down. However, in spite of repeated failures, Malay demand for English education increased and the British found themselves having to contend with these voices of protest.

In the face of such protest, the British conceded that Malay vernacular education needed improvement, but it was determined not to alter the prevailing policy of keeping the masses tied to agricultural pursuits. To see to the "improvement", Winstedt, who was then an Assistant Director of Education (Malay), was charged with the responsibility of making recommendations for Malay vernacular education. Sent to Java and the Philippines in 1916 to study the situations there, Winstedt's recommendations were to have far-reaching implications on Malay education and modern Malay culture as a whole.

Winstedt's ideas were put into force in 1917 and showed an unswerving fidelity to the British policy of preservation of Malay traditional life. As the Federal Council Proceedings of 1920 indicated:

It is not real education that qualifies a pupil in reading, writing and arithmetic and leaves him with a distaste, or perhaps even a contempt, for the honourable pursuits of husbandry and handicraft. It will not only be a disaster to, but a violation of the whole spirit and traditions of, the Malay race if the result of our vernacular education is to lure the whole of the youth from the kampung to the town (in Roff 1967: 138).

It was thus that Winstedt's proposals were to institutionalize the concept of the "rural bias". Central to the scheme adopted by the colonial government was a teacher-training college whose graduates would return to the villages to influence the general well-being of the masses.

The college, the Sultan Idris Training College, or the SITC, was opened at Tanjung Malim in 1922. It drew its students from the peasantry — sons of fishermen and peasant farmers. Selected by an examination, students came from all over the country, and by the 1920s SITC was taking in about

120 students a year. The curriculum drawn up for its three-year course remained elementary and included arithmetic, drawing, Malay language, Malay literature, hygiene, geography and history. In addition, students were given two hours a week of religious instruction. In conformity with the rural bias laid down, handicrafts, basketry, gardening, especially the latter, became essential features of the curriculum. Each first year student was given a small plot of land which had to be planted with different varieties of local vegetables which, in turn, had to be changed twice a year. Each second year student was entrusted with a tree each in addition to his own plot of land. Competition and prizes for well-cultivated plants and fruit also became part of the curriculum.

Under O.T. Dussek, its first principal who was to remain in the position for seventeen years, SITC was to take on a distinct character. Dussek had a great love for the Malay language and culture, and saw in SITC a potential for an educational centre far bigger than that envisaged by Winstedt. Thus while adhering to the rural and practical biases, he widened considerably the scope of the College's activities. In 1924 on his initiative, the Malay Translation Bureau was transferred from Kuala Lumpur to SITC. Both he and Zaaba, the principal translator, had envisaged the role of the Bureau to be like that of the Indonesian Balai Pustaka. When the idea was mooted, however, Winstedt turned it down, refusing to be seen as "imitating" the Dutch. In spite of its several handicaps, between 1924 – 1932 the Bureau produced 48 textbooks in its Malay School Series. In 1929 it started the Malay Home Series which made available to the now literate peasantry classical Malay stories and translations of popular English literature such as *Ribinson Crusoe*, *Treasure Island* and the like. In addition, the staff produced a fortnightly newspaper, including in them their own literary writings and those of the able students. In concert with these efforts to foster indigenous language and culture, Dussek insisted that all teachings should be in the Malay language and categorically forbade the teaching of English:

The Malay schools must be run for those Malays who will and must remain in the villages. They must have no connection and no point of contact with English: English and Vernacular make very poor bed-fellows (*The Straits Times*, August 15, 1935).

With this emphasis clearly marked out, Dussek strove and succeeded in instilling in his students a sense of responsibility towards their language, literature and culture. Thus, under his tutelage, SITC emerged as a centre for literary activity. Students and staff alike, almost all of whom were Malays except for the principal and his assistant, became involved in the literary and cultural life of the College. Debates, speeches, literary writings and cultural performances were some of the activities which the College diligently fostered. Of this aspect of SITC life, Dussek wrote: "every activity that is genuinely cultural and genuinely Malay has flourished in an astonishing manner" (in Roff 1967: 143).

While the SITC may symbolise a concrete effort to improve Malay vernacular education, and Dussek's own initiatives in widening the scope of the College curricula were commendable, it must be borne in mind that the position of Malay education, in terms of employment opportunities, remained very much the same. Students with Malay education went back to the fields or were employed as labourers or gardeners. Employment in the government services and the professions remained completely sealed off from them. Graduates of SITC went back to their villages to teach in rural schools from whence they themselves originated. Winstedt's "vision" of a strong peasantry capable of providing continued supply of staple food and also capable of making waste-paper baskets and trays, handicrafts whose marketable value he himself doubted, was to remain a decisive factor in the Colonial education policy for the Malay masses.

If the education policy for the masses tied them to their land and the villages, that for the elite was decidedly different. British penetration of the Malay states had always followed the logic of recognising the position of the traditional elite and allying with them in order to ensure their cooperation and by extension that of the masses. The prudence of such a policy was perhaps reflected in a confidential letter from the High Commissioner to the Secretary of State, 1928:

I think it is all important to maintain the Malay rulers and leading chiefs in considerable affluence. Politically they are a real and to my mind essential asset. But for them the Malays would become a mob (in Loh 1975: 89).

It was decided that the traditional elite, unlike the masses, should be trained in matters of government in conformity with the aim stated in the Education Report to see to "the provision of special facilities to instruct Malays to become useful public servants" (in Roff 1967: 100). With English the language of government, it followed that the traditional elite was to be provided with English education. As early as 1890, members of the various Royal houses were given access to English education, a move made possible by the fact that most royal courts were in the urban areas. In certain cases, the young scions were sent to England to study. Such was the pattern that persisted until the end of the nineteenth century when education for the traditional elite took on a characteristic form. To understand this development, it is necessary to place it in the context of demands facing the British colonial administration at the time.

In line with their manifest aim to acquaint the Malays with a modern form of government, British policy had provided for the inclusion of high-ranking Malays in administrative responsibility. However attractive this ideal might have seemed in theory, it was, in truth, difficult to carry out. The Malay traditional elite was on the whole unfamiliar with Western-type government and all the complexities of administration. Further, the rapid growth of commercial centres called for specialised skill and knowledge in specialised areas, both of which the Malay elite lacked. In the face of

this reality, the recruitment of European staff, from the standpoint of practical considerations, was found to be necessary. By the turn of the century, the Federated Malay States were to see to the dominance of European staff in its administration. This excess and its attendant high cost called for cutting down the number of European staff which in turn necessitated the creation of a Malay administrative cadre. This move also came in the light of protests from the rulers who saw their power seriously curtailed by British indirect rule, a fact made glaring by the relative autonomy enjoyed by the Sultans in the Unfederated Malay States.³ The matter was raised at the Rulers' Conference of 1903 together with the contentious issue of the virtual absence of Malays in the Malayan Civil Service.

British commitments and the Sultans' grievances aside, the marked increase in immigrant population in the country was no less important in influencing British policy towards the Malay elite. Regarded as aliens, British policy towards these immigrants was to allow them freedom of economic pursuit but to bar them from political and administrative sphere which was manifestly to remain the preserve of the indigenous population, especially the elite. However, while this might be a stated policy, the British seriously considered the possibility of non-Malays encroaching upon governmental and political spheres of the country, a possibility not altogether remote given the growing economic strength of the non-Malays, especially the Chinese.⁴ It was thus decided that greater Malay participation in the administration would serve as a "buffer" and also help to perpetuate what has come to be known as "the myth of continued Malay sovereignty" (Roff 1967: 24).

Political expediency, financial considerations and British commitments thus combined together to bring about a school geared towards producing a generation of Malay civil servants who could be tailored according to British needs and objectives, in short, civil servants who would bear the British impress. This concern with the "British stamp" was to determine the form and character of the school. The overriding consideration was the "right background", which was considered suitable for public services.

³These included Trengganu, Kelantan, Perlis, Kedah and Johore. However, by 1914 all these states came under the British protectorate system.

⁴This possibility was later to cause the British a certain measure of alarm as to warrant seriously considering restoring more power to the traditional elite. In a secret despatch to the Secretary of State in 1932, Clementi, then the Governor, made this point clear: ... but the Rulers are a very necessary "buffer" ... "a buffer between Government and the Chinese" ... it is evident that political agitation is beginning among the Chinese communities resident in this peninsula, and it will certainly spread from the Colony to the Malay States. The only adequate means of resisting such agitation will, in my opinion, be to restore to the Rulers of the Federated Malay States and their States Councils power as great as that now enjoyed by the Rulers of the Unfederated Malay States and their Councils. (in Loh 1975: 74 - 75).

Together with this emphasis on impeccable lineage, the Malay College Kuala Kangsar or MCKK, as the school later came to be popularly known, was also to be run along the lines of English public schools (Khasnor Johan 1969). Concomittant with this, class bias and its attendant notion of elitism became inevitably institutionalised in MCKK.

Opened on 2nd. January 1905, the first boarders of the school included the sons and brothers of the various Sultans and members of the various royal houses. Attempts to take in commoners were strongly opposed by the Sultans, and the notion of "exclusiveness" became MCKK's overriding policy. In conformity with the specific socio-political role its graduates were to play, the College curriculum was tailored to lay emphasis on aspects of character-building which were deemed crucial to the image of the British civil servant. The acquisition of the English language was made a top priority, with attention given to purity of accent. Along with this were the trappings of the public school with the monitorial and prefect systems, scouts and cadets, prep, the High Table and the saying of "grace". In the light of these measures, it was little wonder that MCKK soon acquired the name, "The Eton of the East". On graduation from this prestigious school, the graduates then joined the Malay Administrative Service or MAS, a junior branch of the prestigious Malayan Civil Service. In the context of colonial Malaya, their presence served to consolidate and formalize further the aristocratic class and reinforced the class division prevalent in Malay society.

By the turn of the twentieth century, then, colonial Malaya had felt the full force of British two-pronged policy of preservation of traditional Malay life and introduction of innovations. British penetration of the Malay states brought about an ordered form of government, introduced communication and transport, and fostered the growth of a monetized economy, creating commercial centres where none existed before. In the process, it created a demographic structure which bore a characteristic form, with the indigenous population overwhelming confined to the rural areas. More importantly, it kept Malay society tied to a subsistence economy, effectively isolating it from the mainstream of urbanization. Within the social framework of traditional Malay society, British policy allied itself with the elite, and though depriving the latter of much of its power, it retained virtually intact its structural form, and in fact, helped to reinforce it further. Its education policy showed a fundamental dichotomy, as epitomised by the SITC and the MCKK. With the political role assigned to it, MCKK was to retain its notion of elitism, one which it proudly strove to maintain. On the other hand, the utilitarian role assigned to the peasant-based SITC was to be increasingly associated with Dussek's Malay-oriented policy. The class division which British education policy served to reinforce was also to see to the growth of a cultural component in that division. Malay language, literature and culture, "every activity that is genuinely ... Malay", enshrined in vernacular education, thus became non-elite cultural forms.

THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN MALAY LITERATURE⁵

With the English-educated elite groomed for a political role, literary production thus became centred in the Malay-educated, who were largely teachers and journalists. A study of modern Malay literature has to take cognizance of this fact. Modern Malay literature was the product of the non-elite who were predominately of rural background and whose education was oriented towards the rural bias with its attendant emphasis on strengthening the tie with the land and the village world. This close link between literature and the masses was to have a far-reaching effect on modern Malay literature as a whole.

Prior to the appearance of the "Penulis Guru", as the teacher-writers came to be known, and the "Penulis Wartawan" or journalist-writers, the Malay literary scene was already graced with the efforts of a group called "Penulis Agama" or religion-writers. These were Middle-Eastern educated Malays who, influenced by the Islamic Reformism of Turkey and Egypt, took home with them a new understanding of and insight into Islam. Their ideas were vigorously expressed and debated in the newspapers and magazines, foremost amongst which were *Al-Ikhwan* (1926 - 1931) and *Saudara* (1928 - 1941). Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi, a prolific campaigner of the new understanding, carried his ideas into the realm of fiction and gave birth to the first Malay novel, *Hikayat Faridah Hanum*⁶ (1925 - 1926), which was well received. Finding fiction writing a lucrative enterprise, he produced a number of romantic novels, mainly adaptations from Egyptian and Turkish literature, all of which were published by his own Jelutong press. While the presence of the Penulis Agama in the literary scene was not inconsequential, they constituted a small group compared to the Malay-educated teachers and journalist who dominated the literary scene.

The fact that Malay school teachers assumed a significant position in Malay literary history should be seen in terms of the environment at SITC. As stated above, Dussek's initiatives created a climate favourable for the growth of Malay literature, language and culture. Aside from this conducive environment, there was another important factor for which SITC

⁵Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi (1797 - 1856) was generally regarded as the Father of Modern Malay Literature. His famous autobiographical writings, *Hikayat Abdullah* (*Abdullah's Story*) and *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* (*The Voyages of Abdullah*) which were rooted in the everyday world of human beings marked a distinct departure from the earlier associations of literature and the world of mythology. However, after his death, the Malay literary world evinced a vacuum for more than 60 years, and it was not until the 1920s that there was any renewed literary activity of the type Abdullah's work had suggested. While acknowledging Abdullah's role as the forerunner of modern Malay literature, I do not find it relevant for inclusion in the present discussion.

⁶This is an adaptation of an Egyptian novel and portrays Egyptian characters and society. The first Malay novel to portray Malay characters and to use "local colour" was *Kawan Benar*, 1927 by Ahmad Rashid Talu.

was responsible. It inculcated in the students a consciousness of a common cultural tradition and heritage and a wide Malay world which transcended state boundary. This, in turn, generated an awareness in the teachers and students alike of their common situation as a race which had been relegated to an inferior position in their own country, both politically and economically. This consciousness was fired even more in the 1920s by the struggles of the Indonesian against Dutch rule, news of which reached the students through magazines and other reading material available at the College. In 1930, inspired by the Indonesian nationalist movement, Ibrahim Yaakub together with thirty-five fellow SITC student formed the *Belia Malaya*, an organization modelled on similar youth groups in Java and Sumatra. This organization sought to engender similar political nationalism among the students. In the College, discussions about the Malay situation became frequent and students started to write to the dailies, often under pseudonym. The consciousness bred in SITC was to remain with them when they went back to their villages.

Equally important was the field of journalism to which those with literary bent and aspirations were attracted. With its focus on current and topical issues, the newspapers highlighted news which centred round the social, economic and political changes and development which took place in the country. Readers were invited to express their opinions on such subjects in special columns set aside for readers' letters. The inclusion of such columns saw to the opening up of the journalistic horizon to writings which were not strictly "news" or "berita" in nature. Readers' views and opinions soon took the form of short stories, and before long *Warta Jenaka*, a popular weekly, had a column specially for short stories.

In understanding the beginnings of modern Malay literature, a point whose importance could not be minimised is the environment which gave it birth. Modern Malay literature was the product of a period of great changes, of intrusion of ideas, values and ways of life completely alien, and in most cases, antithetical to the writers' own. It was the expression of writers' awakening to the realities surrounding them, of the blatant syphoning of their wealth to an alien country and alien pockets leaving them poor and disadvantaged in their own country. This awakening, moreover, was marked by a sense of helplessness at the rapid changes around them and over which they had little control or say. It bred an awareness of the crying need to do something about the situation which threatened to engulf them. This awareness led writers to take upon themselves the task of criticising their society, admonishing its many weakness which militated against improvement, encouraging its people to strive hard to better their circumstances, cautioning them against negative influences, and reminding them to cherish those values the society held dear.

Indeed, the notion of writers as social critics was not new. Seventy years earlier Abdullah Munshi had laid down the foundation, as it were, of social criticism in Malay literature with his forthright and unabashed criticism

of the Malays, both the elite and the masses. The same concern for the Malay situation already found loud and cogent expression in the magazines and newspapers which proliferated at that time. And it was through the same medium, that is the magazines and newspapers, that Malay literary works reached their audience. This close link with journalism reinforced the orientation towards social criticism. Given this fact, combined with the challenges of the times, and the writers' own perception of their role, literature thus became a medium by which writers articulated their thoughts and perception of their surroundings. It was with the conscious intent to teach and guide the readers, to make clear to them what was happening around them, in short, to transform society, that modern Malay literature came into being. This same consciousness was to determine its literary form.

PRE-WAR LITERATURE: LITERARY FORM AND VALUE ORIENTATIONS

In studying the literary form of pre-war literature, it is important to remember that the writers' Malay education precluded them from any significant contact with Western literary tradition. The efforts of the Malay Translation Bureau which saw to the translation of works such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels* and the like did not acquaint readers with Western literary tradition. However, while pre-war writers might not have access to Western literary tradition, they had available to them a rich oral narrative heritage. It was this tradition of story-telling that Malay writers brought to bear upon their modern material. However, in adapting this literary convention, the writers were guided at all times by the overriding need to inform their readers. That being the case, the question of genres such as novels and short story was irrelevant to them. Of paramount importance was that literary writings had to serve the specific purpose of uplifting the Malay situation. To this end, readers must be provided with morals and examples which they could emulate. In the light of this overriding concern to guide and teach readers, modern Malay literature of this period was inevitably didactic and tendentious.

Concomittant with this specific orientation, short stories of the pre-war period bore abundant examples of the use of didactic devices. Authorial intrusions, sermonising, black/white characterisation, deus-ex-machina, in short devices which could facilitate identification with the moral or message of the story, became popular. The important point to note, however, is that the environment which gave birth to the literature similarly determined its form.

The writers' unambiguous position in their narrative gives an insight into their intellectual and perceptual bents in respect to the questions and issues raised in the writings. Their concern centred largely round the presence of aliens in their midst and the threat this posed to their values. While the Malay writers were sensitive to the presence of a colonial powers, their writings, however, especially those of the early period, were not vocal

on the question of politics and government. To a certain extent, this was due to a General Order which prohibited Malay school teachers from involvement in politics and government. Further, the fact that the Sultans had British advisors also contributed to writers' reticence to express openly their anti-colonial views. (Ishak Hj. Muhammad constituted a lone fighter against the colonial rule). Writers thus focused their attention on other non-Malays in the country whose presence they rejected. Rejection of the Chinese was closely tied up with the larger issue of Malay backwardness. Stories which highlighted Malay poverty often underlined as its cause the twin-factor of Chinese economic aggression and Malay habits and past-times which inhibited economic development. On the one hand, writers admonished the Malays for their laziness, their penchant for extravagance, especially in wedding feasts, their partiality for getting into debts, and urged them to practise diligence and frugality as a means of combating their economic plight. On the other hand, writers urged their readers to be wary of the devious and deceitful Chinese and their limitless greed for wealth. They perceived the Chinese as unscrupulous, seducing the Malays, especially the young men, away from positive economic endeavour to opium-smoking, gambling and prostitution. Apart from the Chinese, Malay writers also rejected the DKKs (Darah Keturunan Keling — Indian Muslim) and the DKAs (Darah Keturunan Arab — those of Arabic descent), generally referred to by the derogatory term "kacukan" (hybrid) or "peranakan" (mixed race). Stories which featured the DKKs and the DKAs often centred round the crucial question of "takrif Melayu" or what constituted a true Malay, and of writers rejection of them as "not Malay". These characters were similarly portrayed as unscrupulous opportunists, who resorted to various means to acquire wealth quickly and easily and thence to use it to sully the purity of the Malay race by marrying into Malay families. Together with the Chinese, and to a certain extent, the British, the DKKs and the DKAs were bracketed together as a group apart from the Malays and whose presence was both undesirable and detrimental to the well-being of the Malays as a whole.

Another major concern of the Malay writers was the adverse effects on traditional Malay life and values of an encounter with Westernisation and modernisation, as symbolised in the urban centres. The writers' rural anchorage gave rise to a myopic view of the city which they perceived as a negation of both Malay culture and religion, Portrayal of the city thus centred round the sordid aspects of city-life and writers tended to discount whatever positive influence the city could offer. Rejection of the city was either boldly stated or implied in the stereotypes and symbols associated with it such as alcohol, dance-hostesses, gambling, night-club, prostitutes and the like. That such symbols came readily to the writers' mind is understandable in the light of the occupational patterns of the Malays and non-Malays, especially the Chinese, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Alcohol and such-like items were "merchandise" which the Malays had

little use for but for which the Chinese had a great demand. Further, non-Malays constituted the suppliers of these merchandice. Writers thus rejected them because on the one hand they were alien to everyday Malay life, and on the other, they were proscribed by Islam. As narrative symbols they were a powerful expression of rejection of the city.

Concomittant with the rejection of the city was the writers' partiality for the village. The rural area was seen as everything that the city was not and was associated with harmony, peace and moral excellence. Stories of morally good village youths meeting their ruin in the city were common. Similarly, girls who left the sanctuary of the village often ended up as prostitutes. Or, working in reverse, the moral degenerates of the city could find salvation in the village. Whether explicitly or otherwise, the value system that underlay literary works clearly emphasised the moral superiority of the village to the city.

Closely tied up with the question of values and mores was the position of Islam. The moral framework of pre-war stories asserted that Islam and its teachings were valid and should serve as a point of reference for all manners of conduct. Stories which portrayed situations in which Islam was pitted against other religions, such as in inter-racial/religious marriages often upheld the validity of Islam by having the non-Muslims embrace Islam before a marriage could be contracted. Further affirmations of Islam were found in stories which portrayed superficial faith in Islam as the root cause of a character's downfall. A point to be borne in mind is that the moral framework of the stories asserted that Malay culture and religion were not differentiated, and thus positive "cultural" values were seen as synonymous with Islamic values. Stories which upheld what could be seen as Malay values therefore became affirmations of Islam, and vice-versa.

In conclusion it can be said that in pre-war literature in general, there took shape both a characteristic literary form and the notion of what it was to be a Malay. Divorced from the elite by sosio-political circumstance, Malay literature came to be expression of champions of the masses against "outsider" and the "city" by writers who were themselves of rural origin and not far removed from the masses. Hence the image of "Malayness" was crystallised as rural, poor, disadvantaged but nonetheless virtuous with its moral centre in Islam. Together with this, was a literary form which, while superficially Western-derived, was actually much closer to rural cultural and literary traditions.

REFERENCES

- A. Bakar Hamid, 1973. "Arah Perkembangan Kesusasteraan Melayu". Paper presented at the Seminar Kesusasteraan Nusantara, 11th. - 13th. April 1973, and published in *Dewan Bahasa*, August.
- _____ (ed.), 1975. *Diskusi Sastra, Jilid 2, Kesusasteraan Modern*, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.

- Awang Had Salleh, 1980. *Pelajaran dan Perguruan Melayu di Malaya: Zaman British*, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.
- Bryson, H. 1970. "The Education of Girls in the Nineteenth Century" in *Malaysia*, November.
- Chai Hon Chan, 1964. *The Development of British Malaya, 1891 - 1909*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur.
- Hashim Awang, 1975. *Cerpen-Cerpen Melayu Sebelum Perang Dunia Kedua*, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.
- Khasnor Johan, 1969. The Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, 1905 - 1941: British Policy of Education for Employment in the Federated Malay States. M.A. thesis submitted to the University of Malaya.
- Loh Fook Seng, Philip, 1975. *Seeds of Separatism: Educational Policy in Malaya 1874 - 1940*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur.
- O'Brien, L.N., 1979. Class, Sex and Ethnic Stratification in West Malaysia, with Particular Reference to Women in the Professions. Ph.D. thesis submitted to Monash University.
- . 1982. "Divide and Rule: Education in Colonial Malaya". Paper read at the Seminar of the Centre for Development Studies, Flinders University, August.
- Roff, W.R., 1967. *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Taib Osman, 1964. "Trends in Modern Malay Literature" in Gangwu, Wang (ed.) *Malaysia: A Survey*, Pall Mall Press, London.
- Tham Seong Chee, 1977. *Malaya and Modernization*, Singapore University Press.
- The Straits Times*, August 15, 1935.
- Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, 1984. Antara Kampung dan Kota: Rural Bias in the Novels of Shahnnon Ahmad. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University.

