

**MALAYAN MUSLIMS AS A REFLECTION OF  
MALAYNESS IN ANTHONY BURGESS'S  
'*TIME FOR A TIGER*'**

*MELAYU ISLAM SEBAGAI REFLEKSI  
KEMELAYUAN DALAM NOVEL 'TIME FOR A  
TIGER' KARYA ANTHONY BURGESS*

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**Abstract**

In one of the most overlooked English literary text on the Malay World, namely Anthony Burgess' novel *Time for a Tiger* (1956), the depictions of Islamic practices through the Malay characters show their hypocrisy and that they are wayward Muslims (Zawiah Yahya, 2003). This paper then seeks to explore the role of Islam as a paradigm of Malayness in literature portrayed through characters understood to be Malay. The objectives of this study are met by undertaking a close reading of the text as a methodology to explore how the Malay characters understand and practise Islam, and to discover whether they conform to the Islamic beliefs as understood by non-Muslims; here, to Burgess' understandings of Malayan Islam. The conceptual framework is based on the paradigm of Malayness in literature as an everyday-defined social reality consisting of six elements – the Malay language, Islam, the Malay rulers, *adat*/culture, ethnicity and identity (Ida Baizura Bahar, 2010) as opposed to it as an authority-defined social reality comprising only of Islam, the Malay language and the Malay rulers (Shamsul A. B., 2001). The findings demonstrate that Burgess could have made an implicit criticism of Malayan Muslims by mocking the reality of the Malays through his observations during his stay in Malaya and that the paradigm of Malayness in literature is not an authority-defined but an everyday-defined social reality. Findings from this study therefore can contribute to the on-going discourse on Islam and Malayness in literature as well as English Literature on the Malay World.

**Keyword:** Malayness, Islam, Muslims, English literature on the Malay world

### **Abstrak**

*Dalam salah satu teks sastera Inggeris yang paling diabaikan di alam Melayu iaitu novel *Time for a Tiger* (1956) yang ditulis oleh Anthony Burgess, gambaran-gambaran amalan Islam melalui watak-watak Melayu menunjukkan kemunafikan mereka sebagai Islam yang sesat (Zawiah Yahya, 2003). Karya ini bertujuan untuk meninjau peranan Islam sebagai paradigma Kemelayuan dalam kesusasteraan yang digambarkan melalui watak yang difahami sebagai Melayu. Objektif kajian ini diperolehi dengan menjalankan bacaan secara dekat sebagai metodologi untuk meneroka bagaimana watak-watak Melayu memahami dan mengamalkan ajaran Islam serta untuk mengesahkan sama ada mereka mematuhi akidah Islam seperti yang difahami oleh orang bukan Islam; di sini, untuk pemahaman Burgess terhadap Melayu Islam. Kerangka kerja konseptual adalah berdasarkan paradigma Kemelayuan dalam kesusasteraan yang ditakrifkan realiti sosial sehari-hari yang terdiri daripada enam elemen – bahasa Melayu, Islam, raja-raja Melayu, adat/budaya, etnik dan identiti (Ida Baizura Bahar, 2010) yang berlawanan dengan takrifan realiti sosial autoriti yang hanya terdiri daripada Islam, bahasa Melayu dan raja-raja Melayu (Shamsul A. B., 2001). Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa Burgess telah membuat kritikan tersirat terhadap Melayu Islam dengan mengejek realiti orang Melayu melalui pemerhatiannya semasa tinggal di Tanah Melayu dan paradigma Kemelayuan dalam kesusasteraan jelas bukanlah realiti sosial autoriti tetapi realiti sosial sehari-hari. Hasil kajian ini boleh menyumbang kepada wacana yang berterusan terhadap kesusasteraan Islam dan Melayu sebagaimana kesusasteraan Inggeris dalam dunia Melayu.*

**Kata kunci:** *Kemelayuan, Islam, kesusasteraan Inggeris dalam dunia Melayu*

### **Introduction**

Based on the studies of Ida Baizura Bahar (2010; 2012), Islam is described as one of the six elements which constitute the paradigm of Malayness in literature as an everyday-defined social reality. In some cases, it might not be necessary that a person has to be ethnically Malay

in order to retain the paradigm Malayness, as long as he or she is a Muslim who also uses the Malay language.

I would seek to explore in this study how far Islam is important in constituting Malayness in an individual who is considered as Malay in literature. The objectives of this study will be met by analysing a text on the Malay world by Anthony Burgess, namely *Time for a Tiger* (1956), I would like to explore how Burgess portrays the Malay characters in the novel in terms of their Islamic practices and whether or not they could be considered wayward. This study will analyse Burgess's understanding and views on Malayan Islam during his stay in Malaya before its Independence in 1957. The objective of this paper is to reconfirm that the paradigm of Malayness is in fact an everyday-defined social reality rather than an authority-defined social reality as conceptualised by a prominent Malaysian social anthropologist, Shamsul Amri Baharudin or better known as Shamsul A. B.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Paradigm of Malayness in Literature**

In her unpublished thesis entitled 'The Paradigm of Malayness in Literature', Ida Baizura Bahar (2010) focuses on exploring the paradigm of Malayness in selected English and Malay literary texts on the Malay World by hypothesising six elements, namely the Malay language, Islam, the Malay rulers, *adat/culture*, ethnicity and identity (Ida Baizura Bahar, 2010: 1). Ida proposes in her study that the three pillars of Malayness as suggested by Shamsul A. B. (2001) which consist of '*agama*' (Muslim religion), '*bahasa*' (the Malay language) and '*raja*' (the aristocrat government of the sultans) are only a fraction of what constitutes Malayness (Shamsul A. B., 2001: 1). She proposes instead that the paradigm of Malayness in literature should also include the three pillars of '*adat/culture*' (culture), ethnicity and identity, also known as elements which constitute the paradigm of Malayness (Ida Baizura Bahar, 2010: 4). Ida also found that the paradigm of Malayness in literature is not an authority-defined social reality (defined authoritatively by people of the dominant social power), but is in fact an everyday-defined social reality, experienced by the people in their everyday life (p. 3).

The importance of Islam in constituting Malayness is also stated clearly in Ida Baizura's study where she quotes earlier studies which state that, since the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, European presence in the Malay islands made Islam widespread in the local Malay communities. For example, Nagata (1982), in her study, found that no non-Muslim could claim Malay status if they do not embrace the Muslim faith (quoted in Ida Baizura Bahar, p. 2).

In an article by Ida, "Sustaining Diversities through Understandings of Islam within Malayness: Reflections in Anthony Burgess' *The Malayan Trilogy*" (2012), she explores the understandings of Islam based on the proposed paradigm in her thesis. The understandings of Islam from the paradigm are applied to Anthony Burgess's *The Malayan Trilogy* (2000), a trilogy which consists of Burgess's three novels, namely *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) and *Beds in the East* (1959). The study found that the depictions of Islamic practices in the novel through the Malay characters show their hypocrisy and the fact that the Malays in the novel are wayward Muslims (Ida Baizura Bahar, 2012: 5). Supporting findings from an earlier study by Zawiyah Yahya (2003), Ida proposes that Burgess could be said to have made a conspiratorial attack on Islam by mocking the reality of the Malays as what he has observed during his stay in Malaya (p. 5).

### **Burgess' View on Malayan Islam**

According to Zawiyah Yahya (2003), Burgess' writing on Malaya in his novel *The Malayan Trilogy* is born from his six years involvement with the Orientals (Zawiyah Yahya, 2003: 167). Burgess' writing on *The Malayan Trilogy* is graphic in its details and he wrote as though he knew the landscape of Malaya for years, not drawing from memory but as in reality as if the reader is in the story (p. 167). Zawiyah also describes a silent comparison by Burgess between British diplomacy and religious tolerance when he mentions the history of Malaya where Francis Xavier in Malacca had preached Christianity and the love of an alien God, unknown to the people of Malaya at that time, and establishing belief in Christianity on the nation (p. 171). This shows Burgess' fascination and interest in the topic of religion which he constantly touched on in *The Malayan Trilogy*. Thus, the extract displays Burgess' views on Malayan Islam in the novel.

Burgess has also chosen historical details to include in his trilogy and this can be seen in his retelling of the reality of the Malay rulers in the first novel of the trilogy, *Time for a Tiger* (p. 173). Burgess depicts the sultans and rulers in Malaya as wayward Muslims who smoked opium, ate prohibited meat and committed fornication out of wedlock (p. 173). Burgess' views on Malaya, the Malays in Malaya and Malayan Islam according to Zawiyah represent his conspiratorial attack on Islam where the trilogy is filled with representations of sinners and religious hypocrites from sultans to men of religion (p. 174). To Zawiyah, Burgess makes a mockery of what, in reality, is frowned upon by the Malays (p. 174).

In his article, "Identity and History in the Reconsidered Idea and Practice of 'Malayness' in Malaysia", Shamsul A. B. (2001) discusses how identity in 'Malay' and 'Malayness' is constructed with influence from colonial knowledge (p. 365) and goes on to suggest that the term 'bumiputera' also has its roots from colonial knowledge namely since 1891 as a term to categorise Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago (p. 365). His study also puts forth the social power which comes from the construction of Malay identity (p. 365) in the form of a more recent term namely Bangsa Malaysia, which is described as an effort to assimilate a homogenous and plural society of Malaysia (p. 366). His study shows a contestation of not only the identity of 'Malayness' or 'bumiputera' but also of the methods and frameworks by which identity is investigated and defined and that these frameworks will constantly overlap each other in the future to come (p. 366). It can be seen from his study that the formation of 'Malay-Malayness' as a social identity is not completely innate but is constructed by historical, cultural and social factors in its history (p. 355). He concludes that the history of the formation of the Malay identity is highly affected by the colonial historiography and has been a focus in the studies of many historians of postcolonial Malaysia (p. 355).

### **Analysis of *Time for a Tiger***

*Time for a Tiger*, published in 1956, is the first of three novels in Anthony Burgess' trilogy of novels in *The Malayan Trilogy* (1964). I will discuss extracts from the novel which shows Burgess' portrayal of the Islamic practices of the Malay characters and employ a close textual

reading of the novel in order to explore the element of Islam within the paradigm of Malayness in literature.

*Time for a Tiger* is a novel about the life of Victor Crabbe, a resident master and educator at Mansor School, an all-boys boarding school in Malaya. Some of the central issues in the novel is Crabbe's relationship with his Malay mistress, his English and Malay friends and the wayward Islamic practices of the main Malay characters in the novel including the Islamic malpractices of Ibrahim, Crabbe's male servant and Rahimah, Crabbe's Malay mistress. The novel also revolves around Victor Crabbe's relationships with the women in his life such as with second his wife, mistress and his first wife who is deceased. The novel's underlying theme is the weakening of colonial power in Malaya, in a period close to independence.

In a scene at the beginning of the novel, after one of the characters, Nabby Adams has fallen asleep, the '*bilal*' could be heard to recite the *azan* in the town of 'Lanchap' which means 'masturbation' (p. 11). There is also a depiction of the '*bilal*' reciting part of the *syahadah* "*La ilaha illa 'llah. La ilaha illa 'llah*" which means there is no God but God (p. 11). Despite the depiction of the *bilal*, the environment at 'Lanchap' is described as dark and ignorant where around the '*bilal*' are cinemas, drinking shops and the '*istana*' or castle for the Sultan who is in Bangkok with his latest Chinese dance-hostess, while the '*Raja Perempuan*', his wife is in Singapore for race-meetings, all of which are prohibited in Islam (p. 11).

Burgess displays the hypocrisy of the '*bilal*' as he reminisces on his trip to Mecca which he saved from his own money (p. 12). He has always wished to go to Mecca in order to become a *haji* and be called Tuan Haji Mohammed Nasir bin Abdul Talib and to have all his sins forgiven by Allah (p. 12). However, his savings for his trip are from judicious bets on tipped horses (p. 12). The '*bilal*' knew that gambling is '*haram*' or prohibited in Islam but he really wants to become a '*haji*' with the title of Tuan Haji (p. 12). The '*bilal*' also thinks he is better than those who are superstitious and believe in animistic beliefs as he has seen the great mosque 'Masjid-al-Haram in Mecca (p. 12). He is also described implicitly to be an hypocritical '*bilal*' as he knew that many of his fellow Muslims such as *Inche* Idris bin Zainal, who is an important man in the Nationalist Movement, eats bacon, *Inche* Jamaluddin drinks brandy and *Inche* Abu Zakaria often sneaks off to small villages to eat and drink during the fasting month

(p. 12). The '*bilal*' also believes that these people will be thrown in *naraka* or hell and they will not enter the Garden of heaven, without realising that he too has committed grave sins (p. 12).

It can be seen again in the novel Burgess' implicit mockery of the Islamic belief as he names the first location in the novel as Lanchap or masturbation in English which in the novel is taken from the name of the river Lanchap (p. 25). Burgess also depicts villagers who worship thunder and have no education who live in the jungle (p. 25). On the other hand, the Malay villages believe in the Koran and the Prophets but their beliefs are intertwined with nymphs and tree-gods, which refer to animistic beliefs (p. 25). This is Burgess' way of saying that the people of the state of Lanchap believe in Islam but also believe in animism where they believe in crocodile-gods in the river and Burgess calls the place 'Kuala Hantu' or Ghost Estuary (p. 26).

Burgess makes parodies about the rulers of Malacca who rule over Lanchap in the novel (p. 26). Their depictions as wayward Muslims is depicted in a scene where Burgess describes a sultan called Yahya as never moving out of the opium trance, Ahmad who died of overeating Persian sweetmeats which might refer to pork, Mohammed who lashed at least one slave to death every day, Aziz who had syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease, and Hussain who had a hundred wives (p. 26). These descriptions show the depictions of the Malay and Muslim rulers in the state in such a way that we might understand their depictions to be a form of mocking their hypocrisy.

The previous ruler of Lanchap in the novel is Sultan Mansor who, after the war became an Anglophile (p. 27). His wayward Muslim character can be seen when he is dedicated as frequenting race-meetings in Singapore and establishing a tradition of heavy gambling which have been a feature in the royal house of Lanchap ever since (p. 27). Successors of Sultan Mansor are no better as they are described in the novel to be insensitive to many of the sanctions of Islam (p. 27). Although pork has never been served in the Istana or palace, it has been stocked with an abundance of wine and liquor and every Sultan has to drink brandy on doctor's orders (p. 27). Here, Burgess shows how the rulers in the state of Lanchap in the novel themselves are wayward Muslims and has shaped the country in that way.

Another Malayan ruler in the novel, Sultan Aladdin, is depicted as loving the multiculturalism aspect of the nation but is also a

wayward Muslim (p. 28). The Sultan is depicted as loving his Chinese and European mistresses more than his own Malay wives and has many love-children of many colours (p. 28). Here, Burgess depicts the sultan as not adhering to the Islamic doctrine of not having sexual relationships out of wedlock.

Burgess again shows an example of Malay Muslims who commit prohibited acts in Islam and shows his own view on Muslims and their belief in the novel. This can be seen when the protagonist Victor Crabbe asks his students about an absent student, where they answer that the student, Hamidin, has been expelled from school after being caught in a room with a woman (p. 44). Hamidin has been caught by a prefect who claims he was in the house-boy's room with a woman, where the house-boy was also there with another woman (p. 44). He also claims to have been kissing the woman in the room (p. 45). Here, Burgess shows that the Malayan Muslim youths may not entirely conform to the Islamic beliefs showing that they too give in to their sexual desire regardless of the teachings of Islam.

Another evidence of wayward Malay Muslims in the novel is when Crabbe went to the Paradise Cabaret where he meets his Malay mistress Rahimah. In the cabaret, the samba music playing contains the lyrics of the *Rukun Islam* or the Tenets of Islam (p. 70). This depiction paradoxically shows how Burgess views the actions of the Malay Muslims which contradict with the Islamic belief as the extract shows how a place prohibited in Islam, the cabaret, is attended by Malay Muslims and plays music which preaches the Islamic beliefs.

In the same scene where Crabbe goes to the Paradise Cabaret with Nabby Adams, and discusses the impossibilities of eloping with Rahimah and says to her he could not elope with her as he is married (p. 70), Rahimah is depicted as suggesting a solution to Crabbe; that he "could enter (embrace) Islam" and four wives are allowed for a Muslim man to marry (p. 70). Then she adds that "surely two wives would be enough", signifying that Crabbe should not marry more wives after marrying her (p. 71).

Later, when another character called Alladad Khan joins Crabbe and the rest at the cabaret, Crabbe orders more beer for him and Rahimah obligingly went to take more beer (p. 71). This extract shows that it is a norm for Rahimah to be involved in serving beer which is



prohibited in Islam where a Muslim should not be involved in anything *haram* or prohibited in Islam.

Besides Rahimah, a character who is significantly a wayward Muslim is Ibrahim, Crabbe's servant who is depicted as a homosexual and has feelings for Crabbe (p. 102). Ibrahim goes to the market wearing silk, which is prohibited in Islam for men to wear, and has hairclips in his hair (p. 102). In terms of behaviour, Ibrahim greets his friend gaily and provocatively, very female-like and another trait of Ibrahim that shows he is a wayward Muslim is that he steals (p. 102). Ibrahim steals from his master, Crabbe, even though he has been taught by his father that no good Muslim servant would steal from his master (p. 102). Ibrahim steals by bearing in mind that he is only buying things in his master's house although he only buys unneeded things such as plastic horses and portraits of film stars (p. 102). Besides stealing from his master, Ibrahim also steals from the school kitchen below their residence (p. 103). Ibrahim also steals from Crabbe thinking that they are only acts of revenge to Crabbe for being married, having a mistress and being unresponsive to his charm (p. 103).

Ibrahim is also a married man who has left his wife (p. 103). Being homosexual, he refused to marry but was forced to marry Fatimah and did not perform his responsibilities as a husband in cohabiting with his wife (p. 103). His wife has used the term *nusus* (*nusyuz*), which is usually applicable to women who refuse cohabitation with her husband, on Ibrahim (p. 103). Despite being homosexual, Ibrahim prays to Allah in the Islamic way, abiding the five daily prayers and asks from God that his wife returns to Johore (Johor) (p. 104). He also prays to Allah that Fatimah would die and this to Muslims is wrong as Muslims are not allowed to ask from Allah for bad things to happen to others. However, Ibrahim assumes that his prayers are not answered when Fatimah chases him with a carving-knife and screams at him when she catches him hand-in-hand with a soldier friend at the cinema (p. 104).

Ibrahim and Rahimah, Victor Crabbe's servant and Malay mistress respectively, are shown to believe and practise black magic (p. 104). Rahimah asks Ibrahim's help to mix a potion to restore Crabbe's love to her which she obtains from a *pawang* (witchdoctor) and this act is understood by Muslims to be prohibited in Islam as Muslims are not allowed to believe in other things to have powers to control besides Allah as this entails *syirik* (p. 104). Ibrahim then fears that his wife

Fatimah would do the same to him by using the *pawang*'s help and he too resorts to black magic and believes in placing gifts for spirits in a shrine to protect himself from another attack of black magic (p. 105).

Interestingly, in the novel, Burgess' questions about religion can be seen where Crabbe and Alladad Khan discuss metaphysics (p. 140). They mention that Plato believed that all things on earth are mere copies of the heavenly pattern and God has only one pattern in mind and all on earth try to imitate it (p. 140). They also question whether God's system would ever break down and would always serve a purpose but they came to a conclusion that "God know the best" (p. 140). From this scene, I suggest that Crabbe believes in God but question the beliefs of the Muslims who do not question God but have shown that they are wayward Muslims who fail to be good Muslims who adhere to all aspects of the religion.

## Conclusion

Burgess' depictions of the Malay characters in *Time for a Tiger* show that the Malays are wayward Muslims where they commit various prohibitions in Islam, such as practising black magic and drinking alcoholic drinks. My findings therefore supports Zawiyah Yahya's (2003) view that Burgess' depiction of the Malay characters and Malayan Islam represent his conspiratorial attack on Islam where the novel is filled with representations of sinners and religious hypocrites from sultans to men of religion (Zawiyah Yahya, 2003: 174). Although Burgess seem intrigued by the Islamic belief in the scene where Victor Crabbe and Alladad Khan conversed about philosophical beliefs in *Time for a Tiger*, Burgess also makes a mockery of the reality of the Malay Muslims in the novel. This shows that Burgess is disillusioned with the religious beliefs of the Malays during his stay in Malaya at that time. Burgess' depictions of the Malay characters and their Islamic practices which they deem to be correct but in reality they are not proves that the role of Islam as a paradigm of Malayness is indeed an everyday-defined social reality, as defined by the Malays themselves and not subject to be determined by authority. Burgess' stay in Malaya provided him his views on the Malays and their Islamic practices which at times do not adhere to the Islamic doctrines, but with no doubt, they are still considered as Malays.

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