

A Correlation Study between the Theme of Egyptian Novel “Zaynab” and Malaysian Novel “Faridah Hanom”

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Abstract

Arabic literature had played an important role in contributing to the spread of Islamic knowledge and culture among the Malay society. Its contribution continues until the development of modern Malay literature. Most literary researchers agree that the novel entitled *Faridah Hanom* (1926) represents the first Malay novel. Nevertheless, the novel which was written by Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi, a prominent Islamic reformist in the country in the early twentieth century, has long been debated by scholars for its authenticity, whether the novel is originally written by the author, or it is merely a translation of the famous Arabian novel, *Zaynab*. Thus, it is the purpose of this study to examine the impact of novel *Zaynab*'s theme in the emergence of Malaysian novel's theme. Based on the results obtained, it is found that theme of novel *Zaynab* contributed to the emergence of the theme of novel *Faridah Hanom*.

Key Words: Arabic language, *Faridah Hanom*, comparative literature, influence, Arabic novel.

Introduction

Nonetheless, there is a debate among scholars on its authenticity. As Egypt has been used as its background setting throughout the novel, there seems to be some polemical arguments onto whether the novel is originally written by Sh. Al Hadi, the author, or its just a mere translation of the famous Arabian novel. Mana Sikana (1983) claim that *Faridah Hanom* is plainly an adaptation of the novel, *Zaynab*. A.Wahab Ali (1991) while writing the PhD thesis fails to trace the impact of *Zaynab* on Malaysian novel *Faridah Hanom*.

There are also literary scholars who think it is an adaptation novel of foreign literature and has variety of sources. The efforts to find a source have always failed (Christine Campbell, 2009). Mohammad Saleeh Rahamad (2009) describes the influence of the novel to receive the French philosopher, Rousseau, especially ideas that have been absorbed in the novel *Zaynab*.

Matheson Hooker, Virginia (2000) said the determination of the authenticity of works of Syed Sheikh is still disputed and the tale revolves around the question of whether this *Faridah Hanom* is adaptation or directly translation. Jan Van Der Putten (2007) suggested the discussion of originality should be also involves comparing the published works.

The validity of these views cannot be determined as there has been no comparative study conducted on these two novels. By conducting a comparative study on theme of the two novels, this paper intends to highlight the significant instances in *Faridah Hanom* as claimed by many of its being highly influenced by the Egyptian novel *Zaynab*. Findings of this study will present a definitive answer to the polemic issues, which will act as a form of reference in the scope of Malaysian comparative literature.

Novel “Zaynab” in Brief

Muhammad Husain Haikal is a pioneer in the development of Arabic novel. He was the first to introduce the figure of the novel genre in the development of modern Arabic literature (Yahya Haqqi. 1987: 41; Mahmud Syauqat. 1961; Syauqi Dhaif. 1992; Taha Wadi. 1997). According to Ahmad Zalat (1988) and Abdul Aziz Syaraf. (1987) the influence of foreign literature knowledge helped him to produce his work. This influence begins from early childhood through reading and his environment.

Mastery of English and French enabled him to read the foreign literary works. With the skills of both the language and the knowledge he was able to explore foreign cultures with the wider area. Generation reforms consisting of Muhammad Haikal generation and his colleagues are the first generation to receive European reform for national development. They boldly combine European thought and Egyptian thought. They managed to bring a modern approach to the Egyptian culture. He was eager to engage in the arts and literature calling for reform even graduated in law (Husain Fauzi Najjar al., 1989: 20).

Taha Wadi (1969:36) explained from the point of thinking, he has two sources that make up his knowledge. The first source of Egyptian thought. The second stream of thought and culture is foreign knowledge like France and English. Current Egyptian thinking is a key pillar became a weapon for him. These currents can clearly be seen through his influence with his life environment. At the age of 17 years he read the book "The Freedom of Women" written by Kasim Amin. Then he also read the arguments presented in the book "Modern Woman". Similarly, Sheikh Muhammad Abduh became his idol. At the same time he also read his book "Islam Wa al Nasraniyyah". Similarly, he also read the book "Fi Raddi Ala al Dahriyin" written by Sayyid Jamaluddin al Afghani. Also shaping his thinking tradition Arabic books like *Aamali al Qali*, *Aaghani al Asfihani*, *Amsal al*

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In the formation of European thought, Sayyed Lutfi led him to read many books in English. He read a lot of books in that language. French culture became the basis of his modernization thinking. This is due to the available studies in France. During his stay there, he took the opportunity explore French culture by reading books of literature and culture. The result of reading reformed his creative thinking and led him to creative. He produces his novel while in France to describe the background of his country (Sayyed Ahmad al Mahzanji, 1987: 8).

While writing the novel he closed all the windows to get a glimpse of his room picture of Egypt village. In the first issue he simply states his name as an Egyptian farmer for fear of acceptance of her novels. Next release he put his real name. Similarly, the first title of his novels in print entitled "Zaynab: View and Morals Country". In the second and subsequent prints he gave the title "Zaynab" only.

The novel depicts the story of village life, culture life of the village community who adhere to traditional life. In the novel the author tries to highlight the elements of modernization and change from traditional to modernity. This novel basically influenced by Julia novel in French literature. The author does not transfer all the stories and cultural life of the novel, but he created the character and local culture reflected in his novels (Ahmad Darwish. 1992:193).

In Arab culture of life, adhere to traditional cultural society that does not allow girls to leave home to work and make their own decisions to determine their future and do not give the right to learn. Only in accordance with the requirements of the daughter's father, in choosing his life partner. This freedom influenced by the women emancipation highlighted by Sheikh Muhammad Abduh (Muhammad 'imarah. 1997). In this Arabic novel, the author gives freedom to his character to come out of the traditional villages such as working out and seek knowledge.

The author also describes the village traditions that need to be changed. The custom is for the father that determines the choice of their daughters. Choosing a life partner is set by the father with his power. Daughter not asked and was told unless he decided decision. The aim of the author is criticizing the community to be able to innovate in a good life for their children. The proceeds from this event are highlighted daughter lives at a stalemate. Life with someone else loves will bring about the destruction and devastation. With the sufferings borne by the character she eventually died after suffering from homesickness to her lover to endure (Abdul Muhsein Taha Badr. 1992).

Cultural development is also illustrated by the author thought, drawing a side event to the character, which is a lesson Azizah. He was an educated and skilled women in particular foreign language like France. Female characters in the novel Zaynab accept change when they are brought into Malaysia via a novel Faridah Hanom. Writer influenced by reform movements in Arab countries particularly Egypt. His ideas formed by the inductor. He also has a background of Arab culture since childhood while studying at religious schools. Background of his life while in Egypt, particularly in the city of Cairo in the Abbasid city and the environment is also described as a novel background (Talib Samad. 1992).

Novel “*Faridah Hanom*” in Brief

Faridah Hanom (1926) written by Said al Hadi 1867-1934 (S. H. Tan. 1968) is claimed to be the first novel written in Bahasa Melayu (Johan Jaafar and others, 1992). Mohd Taib Osman (1974) said his novel is a work intended to reform the Malay community. Matheson Hooker, Virginia (2000) said Syed Syeikh presents a complex exposition of Islam as a guide for life in the modern world. Hafiz Zakaria (2011) explained the reformist ideas were also promoted through the novel. Indeed, al-Hadi’s narrative was significantly influenced by ‘Abduh’s and Qasim Amin’s ideas. Faridah Hanom, a central protagonist in his novel is depicted as an ideal Muslim woman: beautiful, educated, literate in both English and French, independent and critical, a model to be emulated by Muslim women.

According to Muhamad Zariat (2007) the author attempted to explain the Islamic teaching on women emancipation via his novel and his ideas supported by the Quranic verses. Foley, Sean (2012) discussed that Without question, al-Hadi most successfully realized this vision in the novel *Faridah Hanom*, which uses characters in upper-class Egypt to discuss Islamic modernism in Southeast Asia and its criticism of traditional elites and practices. All the characters are Egyptian (Arabs and Turks), who regularly refer to Egyptian feminists, *al-Manār*, and Islamic modernist leaders. Mawar Syafie (2006) highlighted that the position of this novel might be described as hipoteks to present the next few novels with similar themes to produce the women emancipation with little improvement.

Theme

Among the themes presented by both novels revolve around women’s emancipation to determine her life’s course in the context of Islam. In Islam, women’s rights and emancipation are defined as being free from earlier tradition and customs that designate daughters to be confined indoors. Both novels have attempted to show the rights as deemed in Islam for women, especially in their quest for knowledge and rights to secure a career. The rights to seek knowledge should be open to all individuals regardless of their gender. Che Abdullah Che Ya (2009) in his study showed that the Malay novel is a protest novel in the Malay community who want freedom from the shackles of tradition and the tradition of previous generations they put their children at home alone.

Emancipation is depicted in *Faridah Hanom*’s character as a highly educated woman (Al-Hadi. 1964: 121). Apart from that, she is a bilingual who is proficient in both her native language and French (Al-Hadi. 1964: 17). French is the language she uses to communicate with Syafiq Afendi. This can be seen in the instances where the two lovebirds were engrossed in exchanging love letters to one another.

Similarly, freedom is seen in the novel *Zaynab* through the characters Azizah and Zaynab. Azizah is a highly educated woman who is also fluent in French (Haikal. 1992: 27). Like *Faridah Hanom*, Azizah communicates with Hamid in French. The freedom to have a career is also depicted when Zaynab goes out to work to fend for her family (Haikal. 1992: 14). Hence, in both novels, the women are able to go out of the house for specific reasons, for instance, *Faridah Hanom* usually goes sight-seeing around Cairo, particularly during the “Syamun Nasim” celebration. It is a yearly celebration celebrated by the Egyptians in early spring. During this time they will go to the parks, several tourist spots and jaywalking along the banks of the Nile River (Al-Hadi. 1964: 18). Likewise, in *Zaynab*, Azizah’s character is often depicted as frequenting the activity of sight-seeing around the city of Cairo and the outskirts during her semester break (Haikal. 1992: 14). Like Azizah, Zaynab also goes sight-seeing alongside the scenic fields of the country after work (Haikal. 1992: 27).

Emancipation is also expressed in both novels in terms of choosing life-partners. According to Islam, the father holds the sole marital rights on deciding the right husbands for their daughters (Al Syirazi. 1995:429). Nonetheless, the religion prescribes that the sole-right must also be accompanied by the consent from their daughters who are to be married.

The novel *Faridah Hanom* portrays a paternal’s authority in deciding his daughter’s husbands. For instance in the novel, *Faridah Hanom*’s father marries her off to her cousin without her consent, which results in marital failure. Tragically, after the wedding, both *Faridah Hanom* and her spouse found themselves not compatible with each other. Consequently, *Faridah Hanom* filed for divorce from her husband. With the freedom given by Islam to its women, *Faridah Hanom* is able to determine her future. She finally divorces her husband and is able to marry her soul mate, Syafiq Afendi, finally with her father’s consent (Al-Hadi. 1964: 184).

In the novel *Zaynab*, ironically, the right to freedom is not obtained by Zaynab. This is when her father marries her off to Hassan without her consent. It is her father who gives his own word of consent (Haikal. 1992: 123). Zaynab then follows her father's decision and moves in to her husband house to become a full time housewife. The marriage is doomed. Zaynab falls sick due to a broken heart as she longs for her sweetheart, Ibrahim. Finally, her sufferings bring her to a deathbed (Haikal. 1992: 310). The issue presented here reveals the importance of the fathers to obtain consent from their daughter before marrying them off. This is as the daughters too have the right and freedom to choose their life-partner.

The issue of inner strength is portrayed in both novels through its main characters. Youngsters who have inner strength can persevere the obstacles faced in life. It is with the same inner strength that success can be obtained in their lives. The study conducted by Adibah, et. al (2011) showed that al-Hadi stressed parents to educate their children with Islamic values in order to establish their individuality when they become adults. In the novel *Faridah Hanom*, inner strength can be seen through the characters Faridah Hanom and Syafiq Afendi. Syafiq Afendi is an educated youth who believes in working hard for a living. He carries out his work diligently as assisting his father in their family business. He does not waste his time idly. When he was disappointed with Faridah Hanom's marriage to her cousin, he took the opportunity to console himself by joining the military Academy. In the end, he was sent to Sudan to join the Peace Corps (Al-Hadi. 1964: 180).

Inner strength is also portrayed in Faridah Hanom's character as someone who is highly educated and has a goal in her life. Even though at the beginning, her life was controlled by her father, she later realized that her marriage was a mistake and fixed upon changing her fate. Unable to bear living with her wayward, irresponsible husband who only knew to partying at night clubs, Faridah Hanom decided to confide in her family and told them of her troubled marriage. Due to her determination, she was able to find a way out of her misery by obtaining divorce (*fasakh*) from the Syarie' Court (Al-Hadi. 1964: 192).

On the other hand, in the novel *Zaynab*, inner strength is seen in Azizah who is described as an open-minded and well-learned young lady. She is an optimist, ambitious and not easily influenced by the social pressures of city life. Each semester break, she would return to her village to visit her family. In addition, Zaynab is a determined woman who perseveres through obstacles in life. She works on a farm to support her family. She is a hardworking and trustworthy employee to a point that it attracts the attention of her own supervisor. As a routine, before she goes to the farm, she will make sure that the house is well-kept and food is prepared for her siblings (Haikal. 1992: 13). It is this sense of responsibility that is also seen when she is at her husband's house. She gives her full dedication to her household duties (Haikal. 1992: 136).

Hamid is also a highly educated youth. Every semester break, he would return to his village. As a result, he is not easily influenced by the social demands of city life (Haikal. 1992: 29). Likewise, Ibrahim is a hardworking youth who works hard until he is appointed to be a supervisor. He too does not waste his time loitering at coffee shops like other youths in his village (Haikal. 1992: 50).

Similarly, Hassan is a hardworking youth who works on his father's farm. Due to his hardwork, his father marries him off to Zaynab. After getting married, he still continues to work hard. When Zaynab is seriously ill, Hasan is still patient and tries to treat her. Hence, the issues of inner strength in both novels show how important it is for youth to have inner strength in overcoming obstacles in life as well as seeking contentment (Haikal. 1992: 297).

Since upholding honour is greatly emphasized in all families, youths are obliged to preserve their honour by avoiding things that are against the teachings of religion. The youths need to uphold their family honour by having good mannerism. In both novels, the issue of preserving family honour is greatly emphasized. During courtship, both characters are modest in their behaviour to avoid getting involved in things that go against the religion (Islam), of which would lead to marring their family's honour and reputation.

In the novel *Faridah Hanom*, the issue of modesty and family honour is depicted through Syafiq Afendi and Faridah Hanom's characters. During their courtship, they upheld their self chastity and family honour by preserving their modesty and never going overboard. For instance, when they were together on horse carriage to isolated places, a servant would always acts as a chaperone to them (Al-Hadi. 1964: 36). To exemplify further, in an instance when Faridah Hanom tried to test Syafiq Afendi's self-preservation and true love, she wore a revealing, skin coloured outfit that seemed as if she was nude.

Upon arrival, Syafiq was shocked with what he saw, and scolded Faridah Hanom for dressing that way. Henceforth, it is evident that both lovebirds were able to uphold their chastity and family honour (Al-Hadi. 1964: 63). In the novel *Zaynab*, the issue of modesty and family honour is depicted through the character, Zaynab and her sweetheart. Zaynab always upholds her chastity and family honour whenever she goes out on a date. Whenever, she dates Hamid, she would uphold her mannerism as a respected village lady even when meeting in isolated spots. Hamid himself had never taken advantage of Zaynab.

Similarly, in the relation between Zaynab and Ibrahim, the issue of modesty and family honour is faithfully upheld. Zaynab and Ibrahim have never been involved in any promiscuous activities with each other. In fact, both lovebirds maintain their chastity and honour even though they meet up discreetly in isolated places. As a result, this couple is able to avoid pre-marital sex. This should be as an example to today's youth (Rosni Samah, 2007).

Conclusion

After a thorough dissection of both novels, it can be concluded that the both of Zaynab and Faridah Hanom have similarities in theme which discuss women's emancipation to determine her life's course in the context of Islam including education, outing of the house for specific purpose, working and making decision for her life partner. Apparently the theme of novel *Faridah Hanom* is the product of a literary text being heavily influenced by the theme of novel *Zaynab* (Rosni bin Samah. 2004). Nevertheless, this does not mean that its writer has simply translated the Arabic novel *Zaynab* into the Malay novel, *Faridah Hanom*. The justification would be on the basis that upon reading the novel *Zaynab*, Al Hadi, the author of *Faridah Hanom* was highly influenced by the former's novel and the inspiration to write his novel.

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