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Pemeliharaan Warisan Budaya Iban Sarawak dalam Era Digital: Pendekatan Inovatif untuk Kelangsungan Budaya

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ABSTRAK

Warisan budaya Iban yang kaya dengan tradisi dan sejarah, menghadapi ancaman besar daripada permodenan dan globalisasi. Kaedah pemeliharaan tradisional tidak lagi mencukupi untuk memastikan kelangsungan budaya yang unik ini. Kajian ini meneroka bagaimana teknologi digital termasuk Realiti Maya (VR), Kecerdasan Buatan (AI) dan penceritaan digital boleh digunakan sebagai alat inovatif untuk melindungi dan menghidupkan semula budaya Iban.

Melalui pendekatan kualitatif, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti aplikasi digital yang paling sesuai dan menganalisis isu etika dalam penggunaan AI untuk mencipta aset budaya. Kami menggariskan kepentingan kawalan pencipta dan pendekatan kolaboratif dengan komuniti Iban untuk memastikan teknologi diintegrasikan secara sensitif budaya. Hasil penemuan awal menunjukkan potensi teknologi digital untuk mengatasi cabaran pemeliharaan. Kajian ini menyumbang dengan menyediakan garis panduan praktikal dan etika, memastikan warisan Iban bukan sahaja dipelihara tetapi juga diperkasakan untuk generasi akan datang.

Kata Kunci: Iban, Sarawak, pemeliharaan budaya, warisan digital, kecerdasan buatan

PENGENALAN

Kaum Iban, subkumpulan Dayak yang dominan di Sarawak, Malaysia, memiliki sejarah yang kaya dengan identiti budaya yang tersendiri yang telah mempesonakan cendekiawan dan penjelajah selama berabad-abad. Dikenali sebagai “Dayak Laut” kerana kehebatan mereka dalam peperangan sungai dan pesisir, kaum Iban secara sejarah terkenal sebagai pahlawan yang gagah berani (Sather, 2001). Identiti mereka yang kukuh berakar umbi dalam tradisi lisan dan struktur sosial seperti rumah panjang, telah membentuk sebuah warisan budaya yang unik merangkumi adat resam, seni, bahasa dan sistem kepercayaan (Howell, 1963).

Namun, dalam era pemodenan dan globalisasi yang pesat, warisan budaya yang tidak ternilai ini berhadapan dengan cabaran besar. Generasi muda Iban semakin terasing daripada tradisi asal mereka, manakala kaedah pemeliharaan tradisional yang bergantung pada lisan dan artifak fizikal terbukti tidak mencukupi untuk menghadapi dinamik perubahan sosial. Keterbatasan ini menimbulkan risiko kepupusan budaya jika tidak mengambil tindakan yang proaktif. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dan menyokong penerimaan segera penyelesaian digital yang inovatif.

Perkara yang akan diterokai ialah potensi teknologi canggih seperti Realiti Maya (VR), Kecerdasan Buatan (AI) dan penceritaan digital untuk mendokumentasikan, menghidupkan semula, dan menyebarkan budaya Iban. Penulisan ini penting adalah kerana ia menawarkan kerangka kerja baharu yang

melampaui kaedah konvensional, memastikan kelangsungan dan relevansi warisan budaya Iban untuk generasi akan datang dalam landskap digital global. Dengan mengintegrasikan teknologi ini secara beretika dan kolaboratif, matlamatnya adalah untuk memperkasakan komuniti Iban sendiri dalam memelihara dan berkongsi identiti mereka dengan dunia.

WARISAN BUDAYA DAN MASYARAKAT IBAN DI SARAWAK

Warisan budaya masyarakat Iban adalah cerminan identiti, sejarah, dan hubungan mendalam mereka dengan alam semula jadi. Kekayaan budaya ini terbukti melalui pelbagai aspek kehidupan harian, upacara, dan seni. Bahagian ini mengupas elemen-elemen utama budaya Iban, termasuk struktur sosial, pakaian, masakan, serta seni dan kraf tangan.

1. Struktur Sosial: Rumah Panjang dan Ruai

Pusat kehidupan masyarakat Iban ialah rumah panjang (rumah panjai), sebuah komuniti yang tinggal di bawah satu bumbung dan merangkumi pelbagai keluarga. Struktur ini melambangkan semangat kolektif dan saling bergantung. Ciri utama rumah panjang ialah ruai, koridor atau ruang awam yang luas di sepanjang bangunan (Heimann, 1989). Ruai berfungsi sebagai nadi komuniti, tempat di mana aktiviti sosial, upacara adat, dan mesyuarat penting diadakan. Ia adalah ruang yang memupuk interaksi sosial, mengeratkan ikatan kekeluargaan, dan memastikan setiap ahli komuniti berasa sebahagian daripada satu kesatuan.

Sebelum penubuhan Muzium Sarawak oleh keluarga Brooke pada tahun 1891, masyarakat Iban telah memelihara objek-objek kebudayaan di dalam rumah panjang mereka dengan menggunakan kaedah tersendiri. Kaedah penjagaan tradisional ini adalah asas yang didasarkan pada kepercayaan dan konsepsi mereka tentang kewujudan alam semesta (Kiyai, Gregory, Hashim, Raemah, Mustaffa Halabi, Khairun Nisa, Ismail, Noor 2023).

2. Pakaian Tradisional

Pakaian tradisional Iban, dikenali sebagai *ngepan indu Iban* (wanita) dan *ngepan laki Iban* (lelaki), bukan sekadar pakaian tetapi juga simbol status dan pencapaian. Pakaian ini bercirikan penggunaan tenunan, manik, dan perhiasan perak yang rumit. Contohnya, pakaian lelaki termasuk baju burung yang dihiasi dengan tali pinggang perak, gelang tangan, dan hiasan kepala yang tersendiri (Gomes, 1911). Kerumitan reka bentuk ini mencerminkan rasa estetik yang mendalam serta kepercayaan spiritual masyarakat Iban, di mana setiap corak mempunyai makna tersendiri (Kiyai, G., & Tugang, 2020).

3. Masakan Tradisional

Masakan Iban bercirikan kesederhanaan dan kebergantungan pada sumber semula jadi. Teknik masakan utama yang dikenali sebagai lulun atau pansuh, ialah kaedah memasak bahan seperti ayam, ikan, daging, atau sayur-sayuran di dalam batang buluh yang dipanaskan di atas api. Kaedah ini memberikan aroma dan rasa yang unik dan asli. Teknik ini juga mencerminkan hubungan harmoni kaum Iban dengan persekitaran hutan mereka serta pendekatan yang lestari dalam penyediaan makanan.

4. Seni dan Kraf Tangan

Masyarakat Iban terkenal dengan seni dan kraf tangan yang canggih, yang berfungsi sebagai medium penting untuk mengekspresikan budaya serta menyampaikan naratif sejarah mereka.

- **Pua Kumbu:** Tekstil tenunan ini adalah salah satu bentuk seni Iban yang paling ikonik. Dicipta menggunakan teknik pewarnaan ikat (ikat *dyeing*) dan alat tenun *backstrap*, setiap pua kumbu menceritakan kisah mitos, sejarah, atau kepercayaan spiritual melalui corak-corak kompleksnya. Dalam masyarakat Iban, terdapat sejenis tenunan yang dikenali sebagai kain pua. Perkataan kain merujuk kepada tekstil, manakala pua bermaksud selimut. Oleh itu, kain pua membawa maksud kain selimut. Kain pua mempunyai kedudukan yang amat penting dan istimewa dalam masyarakat Iban di Sarawak. Kain ini dianggap sebagai lambang identiti atau pengenalan diri orang Iban, sama ada dalam kalangan sesama mereka mahupun antara orang Iban dengan *petara* (tuhan) mereka atau kuasa-kuasa luar biasa yang lain. Kain pua juga mempunyai kaitan dengan alam ghaib atau kuasa ghaib dan hal ini merupakan keistimewaan utama dalam budaya benda masyarakat Iban (Tugang, 2014).
- **Iban Ukir (Ukiran):** Ukiran Iban, terutamanya yang diperbuat daripada kayu, mempamerkan kemahiran seni yang luar biasa. Ukiran ini menghiasi tiang rumah panjang, objek istiadat, dan barang peribadi, berfungsi sebagai kronik visual sejarah dan kosmologi Iban (Sather, 2001).

- **Iban Anyam (Anyaman):** Seni anyaman Iban merangkumi penghasilan tikar dan bakul daripada gentian semula jadi. Hasil anyaman ini bukan sahaja berfungsi dalam kehidupan seharian tetapi juga mempamerkan kehalusan kraf tangan masyarakat Iban dalam mengubah bahan mentah menjadi objek yang indah dan berguna.

KONSEP KAJIAN: INTEGRASI AI DALAM PEMELIHARAAN WARISAN BUDAYA IBAN

Warisan budaya Iban kini berada di ambang kritikal. Kerapuhan budaya ini berpunca daripada beberapa faktor, termasuk artifak fizikal yang terdedah kepada kerosakan dan kaedah pemeliharaan yang tidak mencukupi (Kiyai et al., 2023), serta tradisi lisan yang berisiko pupus dengan kematian orang tua sebagai penjaga pengetahuan (Sather, 2001). Ancaman ini diperburuk oleh pemodenan dan globalisasi yang menarik belia Iban jauh daripada tradisi mereka, menyebabkan kemerosotan bahasa, kraf dan ritual (Kedit, 1993). Menghadapi cabaran ini, pendekatan pemeliharaan tradisional tidak lagi mencukupi, justeru memerlukan penyelesaian inovatif yang dapat mengatasi halangan ini.

Kajian ini mencadangkan sebuah konsep kajian yang berpusat pada penggunaan teknologi digital, khususnya Kecerdasan Buatan (AI), sebagai alat utama dalam pemeliharaan warisan budaya Iban. Pendekatan ini adalah kritikal kerana ia membolehkan dokumentasi, pemuliharaan dan penyebaran budaya secara lebih berkesan dan interaktif. Alat-alat digital seperti Realiti Maya (VR), pengimbasan 3D dan penceritaan digital berfungsi sebagai infrastruktur yang membolehkan

pengalaman mendalam dan rekod kekal. Sebagai contoh, inisiatif VR untuk merekonstruksi rumah panjang Iban secara maya telah menunjukkan potensi besar dalam pemeliharaan (UTAR News, 2020), di mana AI dapat memainkan peranan penting dalam meningkatkan pengalaman ini.

Peranan AI dalam konsep ini adalah untuk memperkaya dan mempercepatkan proses kreatif, bukannya menggantikannya. AI dapat digunakan dalam penghasilan aset berasaskan watak dan persekitaran metaverse yang kaya dengan budaya Iban. Melalui teknologi AI, artis dan pakar budaya boleh menjana idea visual, memindahkan gaya seni tradisional kepada aset digital, dan menghasilkan pelbagai ciri watak yang pelbagai namun masih mengekalkan ketulenan. Ini akan memudahkan penciptaan avatar peribadi yang membolehkan pengguna berinteraksi secara bermakna dengan elemen budaya Iban.

Walau bagaimanapun, kejayaan integrasi ini bergantung pada prinsip-prinsip utama dan pertimbangan etika. Pertama, kawalan pencipta adalah kritikal; AI mesti berfungsi sebagai pembantu, memperkasa pencipta Iban untuk mengawal dan memperibadikan aset yang dijana. Kedua, implikasi etika seperti berat sebelah data dan hak harta intelek perlu ditangani dengan teliti (UNESCO, 2024). Ketiga, kerjasama dengan komuniti Iban adalah yang paling utama. Teknologi perlu digunakan untuk memperkasakan mereka, memastikan penciptaan bersama dan pemilikan warisan digital. Dengan mengamalkan pendekatan ini, AI dapat membantu mentransformasikan warisan budaya Iban daripada tradisi lisan yang terdedah kepada ekosistem digital yang berdaya tahan dan boleh diakses secara global.

KESIMPULAN

Berdasarkan kajian ini, dapat disimpulkan bahawa warisan budaya masyarakat Iban sedang menghadapi ancaman kritikal akibat kepupusan tradisi lisan dan kerapuhan artifak fizikal dalam era moden. Pendekatan pemeliharaan konvensional terbukti tidak mencukupi untuk menghadapi cabaran ini. Walau bagaimanapun, analisis mendalam menunjukkan bahawa integrasi teknologi digital, terutamanya Realiti Maya (VR) dan Kecerdasan Buatan (AI), menawarkan penyelesaian yang inovatif dan berkesan. Hasil kajian ini menegaskan bahawa dengan menggunakan AI sebagai alat bantu yang strategik, aset budaya Iban dapat didokumentasi dan dihasilkan semula secara digital, sekali gus mewujudkan platform interaktif untuk pemeliharaan dan penyebaran budaya yang autentik dan menarik.

IMPLIKASI, SUMBANGAN, DAN CADANGAN

Kajian ini membawa implikasi signifikan kepada usaha pemeliharaan budaya peribumi secara global, dengan menekankan keperluan untuk beralih daripada kaedah tradisional kepada pendekatan yang lebih proaktif dan berteknologi. Sumbangan utama penulisan ini adalah menyediakan kerangka kerja konseptual yang berfokus pada AI, yang menggariskan prinsip-prinsip utama seperti kawalan pencipta, pertimbangan etika dan kerjasama tulen dengan komuniti Iban. Dengan ini, teknologi dapat berfungsi sebagai pemerkasa dan bukannya pengganti identiti budaya. Kajian ini mengesyorkan cadangan untuk penyelidikan masa depan, termasuk kajian empirikal yang menguji keberkesanan alat

digital ini serta eksplorasi lebih lanjut tentang cara membangunkan set data yang adil dan inklusif. Melalui langkah-langkah ini, kita dapat memastikan bahawa warisan masyarakat Iban tidak hanya terselamat, tetapi terus berkembang sebagai bukti hidup kepada identiti dan daya tahan mereka untuk generasi yang akan datang.

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Reframing Gambus Learning in Malaysian Higher Arts Education: An Autoethnographic Study of Early Maqām-Based Practice and Knowledge Transmission at Akademi Seni Kebangsaan (2003)

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ABSTRACT

This autoethnographic study documents the early introduction of *maqām*-based learning and notation-mediated instruction into Malaysian *gambus* pedagogy within higher arts education. Focusing on instructional practice at Akademi Seni Kebangsaan (now ASWARA) in 2003, the article examines a pedagogical shift from predominantly oral, repertoire-based transmission toward structured modal understanding grounded in written notation and theoretical explanation. Drawing on the author's lived experience as a tutor appointed to support *gambus* instruction at the institution, the study reconstructs the conditions under which *maqāmāt*, including *Ajam*, *Nahawand*, *Rast*, *Kurd*, *Bayātī*, *Hijāz*, *Ṣabā* and *Sikah*, were first introduced as conceptual systems rather than solely as performance material. The findings highlight the absence of prior formalised teaching resources, theoretical frameworks, or notation-based methodologies for *gambus* learning in Malaysia at the time. By situating this pedagogical intervention within its institutional and historical context, the article argues that early *maqām*-based instruction contributed to the reconfiguration of *gambus* learning as a knowledge-oriented practice, laying foundations for subsequent developments in Malaysian *oud* and *gambus* pedagogy. The study contributes to broader discussions on knowledge transmission, notation, and pedagogical transformation in orally rooted musical traditions.

Keywords: *gambus* pedagogy, *maqām*-based learning, autoethnography, music notation in oral traditions, Malaysian higher arts education

1. INTRODUCTION

Gambus learning in Malaysia has historically been grounded in oral transmission, relying primarily on imitation, memorisation, and repertoire-based learning. Within both community and institutional contexts, pedagogical knowledge was typically passed from teacher to student through demonstration rather than through written materials or formalised theoretical explanation. While this approach supported continuity of performance practice, it offered limited mechanisms for articulating modal structure, pitch organisation, or systematic progression in learning. As a result, *gambus* pedagogy in Malaysia developed largely as a practice-oriented tradition, with minimal emphasis on analytical frameworks or explicit musical concepts that could support broader cognitive understanding of the instrument and its modal foundations.

Prior to the early 2000s, the teaching of *gambus* within Malaysian higher arts education lacked structured instructional materials, notation-based resources, or formalised approaches to *maqām* learning. Modal systems were not introduced as conceptual entities, and students were generally unfamiliar with the identification, tonal centres, or pitch structures of essential *maqāmāt* such as *Ajam*, *Nahawand*, *Rast*, *Kurd*, *Bayātī*, *Hijāz*, *Šabā* and *Sikah*. Learning outcomes were therefore closely tied to the reproduction of repertoire rather than to the internalisation of modal knowledge as transferable musical understanding. This pedagogical condition formed the backdrop against which a new approach to *gambus* learning emerged in 2003 within Akademi Seni Kebangsaan, marking an early attempt to reframe *gambus* instruction through *maqām*-based practice and notation-mediated learning.

The pedagogical shift examined in this study emerged from a specific institutional and historical moment. In late 2003, the author was appointed as a tutor to support *gambus* learning within the music programme, working alongside an established master practitioner whose teaching was grounded in oral transmission and repertoire continuity. This appointment coincided with the author's prior exposure to structured *oud* pedagogy acquired through formal study in London, where *maqāmāt* were taught as theoretical systems supported by notation, scale construction, and modal awareness. The contrast between these learning

environments revealed a significant pedagogical gap within Malaysian *gambus* education, particularly in relation to modal cognition, pitch organisation, and the absence of written learning materials. The introduction of notation-based *maqām* learning at this juncture did not seek to replace oral tradition, but rather to supplement existing practices by making implicit musical knowledge explicit and transferable.

Given the absence of documented curricula, teaching materials, or formal records of *maqām*-based *gambus* learning in Malaysia at the time, autoethnography is employed as the most appropriate methodological approach for examining this early pedagogical intervention. Autoethnography enables the systematic analysis of lived teaching and learning experiences situated within their institutional and cultural contexts, particularly in cases where conventional archival sources are unavailable. The purpose of this article is therefore to document and critically reflect on the early introduction of *maqām*-based learning and notation-mediated practice in Malaysian *gambus* pedagogy in 2003, and to examine how this approach contributed to a reframing of *gambus* learning as a knowledge-oriented practice within higher arts education. By articulating this formative moment, the study aims to contribute to broader discussions on knowledge transmission, pedagogy, and the role of notation in the transformation of orally rooted musical traditions. This study is written with awareness of the author's institutional proximity and adopts a reflexive stance to ensure analytical distance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Gambus Learning in Malaysia Prior to 2003

Gambus learning in Malaysia prior to the early 2000s was shaped predominantly by oral transmission and repertoire-based apprenticeship. Musical knowledge was communicated through demonstration, imitation, and repeated performance, with pedagogical emphasis placed on memorisation and stylistic continuity rather than on the articulation of underlying modal systems. Such learning environments are consistent with broader ethnomusicological descriptions of orally rooted musical

traditions, where embodied practice and interpersonal transmission form the primary modes of knowledge transfer (Nettl, 2005; Racy, 2003).

Within this pedagogical context, theoretical engagement with *maqām* was largely implicit. Modal identity was absorbed through prolonged exposure to repertoire rather than through explicit instruction in scale construction, tonal centres, or intervallic organisation. Ethnomusicological studies of Arab and related musical traditions have long noted that *maqām* knowledge is frequently internalised through performance practice rather than formalised theory, particularly outside conservatory settings (Touma, 1996; Marcus, 2007). In the Malaysian *gambus* context, this resulted in learners performing modal material without necessarily possessing conscious awareness of *maqām* nomenclature or structural differentiation.

The absence of written notation further reinforced reliance on memory and imitation as the dominant learning strategies. Without visual representations of pitch organisation, learners had limited opportunities to engage analytically with melodic structure or to generalise modal understanding beyond specific pieces. Scholars have observed that while oral transmission is highly effective in sustaining stylistic integrity, it can constrain the development of transferable musical knowledge when employed as the sole pedagogical mode within institutional settings (Nettl, 2005; Marcus, 2007). In the case of Malaysian *gambus* learning, this pedagogical condition limited systematic progression and theoretical reflection, particularly within higher arts education contexts.

It was within this learning environment that early efforts to introduce *maqām*-based learning and notation-mediated practice emerged in 2003 at Akademi Seni Kebangsaan. The introduction of written notation and explicit modal explanation did not seek to displace oral tradition, but rather to supplement existing learning practices by rendering implicit musical knowledge visible and conceptually accessible. This moment marked a significant shift in *gambus* pedagogy, reframing learning from an exclusive reliance on repertoire reproduction toward a knowledge-oriented engagement with *maqām* as a transferable musical system.

2.2 Maqām as Musical Knowledge in Oud Traditions

Within Arab and Turkish *oud* traditions, *maqām* functions not merely as a scalar framework but as an integrated system of musical knowledge encompassing pitch organisation, modal hierarchy, melodic development, and affective orientation. Ethnomusicological scholarship consistently characterises *maqām* as a modal concept that combines structural elements with culturally embedded performance conventions, including characteristic phrases, modulations, and expressive trajectories (Touma, 1996; Racy, 2003). Mastery of the *oud* within these traditions is therefore closely associated with the internalisation of *maqāmāt* as cognitive and expressive systems rather than as isolated technical patterns.

In pedagogical contexts where *maqām* is taught explicitly, learners are introduced to modal structures through systematic engagement with tonal centres, *ajnās* construction, intervallic relationships, and modal progression. Studies of *oud* pedagogy in conservatory and semi-formal learning environments indicate that such approaches facilitate deeper modal awareness and greater flexibility in improvisation and interpretation (Marcus, 2007). This conceptual understanding allows performers to recognise modal identity beyond specific compositions, supporting improvisatory practices such as *taqīm* and enabling informed navigation between related *maqāmāt* during performance.

However, ethnomusicological research also highlights that *maqām* knowledge has traditionally been transmitted through oral and experiential means, particularly in non-institutional settings. In these contexts, modal understanding is often acquired implicitly through prolonged listening, imitation, and embodied practice rather than through formal theoretical explanation (Nettl, 2005; Racy, 2003). While this mode of transmission has proven effective in sustaining stylistic continuity, it can limit the articulation of *maqām* as an abstract musical knowledge, especially for learners operating within modern educational institutions that prioritise explicit learning outcomes and structured progression.

The *oud* occupies a central position within *maqām* pedagogy due to its fretless design and melodic flexibility, which allow precise

articulation of microtonal intervals and nuanced modal inflections. As a result, *oud* instruction in Arab and Turkish traditions has frequently served as a primary site for the transmission of *maqām* knowledge, whether through oral apprenticeship or formalised curricula (Touma, 1996; Marcus, 2007). When *maqām* is treated as a knowledge system rather than as repertoire alone, the *oud* becomes both a practical and conceptual instrument through which learners engage with modal theory, melodic logic, and expressive intent.

Understanding *maqām* as a form of musical knowledge is therefore critical to examining pedagogical transformation in *gambus* learning contexts. The introduction of explicit *maqām*-based learning frameworks, particularly when supported by notation, represents a shift from implicit absorption toward conscious modal cognition. This conceptualisation provides the foundation for analysing how early *maqām*-based learning practices introduced into Malaysian *gambus* pedagogy in 2003 reframed learning processes and expanded the epistemological scope of *gambus* education within higher arts institutions.

2.3 Notation and Knowledge Transmission in Orally Rooted Music

The role of notation in orally rooted musical traditions has long been debated within ethnomusicology, particularly in relation to concerns about embodiment, stylistic nuance, and cultural authenticity. Scholars have cautioned that notation, when treated as a prescriptive substitute for oral transmission, may risk constraining expressive flexibility and performative variation (Nettl, 2005; Racy, 2003). However, ethnomusicological and pedagogical literature also recognises that notation can function as a complementary cognitive tool when employed reflexively, particularly within institutional learning environments that require explicit articulation of musical knowledge.

Within Arab and Turkish music traditions, notation has historically occupied a supportive rather than authoritative role. It has been used to visualise pitch organisation, *maqām* structure, and formal outlines, while ornamentation, phrasing, and expressive detail continue to be transmitted through listening and embodied practice (Touma, 1996; Marcus, 2007). In conservatory and semi-formal settings, written notation often serves as a scaffold that enables learners to conceptualise

maqām beyond individual compositions, supporting analytical awareness of scale structure, *ajnās* relationships, and modulating pathways.

When I first engaged with *gambus* learning in Malaysia, notation played little to no role in pedagogical practice. Learning relied almost entirely on oral imitation and memorisation, with no established written materials for *maqām* explanation or modal comparison. As I later documented in my study on the institutionalisation of *oud* pedagogy in Malaysia, this absence limited learners' ability to conceptualise *maqām* as transferable musical knowledge and constrained systematic pedagogical progression within higher arts education (Raja Yusof, 2025). The introduction of notation-mediated *maqām* learning in 2003 therefore emerged not as an attempt to replace oral tradition, but as a response to institutional learning needs that required clearer articulation of musical concepts.

In my pedagogical practice, notation functioned primarily as a diagnostic and explanatory device rather than as a performance prescription. Written materials were used to identify tonal centres, scale degrees, and modal contours, while oral transmission remained central to the acquisition of stylistic nuance, ornamentation, and expressive vocabulary (Raja Yusof, 2025). This approach aligns with broader ethnomusicological perspectives that view notation as most effective when embedded within an orally grounded learning process rather than imposed as an autonomous system.

My subsequent work on *maqām*-based pedagogy further reinforced this position. In examining the transmission of *çarpma* ornamentation within Malaysian *gambus* practice, I demonstrated how technical and expressive knowledge can be communicated effectively when conceptual explanation is integrated with embodied learning, without undermining oral tradition (Raja Zulkarnain, R. M. Y., 2026a). Similarly, my documentation of the introduction of the seven-course *oud* in Malaysia showed that changes in instrument structure necessitate corresponding shifts in pedagogical explanation and learning materials to support student understanding (Raja Zulkarnain, 2026b). These studies underscore the importance of treating notation as a flexible pedagogical tool that supports, rather than displaces, oral modes of knowledge transmission.

Viewed through this lens, the early use of notation in Malaysian *gambus* learning can be understood as part of a broader reframing of musical knowledge rather than as a departure from tradition. By enabling learners to visualise *maqām* structure and articulate modal relationships, notation supported the development of conscious modal cognition while remaining embedded within an orally rooted learning environment. This conceptualisation provides a critical foundation for examining how *maqām*-based learning practices introduced in 2003 contributed to the transformation of *gambus* pedagogy within Malaysian higher arts education.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study adopts an autoethnographic research design to examine the early introduction of *maqām*-based learning and notation-mediated practice in Malaysian *gambus* pedagogy in 2003. Autoethnography is employed to document and analyse pedagogical processes that were not formally recorded at the time and for which conventional archival data are limited or absent. As both practitioner and participant, I draw on lived teaching and learning experiences situated within a specific institutional context to reconstruct pedagogical conditions, decisions, and outcomes. This approach is particularly appropriate for examining formative moments in music education where innovation precedes formal documentation and where knowledge transmission occurs through practice rather than policy.

Autoethnography has been widely recognised within ethnomusicology and arts-based research as a legitimate method for investigating embodied knowledge, pedagogical transformation, and insider perspectives that cannot be adequately captured through external observation alone (Nettl, 2005; Racy, 2003). In this study, autoethnography is not used to foreground personal narrative for its own sake, but as an analytical framework through which pedagogical change can be examined reflexively and situated within broader disciplinary discourse.

3.2 Positionality and Research Context

My positionality as a tutor appointed in 2003 to support *gambus* learning at Akademi Seni Kebangsaan is central to the study. At the time, I had recently returned from formal *oud* training in London, where *maqām* was taught as a theoretical and practical system supported by notation, scale analysis, and modal explanation. This pedagogical background contrasted sharply with the prevailing *gambus* learning practices in Malaysia, which were grounded almost entirely in oral transmission and repertoire imitation.

My role was not to replace existing pedagogical traditions, but to support and supplement them within an institutional learning environment. Working alongside an established master practitioner whose authority derived from oral transmission and performance lineage, I occupied a liminal position between inherited tradition and emerging institutional pedagogy. This positionality shaped both the pedagogical interventions introduced and the reflective lens through which they are analysed in this study.

3.3 Data Sources and Analytical Materials

The primary data for this study consist of retrospective pedagogical reflections, teaching notes, early instructional materials, and reconstructed lesson structures developed during the initial phase of *maqām*-based *gambus* learning in 2003. These materials include notated scale exercises, modal diagrams, and explanatory frameworks used to introduce students to *maqāmāt* such as *Ajam*, *Nahawand*, *Rast*, *Kurd*, *Bayātī*, *Hijāz*, *Šabā* and *Sikah* as conceptual systems rather than as repertoire alone. While these materials were not formally archived at the time, they have been preserved through personal records and later pedagogical documentation.

In addition, this study draws on insights developed through subsequent research on *oud* and *gambus* pedagogy, including my autoethnographic analysis of pedagogical institutionalisation (Raja Yusof, 2025), my study of ornamentation transmission through *çarpma* (Raja Zulkarnain, R. M. Y., 2026a), and my documentation of the seven-course *oud* in Malaysia (Raja Zulkarnain, 2026b). These later works are used not as a primary evidence for the 2003 intervention, but as a reflective reference points that clarify the longer-term pedagogical implications of early methodological choices.

3.4 Analytical Framework

Data analysis in this study follows a reflexive thematic approach, focusing on three interrelated dimensions:

1. Pedagogical absence, referring to the lack of structured materials, notation, and theoretical framing prior to 2003.
2. Pedagogical intervention, examining how notation and *maqām*-based explanation were introduced as learning tools within an orally grounded environment.
3. Pedagogical reframing, analysing how these practices contributed to a shift in *gambus* learning from repertoire reproduction toward knowledge-oriented modal understanding.

Rather than seeking generalisability, the analysis aims to produce contextualised insight into how pedagogical change emerges within specific institutional and cultural conditions. This aligns with ethnomusicological approaches that prioritise depth, situated knowledge, and analytical transparency over statistical representation.

3.5 Validity, Reflexivity, and Ethical Considerations

Methodological validity in this study is addressed through reflexive transparency and triangulation with established ethnomusicological literature. I acknowledge the subjective nature of autoethnographic research and position reflexivity as a strength rather than a limitation, allowing pedagogical assumptions and decisions to be examined critically rather than presented as neutral facts. Where possible, claims are contextualised within existing scholarship on oral transmission, *maqām* pedagogy, and notation in musical learning.

Ethical considerations are addressed by focusing on pedagogical processes rather than on individual students, and by avoiding evaluative judgments of specific persons or performances. The study does not disclose personal student data and treats all institutional and pedagogical contexts with respect for inherited traditions and practitioner authority.

4. AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC FINDINGS AND PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS

4.1 The Initial Teaching Context and Pedagogical Conditions (2003)

When I began supporting *gambus* learning in 2003 at Akademi Seni

Kebangsaan, the pedagogical environment reflected a continuation of oral, repertoire-centred transmission. Instructional activity focused primarily on learning complete pieces through imitation and repetition, with limited verbal explanation of pitch organisation or modal identity. Students were able to reproduce melodic material accurately, yet their understanding of underlying modal structures remained implicit. Concepts such as tonal centre, scale degree, or modal differentiation were not articulated explicitly within lessons.

At this stage, *maqām* terminology was largely absent from instructional discourse. Students were unfamiliar with the names, characteristics, or pitch structures of commonly used *maqāmāt*, even when performing repertoire that clearly drew upon these modal systems. Learning outcomes were therefore tied closely to memorisation rather than to transferable musical understanding. This condition shaped the pedagogical challenge addressed in the subsequent introduction of *maqām*-based learning.

4.2 Introduction of Maqām as Conceptual Knowledge

The initial pedagogical intervention involved introducing *maqāmāt* as conceptual systems rather than as an implicit features of repertoire. Drawing on my prior *oud* learning, I presented *maqām* as a framework defined by tonal centre, scale structure, and characteristic pitch relationships. Early lessons focused on familiarising students with a limited set of core *maqāmāt*, including *Ajam*, *Nahawand*, *Rast*, *Kurd*, *Bayātī*, *Hijāz*, *Ṣabā* and *Sikah*, selected for their relevance to *gambus* repertoire and pedagogical clarity.

Rather than beginning with complete compositions, I structured learning activities around scale-based exploration and modal recognition. Students were encouraged to identify tonal centres, ascend and descend scale structures, and compare intervallic differences between *maqāmāt*. This shift marked a departure from repertoire-first learning and introduced a conceptual layer through which students could understand melodic material beyond individual pieces.

4.3 Use of Notation as a Pedagogical Scaffold

Written notation was introduced selectively as a pedagogical scaffold to support modal understanding, but its significance extended beyond visual aid alone. Pedagogically, notation transformed tacit modal

knowledge into an explicit cognitive framework through which students could begin to organise pitch relationships, tonal centres, and scalar movement in a more systematic way. Rather than depending exclusively on repeated imitation, learners were gradually able to connect what they heard and played with named modal structures. In this sense, notation did not merely document sound. It functioned as a mediating device that enabled reflection, comparison, and progressive conceptualisation within an otherwise orally grounded learning environment.

Its role remained explanatory rather than prescriptive. I used notation to visualise scale structures, indicate tonal centres, and clarify pitch organisation, while performance practice itself continued to rely on oral demonstration, repetition, and close listening. Ornamentation, phrasing, and expressive nuance were not reduced to notation, but remained embedded in embodied practice. This distinction was important because it allowed notation to assist understanding without displacing the stylistic and performative authority of oral transmission. In practical terms, notation enabled students to identify where a *maqām* began to stabilise around a tonal centre and to compare how one modal structure differed from another. For example, learners who had previously reproduced melodies as an undifferentiated repertoire could now observe that similar melodic passages might belong to different modal systems depending on pitch organisation and emphasis. They could compare the scalar contours of Ajam and Nahawand, or recognise that Bayātī and Hījāz were not simply different tunes but distinct modal frameworks with different internal logics. This did not make students fully independent modal practitioners at once, but it created the conditions for a more systematic pedagogy in which modal learning could be discussed, revisited, and progressively deepened.

The pedagogical value of notation, therefore, lay not in replacing oral tradition but in supporting a hybrid model of learning. It made implicit structures visible enough to be named and analysed, while leaving the cultivation of style and expression within the oral and embodied domain. This was especially significant in an institutional setting, where students were expected not only to imitate but also to understand, remember, and transfer musical knowledge across learning situations.

4.4 Student Responses and Learning Shifts

Student responses to *maqām*-based and notation-supported learning revealed a gradual but important shift in the way musical understanding was formed. At the beginning, most learners approached *gambus* repertoire as a discrete pieces to be memorised. Their musical competence was tied closely to successful reproduction of what had been demonstrated in class, but this competence did not necessarily extend to an ability to explain why a melody moved in a certain way or how one modal structure differed from another. As notation and *maqām*-based explanation were introduced, students began to move from passive reproduction toward more conscious recognition of modal organisation.

One of the clearest shifts was the emergence of tonal awareness. Students began to identify tonic centres more independently and to recognise recurring pitch relationships across different pieces, rather than treating each composition as a wholly separate learning task. In practical classroom terms, this meant that some learners could increasingly point to where a melody appeared to settle, distinguish one modal pattern from another, and follow scale-based exercises with greater conceptual confidence. The learning process became less dependent on total memorisation, as students began to understand the internal structure of what they were playing.

Another significant change involved modal comparison. Once students were introduced to named *maqāmāt* and supported with simple notation-based exercises, they became more able to distinguish broad differences between modal frameworks such as *Ajam*, *Nahawand*, *Rast*, *Bayātī*, and *Hijāz*. This did not imply advanced theoretical mastery, but it did indicate that modal identity was no longer entirely implicit. Students started to develop a shared vocabulary for discussing what they were hearing and performing. That shared vocabulary was pedagogically important because it allowed musical knowledge to circulate in a more reflective and transferable manner.

The most meaningful transformation, however, was the shift from piece-bound learning to system-based thinking. Students were no longer confined to the logic of one composition at a time, but began to understand that repertoire could reflect larger modal principles. In some cases, this was evidenced by their ability to identify tonal centres with reduced prompting, to follow structured modal exercises more independently, and to attempt basic exploratory melodic movement within a specific *maqām* framework after guided notation-based practice. Even at an elementary level, this indicated that learning had moved beyond simple imitation toward the early formation of modal cognition.

This shift should not be overstated as a complete transformation achieved immediately or uniformly by all learners. Rather, it marked the beginning of a pedagogical reorientation. Oral imitation remained central, but it was no longer the sole mechanism through which students accessed *gambus* knowledge. The addition of notation and conceptual explanation created new pathways for systematic progression, learner reflection, and transfer of understanding across repertoire. It was this change in the nature of learning, rather than the mere introduction of written materials, that made the 2003 intervention pedagogically significant.

4.5 Pedagogical Implications of the 2003 Intervention

The findings of this autoethnographic analysis indicate that the early introduction of *maqām*-based learning and notation-mediated explanation contributed to a reframing of *gambus* pedagogy within higher arts education. By making modal structure explicit, the intervention addressed pedagogical limitations associated with exclusive reliance on oral transmission, without undermining its cultural or expressive value. Learning was repositioned as both embodied and conceptual, integrating practice with reflective understanding.

This early pedagogical moment laid the groundwork for later developments in Malaysian *gambus* and *oud* education, including the expansion of curricular content, the introduction of new instrumental configurations, and the refinement of ornamentation pedagogy. While the scope of this study is limited to the formative period of 2003, its findings underscore the importance of contextualised, reflexive pedagogical innovation in the transmission of orally rooted musical traditions.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study contribute to broader scholarly discussions on pedagogy, knowledge transmission, and the role of notation in orally rooted musical traditions. Ethnomusicological literature has long emphasised that oral transmission is not merely a pedagogical technique but a cultural logic through which musical meaning, authority, and expression are sustained. In this sense, the Malaysian *gambus* tradition prior to 2003 was not pedagogically deficient in absolute terms, but historically aligned with a mode of learning in which musical knowledge remained embedded in performance, memory, and demonstration. However, the findings of this study suggest that when such traditions enter higher arts education, the pedagogical demands of institutional learning begin to exceed what oral transmission alone can consistently support.

This point becomes clearer when placed in dialogue with existing scholarship. Touma (1996) and Marcus (2007) both show that *maqām* knowledge has often been transmitted through oral and practice-based means, and Racy (2003) similarly highlights the centrality of embodied musical understanding in Arab art music traditions. My findings do not contradict these observations. Rather, they extend them by showing that within Malaysian higher arts education, the institutional setting generated a need for a hybrid pedagogical model in which oral learning remained central but was supplemented by notation-based conceptual support. In other words, the study demonstrates that the oral transmission of *maqām* may remain culturally authoritative while still requiring

auxiliary pedagogical tools when recontextualised within formal education.

The introduction of *maqām* as conceptual knowledge also aligns with broader understandings of modal systems as cognitive frameworks rather than simply collections of melodies. Previous studies of Arab and Turkish music have shown that performers with clearer modal awareness are better positioned to navigate improvisation, modulation, and interpretive decision-making. What this study adds is a pedagogical example of how such awareness begins to form in an institutional context where students initially lack theoretical vocabulary and structural orientation. The shift observed here was not simply from orality to notation, but from tacit and piece-bound musical familiarity to an emerging capacity to think in terms of modal systems.

This analytical distinction is important. A descriptive reading might say only that notation-based *maqām* learning marked a significant shift in *gambus* pedagogy. A more critical interpretation, however, is that the pedagogical significance of notation lay in its ability to convert unarticulated modal familiarity into explicit cognitive frameworks. Through that process, students were able to relate pitch organisation to named systems, compare *maqāmāt* more consciously, and begin transferring modal understanding across repertoire. The intervention therefore did not just add materials to an existing teaching environment. It altered the epistemic structure of learning by making musical knowledge more discussable, revisitable, and progressively teachable.

The use of notation as a pedagogical scaffold further contributes to debates regarding notation in oral traditions. Nettl (2005) and Racy (2003) caution against treating notation as a substitute for oral transmission, and this caution remains valid. My findings support that view. The effectiveness of notation in this study depended precisely on its limited and reflexive role. It was not used to standardise performance or fix expressive meaning, but to clarify tonal centres, scalar relationships, and

modal pathways that otherwise remained implicit. This suggests that the pedagogical value of notation in orally rooted musics is contingent not on notation itself, but on how it is framed, restricted, and integrated into embodied learning.

From a methodological perspective, the study also demonstrates the usefulness of autoethnography for reconstructing formative pedagogical moments that predate systematic institutional documentation. In the absence of archived syllabi, assessment rubrics, or formal lesson plans from that early stage, autoethnography provides access to the lived pedagogical logic through which change was initiated. This does not produce statistical generalisability, but it does yield historically situated insight into how innovation emerges from practice, particularly in arts education contexts where pedagogical transformation often precedes formal recognition.

Importantly, the findings also complicate linear narratives of pedagogical modernisation. The 2003 intervention should not be understood as the replacement of tradition by theory, or of orality by notation. Rather, it constituted a negotiated pedagogical adjustment in which the strengths of oral transmission were retained while its limitations within an institutional learning environment were partially addressed. The significance of this early moment lies not in its rejection of inherited practice, but in its demonstration that orally rooted traditions can be pedagogically expanded without surrendering their cultural integrity. For this reason, the study contributes to a more nuanced account of how *gambus* learning was reframed in Malaysia, and how modal knowledge may be transmitted more effectively when oral and notation-based approaches are allowed to operate in complementary relationship.

This study therefore contributes to ethnomusicology by demonstrating how *maqām* pedagogy can transition from tacit oral transmission to structured institutional knowledge without disrupting cultural continuity.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has documented and analysed an early pedagogical intervention that introduced *maqām*-based learning and notation-mediated explanation into Malaysian *gambus* education in 2003. Through autoethnographic analysis, it has shown how the reframing of *gambus* learning from exclusively oral, repertoire-centred transmission toward a knowledge-oriented approach enabled greater modal awareness, conceptual understanding, and pedagogical flexibility within higher arts education.

The findings suggest that treating *maqām* as musical knowledge, rather than as implicit performance content, has significant implications for *gambus* pedagogy. When learners are equipped with conceptual tools to understand modal structure, they are better positioned to transfer knowledge across repertoire, engage in improvisatory practices, and articulate musical understanding beyond imitation. The selective use of notation, framed as a pedagogical scaffold rather than as a prescriptive system, further supports this process by making implicit musical relationships visible and discussable.

From an institutional perspective, the study highlights the importance of context-sensitive pedagogical innovation. The introduction of new learning frameworks must respond to existing traditions, learner needs, and educational structures rather than replicate external models uncritically. The 2003 intervention illustrates how pedagogical change can emerge organically from practice when informed by reflexive awareness and respect for inherited musical knowledge.

The implications of this study extend beyond the Malaysian *gambus* context. For educators working with orally rooted musical traditions in institutional settings, the findings underscore the potential of integrating conceptual explanation and selective notation to support deeper learning without undermining cultural integrity. Methodologically, the study affirms autoethnography

as a valid and necessary approach for documenting pedagogical histories that would otherwise remain undocumented.

While the scope of this article is intentionally limited to an early formative moment, it provides a foundation for future research on the long-term impact of *maqām*-based pedagogy, comparative studies across regional traditions, and further exploration of how notation can function as a pedagogical tool in modal music education. By articulating this early reframing of *gambus* learning, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how tradition, pedagogy, and knowledge transmission interact within contemporary higher arts education.

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BIOGRAPHY

Raja Zulkarnain Raja Mohd Yusof is an ethnomusicologist and senior lecturer in the Department of Performing Arts, Faculty of Creative Industries, City University Malaysia. His research explores traditional and contemporary performance practices, cultural identity, and the transmission of music across Islamic and Southeast Asian societies. He is widely recognised for introducing the *oud* (‘ūd) into Malaysian higher education in 2002 and for developing structured curricula at institutions such as ASWARA, UiTM, and UPSI. Dr. Raja has authored pioneering instructional texts on the *oud* in the Malay language (2013, 2018) and published extensively on *maqām* theory, microtonality, improvisation (*taqsīm*), and *gambus* performance. His concept of “*intonaphobia*” has contributed to scholarly debates on cultural conditioning in modal perception. Active in cultural programming, research collaborations, and heritage advocacy, he is committed to advancing the relevance of traditional music within contemporary academic and performance contexts.

Mementaskan Gurindam Dua Belas: Antara Tradisi, Estetika Dan Inovasi Persembahan Kontemporari

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ABSTRAK

Gurindam Dua Belas karya Raja Ali Haji ialah puisi klasik Melayu abad ke-19 yang mengandungi dua belas fasal dengan pasangan sebab dan akibat yang menekankan nilai moral, adab, akhlak Islam serta pembentukan karakter. Keunikan strukturnya dan penggunaan metafora, simile serta antitesis menjadikan Gurindam Dua Belas relevan sebagai sumber pendidikan budaya. Terdapat dua objektif kajian ini, iaitu pertama, mengenal pasti prinsip tradisi dan estetika dalam Gurindam Dua Belas; dan kedua, menilai potensi adaptasi artistik Gurindam Dua Belas dalam konteks persembahan kontemporari yang dapat meningkatkan penghayatan nilai dalam kalangan generasi muda. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kualitatif interpretatif melalui analisis teks Gurindam Dua Belas, temu bual separa berstruktur bersama penggiat-penggiat seni dan pemerhatian terhadap persembahan Gurindam Dua Belas. Pendekatan hermeneutik digunakan untuk mentafsir makna manakala Teori Puitika Sastera Melayu sebagai kerangka bagi menganalisis adaptasi artistik pementasan Gurindam Dua Belas. Instrumen kajian terdiri daripada temu bual dan senarai semak pementasan. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tema dan triangulasi. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa inovasi dan integrasi teknologi visual, multimedia, muzik latar adaptif dan kolaborasi rentas disiplin dapat mengekalkan nilai tradisi sambil memperkukuh kreativiti persembahan. Kajian ini mengusulkan pendekatan pementasan adaptif yang seimbang antara tradisi dan pembaharuan, serta memberi implikasi kepada pengajaran sastera Melayu, pelestarian warisan dan pembangunan bentuk persembahan kontemporari berasaskan nilai budaya.

Kata kunci: estetika tradisi Melayu; gurindam Dua Belas; model persembahan adaptif; pelestarian warisan; pementasan kontemporari

1. PENDAHULUAN

Gurindam Dua Belas merupakan karya puisi klasik Melayu yang ditulis oleh Raja Ali Haji pada tahun 1847, iaitu 23 Rejab 1263 Hijrah. Karya ini terdiri daripada dua belas fasal. Setiap fasal berisi bait-bait yang masing-masing terdiri daripada dua baris kalimat. Pola khas dalam setiap fasal berbentuk tanya-jawab atau sebab-akibat. Baris pertama mengandungi pertanyaan, permasalahan atau pernyataan sementara baris kedua memberikan jawapan, akibat atau penegasan dari baris sebelumnya (Nurasyifa, 2024). Strukturnya sederhana, tidak hanya menambah keindahan rima dan irama tetapi juga memudahkan penyampaian pesan-pesan moral dan keagamaan yang melekat dalam setiap baitnya. *Gurindam Dua Belas* menjadi instrumen pelajaran nilai yang mendalam kepada masyarakat Melayu (Nurasyifa, 2024; Sirait, 2018).

Selain dikenali sebagai seorang sasterawan unggul, Raja Ali Haji juga merupakan ulama dan pahlawan nasional dari Provinsi Kepulauan Riau yang berperanan penting dalam mengkaji dan mengembangkan sastra Melayu. *Gurindam Dua Belas* tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sastra tetapi sebagai media pendidikan yang berakar daripada nilai-nilai Islam dan Melayu. Peranan Raja Ali Haji sebagai tokoh yang memiliki ilmu agama, budaya dan bahasa memberi sumbangan besar terhadap identiti Melayu dan nasionalisme tempatan (Hidayah & Rusdi, 2022; Sirait, 2018).

Gurindam Dua Belas menggunakan metafora, personifikasi, simile, antithesis dan simbolisme untuk memperindah dan memberi kesan mendalam mengenai pesan moral yang disampaikan dimulai dengan kewajipan anak terhadap orang tua, tugas orang tua kepada anak hingga ajaran tentang budi pekerti dan hidup bermasyarakat yang baik (Alkhaerani, 2023; Amanan, Hermansyah & Juswandi,

2023). Seperti puisi berangkap yang lain, *gurindam* telah berkembang dalam masyarakat Melayu sebagai seni tutur tradisi yang populer dan berestetika (Silahudin, 2023).

Kerelevanan *Gurindam Dua Belas* pada hari ini tidak pudar. Karya ini masih digunakan sebagai bahan pengajaran dalam pendidikan karakter dan pengembangan nilai-nilai keagamaan. Dalam konteks pendidikan kontemporer, *Gurindam Dua Belas* berupaya dalam menyuntik pemahaman karakter Islami dan nilai budaya lokal yang relevan. Justeru, penelitian serta revitalisasi *Gurindam Dua Belas* dalam medium pembelajaran formal dan tidak formal menjadi keperluan bagi bertaut kembali tradisi dengan dinamika pendidikan masa kini (Alkhaerani, 2023; Zaitun, Hakam & Ruyadi, 2018).

Penelitian mengenai pementasan *Gurindam Dua Belas* dilakukan bertujuan untuk mengintegrasikan tiga dimensi utama, iaitu tradisi, estetika dan inovasi dalam konteks persembahan kontemporer. Tujuan utama penelitian ini ialah merumuskan model pementasan yang tidak hanya memelihara nilai-nilai tradisional dan estetika karya sastera tetapi juga mengeksplorasi inovasi melalui seni persembahan moden seperti dendangan dan multimedia. Dengan demikian, *Gurindam Dua Belas* dapat dihidupkan dengan cara yang sesuai dengan generasi masa kini tanpa kehilangan inti dan kandungan budayanya (Asra, Yudarta & Mudra, 2024; Laila Nurul Hidayah, 2015).

Selain aspek estetika dan tradisional, penelitian ini juga bertujuan menjawab keperluan pendidikan karakter yang semakin mendesak. Seni persembahan yang mengangkat *Gurindam Dua Belas* sebagai medium pembelajaran etika dan moral menjadi cara efektif untuk membangkitkan kesedaran dan pemahaman nilai-nilai luhur dalam kalangan generasi muda. Dengan demikian, peranan seni

persembahan sebagai medium pendidikan juga menjadi titik fokus penelitian ini (Asra, Yudarta & Mudra, 2024; Dahrani & Roza, 2024).

Kepentingan yang lebih mendalam terletak pada pengiktirafan terhadap warisan budaya Melayu yang diangkat dalam karya ini, khususnya dari aspek identiti dan integriti budaya di tengah arus modenisasi dan globalisasi. Menerusi penelitian ini, ditegaskan bahawa pentingnya mempertahankan akar budaya tempatan sebagai identiti yang wajib dipelihara dan diwariskan dalam bentuk yang relevan dengan konteks sosial dan budaya masa kini.

2. METODOLOGI DAN PENDEKATAN PENELITIAN

Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan kajian kepustakaan dan analisis isi bagi menggali makna dan nilai yang terkandung dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas*. Pendekatan ini membolehkan pengkaji memperoleh pemahaman mendalam mengenai tradisi, nilai estetika serta konteks budaya dan agama yang terkandung dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas*. Kajian kepustakaan terhadap tulisan ilmiah mendukung pengujian dan analisis konseptual dan isi *Gurindam Dua Belas* yang terkait dengan pendidikan dan nilai moral (Alkhaerani, 2023).

Dalam kajian ini, kaedah hermeneutik digunakan bagi mentafsir makna yang terkandung dalam teks serta berperanan sebagai wahana untuk membuka lapisan-lapisan nilai yang tersirat, sama ada pada aras literal mahupun metafora dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas*. Pendekatan ini mengukuhkan aspek pentafsiran dan pemahaman *Gurindam Dua Belas* sebagai karya hidup yang relevan hingga hari ini.

Teori Puitika Sastera Melayu yang diperkenalkan oleh Muhammad Haji Salleh (1989) digunakan sebagai kerangka analisis yang komprehensif untuk adaptasi artistik pementasan *Gurindam*

Dua Belas. Kerangka ini memungkinkan pengkaji membongkar dan memahami bagaimana elemen-elemen tradisional *Gurindam Dua Belas* diinterpretasikan dan ditransformasikan dalam konteks persembahan kontemporari, dengan berakar pada prinsip-prinsip estetika Melayu. Teori Puitika Sastera Melayu juga menekankan bahawa sastera Melayu tradisional seperti *Gurindam Dua Belas* ialah hasil daripada pemikiran dan pengalaman budaya yang kaya, bukan sekadar peniruan dari Barat.

Bagi tujuan menganalisis adaptasi artistik, sejauh mana pementasan *Gurindam Dua Belas* kontemporari mengekalkan nilai-nilai moral, keagamaan dan pandangan hidup yang terkandung di dalamnya, ditentukan. Selain itu, bagaimana teks *Gurindam Dua Belas* yang berfungsi sebagai ajaran dan pedoman hidup diterjemahkan secara visual dan auditif di atas pentas?

Teori Puitika Sastera Melayu menggariskan beberapa prinsip estetika yang relevan untuk analisis adaptasi artistik. Keindahan dalam puitika Melayu bukanlah sesuatu yang abstrak semata-mata melainkan terikat pada realiti dan disampaikan melalui kiasan dan saranan. Teori ini juga menekankan peranan khalayak yang aktif dalam persembahan tradisional yang mana penonton tidak hanya menerima tetapi berinteraksi dengan karya. Muhammad Haji Salleh menyatakan teori ini mempunyai persamaan dengan Teori Sosiologi Sastera dari aspek khalayak.

Teori Puitika Sastera Melayu turut membuka ruang untuk dialog antara tradisi dan konteks baharu. Bagaimana adaptasi artistik *Gurindam Dua Belas* membawa elemen inovatif yang menciptakan dialog dengan sejarahnya atau dengan isu-isu kontemporari? Bagaimana pendengar *gurindam* menggunakan kebebasan artistik untuk ‘memperbaharui’ persembahan sambil tetap menghormati intipati *Gurindam Dua Belas* dalam masyarakat hari ini?

Dengan menggunakan Teori Puitika Sastra Melayu sebagai lensa, analisis adaptasi artistik *Gurindam Dua Belas* dapat diperluas bukan sahaja kepada aspek yang dipersembahkan tetapi juga rasional di sebalik bentuk persembahan tersebut, caranya berhubung dengan akar tradisi serta kesan estetika yang dihasratkan terhadap penonton kontemporari.

Instrumen kajian dibangunkan secara khusus bagi menilai dimensi utama pementasan *Gurindam Dua Belas*, iaitu tradisi, estetika dan inovasi kontemporari. Dua instrumen utama digunakan dalam kajian ini, iaitu temu bual separa berstruktur dan senarai semak pementasan. Temu bual separa berstruktur digunakan bagi mendapatkan perspektif mendalam daripada penggiat seni, pendendang, pakar sastra Melayu serta pemuzik tradisional. Soalan temu bual dirancang untuk meneliti rasional adaptasi teks *Gurindam Dua Belas*, pertimbangan estetika dan nilai tradisi dalam pementasan, proses kreatif dalam penggabungan elemen kontemporari seperti multimedia dan teknologi visual, dan cabaran serta strategi mengekalkan keaslian makna. Rakaman audio dan nota lapangan digunakan sebagai data utama.

Instrumen senarai semak pementasan digunakan bagi menilai aspek teknikal dan artistik persembahan berdasarkan indikator yang merangkumi ketepatan penghayatan teks *Gurindam Dua Belas*, intonasi, lenggok vokal, tempo dan kesesuaian rasa, penggunaan unsur tradisi seperti muzik iringan dan gaya persembahan, integrasi dan keberkesanan komunikasi mesej moral dan etika. Senarai semak pementasan ini membolehkan penilaian yang sistematik terhadap setiap komponen pementasan.

Data daripada temu bual dan senarai semak pementasan kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tema yang mana melibatkan

proses pengkodan terbuka, kategori dan pembentukan tema induk. Triangulasi sumber digunakan untuk memastikan kesahihan data dengan membandingkan dapatkan teks dan pandangan pakar.

3. PRINSIP TRADISI DALAM GURINDAM DUA BELAS

3.1 Nilai-nilai Budaya dan Islam dalam Gurindam Dua Belas

Gurindam Dua Belas mencerminkan integrasi nilai-nilai Islam dan budaya Melayu yang menjadi asas utama dalam pembentukan dunia moral masyarakat Melayu. Keharmonian antara ajaran agama dan kearifan lokal memberi warna khas pada karya ini sehingga nasihat-nasihat yang disampaikan tidak hanya bersifat keagamaan tetapi juga budaya, terkait erat dengan adat istiadat dan tradisi sosial masyarakat Melayu. Nilai-nilai Islam seperti keimanan dan prinsip musyawarah disampaikan dengan mengedepankan cara yang diselaraskan dengan norma budaya Melayu yang menjunjung tinggi kesopanan dan keharmonian sosial (Alkhaerani, 2023; Sirait, 2018). Berikut merupakan petikan *Gurindam Dua Belas Fasal Ketiga*:

Apabila terpelihara mata
Sedikitlah cita-cita

Apabila terpelihara kuping
Kabar yang jahat tiadalah damping

Apabila terpelihara lidah
Niscaya dapat daripadanya beberapa faedah

Bersungguh-sungguh engkau memelihara tangan
Daripada segala berat dan ringan

Apabila perut terlalu penuh
Keluarlah fiil tiada senonoh

Anggota tengah hendaklah ingat
Di situlah banyak orang kehilangan semangat

Hendaklah peliharakan kaki
Daripada berjalan yang membawa rugi.

Selain nilai keislaman, *Gurindam Dua Belas* mengandungi nasihat yang terkait dengan kehidupan sosial, keluarga dan kepimpinan yang tertumpu pada tradisi Melayu. Berikut ialah petikan *Gurindam Dua Belas Fasal Kesepuluh*:

Dengan bapa jangan durhaka
Supaya Allah tidak murka

Dengan ibu hendaklah hormat
Supaya badan dapat selamat

Dengan anak janganlah lalai
Supaya boleh naik ke tengah balai

Dengan isteri dan gundik janganlah alpa
Supaya kemaluan jangan menerpa

Dengan kawan hendaklah adil
Supaya tangannya jadi kapil.

Pesan sosial tersebut mengingatkan tentang pentingnya tanggungjawab anak terhadap orang tua dan peranan orang tua terhadap anak serta ikatan kekeluargaan. Dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas Fasal*

Kedua Belas mengandung pesan kewajipan raja dan pemimpin terhadap masyarakat. Berikut ialah bait-baitnya:

Raja muafakat dengan menteri
Seperti kebun berpagarkan duri

Betul hati kepada raja
Tanda jadi sebarang kerja

Hukum adil atas rakyat
Tanda raja beroleh inayat

Kasihkan orang yang berilmu
Tanda rahmat atas dirimu

Hormat akan orang yang pandai
Tanda mengenal kasa dan cindai

Ingatkan dirinya mati
Itulah asal berbuat bakti

Akhirat itu terlalu nyata
Kepada hati yang tidak buta.

Melalui karya ini, dimensi tradisi sosial serta peranan kepemimpinan yang rendah hati terserlah sebagai norma yang wajib dipelihara dalam budaya Melayu. Nilai kesantunan, kebijaksanaan serta keinsafan diri digariskan sebagai asas kepemimpinan yang beretika. Penekanan terhadap sifat rendah diri bukan sekadar tuntutan moral tetapi juga mekanisme sosial untuk menjaga keharmonian, mengelakkan penyalahgunaan kuasa dan memastikan kesejahteraan masyarakat yang berterusan (Nurasyifa, 2024; Jubba, Rafi & Qodir, 2021).

3.2 Fungsi Sosial Dan Pendidikan Tradisional

Sebagai karya sastra, *Gurindam Dua Belas* bukan sekadar hiburan tetapi berfungsi sebagai media pengajaran nilai-nilai agama dan etika masyarakat Melayu secara tradisional. *Gurindam Dua Belas* berperan sebagai wahana untuk mendidik bagi menanam prinsip-prinsip kebaikan, agama dan norma sosial secara turun-temurun. Dalam konteks pendidikan tradisional, *Gurindam Dua Belas* mengandung ajaran tentang budi pekerti, silaturahmi dan kewajiban beribadah kepada Tuhan Maha Esa, yang membentuk dasar karakter masyarakat Melayu yang beretika dan beradab (Ilyas, Putera & Muliardi, 2020). Ajaran ini disebutkan dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas Fasal Pertama*:

Barang siapa tiada memegang agama
Sekali-kali tiada boleh dibilangkan nama

Barang siapa mengenal yang empat
Maka yaitulah orang yang makrifat

Barang siapa mengenal Allah
Suruh dan tegahnya tiada ia menyalah

Barang siapa mengenal diri
Maka telah mengenal Tuhan yang bahari

Barang siapa mengenal dunia
Tahulah ia barang yang terpedaya

Barang siapa mengenal akhirat
Tahulah ia dunia mudarat.

Ini jelas menunjukkan bahawa *Gurindam Dua Belas* berperanan sebagai wahana pembentukan karakter dan norma sosial tradisional yang diajarkan dalam keluarga dan masyarakat. Pesan moral yang sarat dengan nilai keagamaan, tanggungjawab dan kejujuran menjadi teras utama yang ditujukan untuk membina generasi pewaris bangsa yang berakhlak mulia (Sakila, Arbi, Dewi & Rohani, 2023; Sari & Isnaini, 2021). Peranan guru, pendidik dan tokoh masyarakat yang mewarisi *Gurindam Dua Belas* sangat signifikan. Mereka dilihat sebagai tiang intelektual dan spiritual yang membimbing anak didik agar bukan sahaja berilmu tetapi juga berakhlak mulia serta bertanggungjawab terhadap masyarakat. Pendidikan karakter menempatkan guru sebagai sumber penerapan nilai moral dan pembentukan peribadi yang terpuji (Dahrani & Roza, 2024).

3.3 Kelestarian Tradisi dan Pengaruh Lokal

Nilai serta tradisi tempatan yang terkandung dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas* terus dipelihara melalui pelbagai usaha konservasi budaya, khususnya dalam kalangan masyarakat Melayu. Kearifan lokal yang terkandung dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas* menjadi teras penting bagi usaha pelestarian dan revitalisasi budaya yang disesuaikan dengan keperluan masyarakat masa kini. Pengiktirafan terhadap tradisi Melayu turut menyokong kesinambungan nilai-nilai jati diri yang terkandung dalam karya ini dipadukan dengan identiti budaya setempat (Jubba, Rafi & Qodir, 2021; Sirait, 2018).

Usaha revitalisasi dilaksanakan melalui pendidikan, penggunaan media seni serta kaedah pembelajaran yang diintegrasikan dengan budaya tempatan. Sekolah dan komuniti budaya turut memainkan peranan aktif dalam menghidupkan kembali nilai *Gurindam Dua Belas* sebagai sebahagian daripada pendidikan karakter dan kesedaran budaya

di tengah arus modenisasi (Amanan, Hermansyah & Juswandi, 2023; Sirait, 2018).

Institusi adat Melayu memainkan peranan signifikan dalam memelihara serta memperkukuh tradisi *Gurindam Dua Belas* sebagai warisan budaya yang bernilai tinggi. Melalui mekanisme sosial seperti majlis adat, pendidikan tidak formal dan pewarisan lisan, institusi ini memastikan nilai moral dan spiritual dalam gurindam terus difahami dan diamalkan. Kerjasama dengan pihak kerajaan melalui program pelestarian budaya, kurikulum pendidikan, festival seni serta sokongan komuniti setempat membantu menjadikan tradisi ini relevan dalam konteks semasa. Usaha kolektif ini mengukuhkan identiti Melayu dan memastikan kesinambungan khazanah intelektual yang diwarisi turun-temurun (Jubba, Rafi & Qodir, 2021).

4. ESTETIKA SASTERA DALAM GURINDAM DUA BELAS

4.1 Struktur dan Bentuk

Struktur *Gurindam Dua Belas* memperlihatkan kesederhanaan yang menjadi ciri khas puisi lama Melayu. Karya ini terdiri daripada dua belas fasal. Pola soal-jawab atau bentuk *problem-solution* dalam setiap fasal membolehkan penegasan makna yang disampaikan secara efektif dan estetik, sekali gus menjadikan karya ini mudah diingati serta berfungsi sebagai medium pengajaran nilai (Nurasyifa, 2024; Sirait, 2018). Berikut disertakan *Gurindam Dua Belas Fasal Ketujuh*:

Apabila banyak berkata-kata
Di situlah jalan masuknya dusta

Apabila banyak berlebih-lebihan suka
Itulah tanda hampirkan duka

Apabila kita kurang siasat
Itulah tanda pekerjaan hendak sesat

Apabila anak tiada dilatih
Jika besar bapanya letih

Apabila banyak mencela orang
Itulah tanda dirinya kurang

Apabila orang banyak tidur
Sia-sia sahajalah umur

Apabila mendengarkan kabar
Menerimanya itu hendaklah sabar

Apabila mendengar akan aduan
Membicarakannya itu hendaklah cemburuan

Apabila perkataannya lembut
Lekaslah sekalian orang mengikut

Apabila yang amat kasar
Lekaslah sekalian orang yang gusar

Apabila pekerjaan yang amat benar
Tiada boleh orang berbuat onar.

Dari segi tatabahasa dan sintaksis, *Gurindam Dua Belas* didominasi oleh penggunaan frasa nominal dan kalimat majmuk yang mencerminkan kekayaan bahasa klasik Melayu. Analisis menunjukkan bahawa fungsi predikat sangat dominan dan gaya bahasa yang dipakai

memperkuat pesan yang disampaikan dalam bentuk yang puitis dan bermakna (Zulfadhli, Farokhah & Abidin, 2021).

Pola irama dan bunyi dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas* juga menjadi salah satu aspek estetika yang menonjol. Simile, rima dan pengulangan bunyi tertentu memberi kesan muzikal yang khas. Ini menambah keindahan dan daya pikat dalam penyampaian pesan. Pola rima yang konsisten mendukung harmonisasi suara sehingga dapat memikat pendengar dan memudahkan penyerapan maksud karya (Al Farisi, 2020). Berikut disertakan *Gurindam Dua Belas Fasal Keenam*:

Cari olehmu akan sahabat
Yang boleh dijadikan ubat

Cari olehmu akan guru
Yang boleh tahukan tiap seteru

Cari olehmu akan isteri
Yang boleh ia menyerahkan diri

Cari olehmu akan kawan
Pilih segala orang yang setiawan

Cari olehmu akan abdi
Yang ada baik sedikit budi.

4.2 Gaya Bahasa dan Penggunaan Bahasa Kiasan

Bahasa kiasan merupakan kaedah estetika teras dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas*. Bahasa kiasan berfungsi memperhalus penyampaian nasihat serta memperkukuh kedalaman makna. Metafora digunakan untuk menggambarkan sifat manusia dan akibat perbuatan secara simbolik,

manakala simile membantu memperjelas perbandingan moral dengan imejan yang mudah dihayati. Personifikasi pula menghidupkan konsep abstrak seperti akal dan nafsu agar lebih dekat dengan pengalaman pembaca. Antitesis menonjolkan pertentangan antara baik dan buruk, sekali gus menegaskan pilihan etika. Hiperbola digunakan secara terpilih untuk menekankan kepentingan adab serta tanggungjawab insan dalam kehidupan.

Lanjutan daripada itu, penggunaan bahasa kiasan ini bukan sahaja memperindah keindahan puisi tetapi juga berfungsi sebagai medium penyampaian nilai serta ajaran keagamaan. Kekuatan retorik yang lahir daripada gaya bahasa tersebut mampu memperkukuh mesej sekali gus menumbuhkan pemahaman dan penghayatan yang lebih mendalam terhadap pesan moral yang disampaikan (Alkhaerani, 2023). Berikut ialah *Gurindam Dua Belas Fasal Kesembilan*:

Tahu pekerjaan tak baik tetapi dikerjakan
Bukannya manusia yaitulah syaitan

Kejahatan seorang perempuan tua
Itulah iblis punya punggawa

Kepada segala hamba-hamba raja
Di situlah syaitan tempatnya manja

Kebanyakan orang yang muda-muda
Di situlah syaitan tempat bergoda

Perkumpulan laki-laki dengan perempuan
Di situlah syaitan punya jamuan

Adapun orang tua yang hemat
Syaitan tak suka membuat sahabat

Jika orang muda kuat berguru
 Dengan syaitan jadi berseteru.

Fungsi bahasa kiasan sebagai wahana penyampaian nilai keagamaan amat penting khususnya dalam menjelaskan konsep-konsep abstrak seperti keimanan, ketakwaan dan tanggungjawab sosial dengan cara yang lebih mudah difahami serta dihayati oleh pembaca atau pendengar. Seiring dengan itu, gaya bahasa yang sering menampilkan repetisi dan paralelisme memperkukuh penegasan mesej yang dirangkai dalam bait-bait puisi. Ini menjadikan penyampaian *Gurindam Dua Belas* nilai lebih berkesan dan mendalam.

Analisis gaya bahasa juga mengungkapkan bahawa diksi dan struktur kalimat yang digunakan secara cermat memunculkan penegasan estetik sekali gus memperjelas pesan moral. Gaya bahasa yang indah dan puitis menjadikan *Gurindam Dua Belas* bukan sekadar karya sastra tetapi juga sarat dengan muatan edukatif yang tinggi (Zulfadhli & Lakawa, 2022).

4.3 Dimensi Teologi dan Filosofi Bahasa

Kandungan teologi dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas* sangat mendalam dan bernuansa pendidikan Islam. Teks berasal daripada nilai-nilai agama yang mengedepankan tauhid, iman dan hubungan manusia dengan Tuhan dan sesama manusia. Pendidikan Islam dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas* meliputi unsur Ilahiyah dan Insaniyah yang terpadu, membentuk dasar akhlak mulia yang harus dimanifestasikan dalam sikap dan tindakan manusia (Ilyas, Putera & Muliardi, 2020; Nurliana, 2019).

Hubungan antara teks sastra dan nilai keimanan dapat dilihat melalui *Gurindam Dua Belas* yang menggabungkan pesan-pesan moral

dan kebijaksanaan dengan penggunaan bahasa yang indah, simbolik serta sarat dengan unsur keagamaan. Pendekatan ini memberi ruang kepada pembaca untuk merenung dan menghayati nilai-nilai spiritual sebagai pedoman hidup. Berikut ialah petikan *Gurindam Dua Belas Fasal Kedua*:

Barang siapa mengenal yang tersebut
Tahulah ia maknanya takut

Barang siapa meninggalkan sembahyang
Seperti rumah tiada bertiang

Barang siapa meninggalkan puasa
Tidaklah mendapat dua termasa

Barang siapa meninggalkan zakat
Tiadalah hartanya beroleh berkat

Barang siapa meninggalkan haji
Tiadalah ia menyempurnakan janji.

Dari aspek estetika, penggunaan bahasa dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas* berfungsi sebagai medium berkesan untuk menyampaikan pesan moral dan teologi secara halus namun mendalam. Raja Ali Haji memperkukuh pemaknaan nilai akhlak serta prinsip ketuhanan. Penghayatan terhadap estetika dalam bahasa berperanan dalam memperdalam pemahaman dan penghayatan ajaran yang terkandung dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas*. Ini menjadikan karya tersebut bukan sekadar teks sastra tetapi sebagai panduan hidup bermoral yang sarat dengan unsur spiritual (Nurliana, 2019).

5. ADAPTASI GURINDAM DUA BELAS DALAM KONTEKS PERSEMBAHAN KONTEMPORARI

5.1 Gurindam Dua Belas dalam Seni Persembahan

Transformasi teks *Gurindam Dua Belas* ke medium seni persembahan, khususnya dendangan, merupakan suatu inovasi penting dalam memastikan karya sastra klasik ini terus relevan. Adaptasi tersebut dilakukan dengan menghidupkan pesan-pesan moral dan estetika *Gurindam Dua Belas* melalui beberapa elemen. Elemen yang dimaksudkan melibatkan ekspresi vokal, emosi, irama, ritma, gerak tubuh, ekspresi estetika, spiritual dan elemen visual yang dirancang secara kontemporari namun tetap kekal pada makna asli teks (Asra, Yudarta & Mudra, 2024).

Ekspresi vokal dalam dendangan *Gurindam Dua Belas* disampaikan dengan intonasi yang tenang, mendalam dan beralun sederhana. Tekanan vokal diberi pada kata-kata kunci yang mengandung nilai moral dan keagamaan agar mesej lebih mudah difahami pendengar. Penggunaan lenggok suara (*melisma*) dan getaran (*vibrato*) memberi kesan estetika selain memperkukuh rasa kesyahduan. Rajah 1 menunjukkan pecahan inovasi vokal dalam persembahan *Gurindam Dua Belas*.



Rajah 1: Pecahan inovasi vokal dalam persembahan *Gurindam Dua Belas*

Berdasarkan persembahan *Gurindam Dua Belas Fasal Kelima* yang dipentaskan di Universiti Malaya pada tahun 2025 seperti dalam Gambar 1, pendendang gurindam mengekspresikan emosi dengan nada penuh keinsafan, hikmah dan tenang. Walaupun fokusnya pada vokal, pendendang menggunakan gerak tubuh minima seperti mengangguk, mengangkat tangan atau perubahan mimik muka bagi menguatkan penyampaian *Gurindam Dua Belas*. Sebagai perbandingan, berdasarkan beberapa persembahan *Gurindam Dua Belas* secara tradisional, pendendang berada dalam posisi duduk bersila dengan ekspresi penuh hormat.

Emosi yang dibawa selalunya berkait dengan renungan moral seperti kejujuran, kesederhanaan, tanggungjawab dan ketakwaan. Pendendang menyesuaikan emosi dengan bait-bait *Gurindam Dua Belas* yang didendangkan, contohnya lebih serius pada bahagian nasihat agama dan lebih lembut pada pesan-pesan sosial. *Gurindam Dua Belas* dilagukan dalam tempo lambat hingga sederhana (*andante*) supaya pendengar dapat menangkap makna dengan jelas.

Irama bebas (*free rhythm*) sering digunakan bagi membolehkan penekanan makna disampaikan secara lebih fleksibel seolah-olah “bercerita dengan suara”. Selain itu, terdapat juga variasi irama berulang yang sederhana, khususnya apabila didendangkan bersama alat muzik tradisional seperti gambus, violin/biola dan gendang. Dendangan *Gurindam Dua Belas* bukan sekadar hiburan, malah merupakan satu bentuk ritual budaya yang mendidik jiwa. Suasana persembahan pula sering bernuansa keagamaan dan penuh ketenangan. Hal ini secara tidak langsung menghubungkan pendengar dengan nilai moral, spiritual dan kebijaksanaan Melayu.



Gambar 1: Persembahan
Gurindam Dua Belas
penuh syahdu

Penggunaan seni persembahan memiliki fungsi edukatif yang kuat. Ini bagi membolehkan penonton terutama generasi muda memahami nilai etika dan moral secara interaktif. Pendekatan ini membuka ruang untuk meningkatkan kesedaran etika dan pembinaan karakter melalui pengalaman deria serta emosi yang menyeluruh.

5.2 Integrasi Kreativiti dan Teknologi Moden

Peningkatan kualiti pementasan *Gurindam Dua Belas* dilakukan melalui pemanfaatan teknologi multimedia yang memperkaya pengalaman visual dan auditori penonton. Inovasi teknikal seperti

pencahayaannya, projeksi video dan kesan suara melengkapi penyajian puisi klasik *Gurindam Dua Belas*. Seperti yang dapat dilihat dalam Gambar 2, elemen-elemen moden ini dapat diterima sesuai dengan era digital hari ini.



Gambar 2: Pemanfaatan teknologi multimedia dan inovasi teknikal dalam persembahan dendangan *Gurindam Dua Belas*

Penggunaan pencahayaan dinamik, projeksi video dan kesan bunyi menambahkan dimensi baharu dalam pementasan *Gurindam Dua Belas*. Unsur visual membantu memperkukuh simbolisme dalam teks, manakala efek bunyi memberi lapisan emosi yang mendalam. Gabungan ini menjadikan persembahan *Gurindam Dua Belas* lebih imersif. Hal yang demikian membolehkan penonton bukan sahaja mendengar malah merasakan suasana yang ingin dibawa.

Integrasi elemen moden menjadikan *Gurindam Dua Belas* lebih diapresiasi oleh generasi digital. Penggunaan projeksi video untuk melatari naratif atau lampu interaktif yang bergerak seiring dengan ritma dendangan, menjadikan penyajian tradisi lebih segar dan sesuai dengan selera penonton masa kini tanpa mengorbankan keaslian mesej. Perpaduan antara kreativiti artistik dan teknologi memberi ruang kepada eksplorasi baharu bagi penggiat-penggiat seni dan pendidik untuk menyampaikan pesan-pesan secara menarik dan relevan. Pementasan *Gurindam Dua Belas* bukan sahaja menjadi tontonan tetapi berubah menjadi pengalaman seni yang hidup. Penonton dapat menghayati nilai moral melalui bentuk yang lebih komunikatif dan relevan.

Pengintegrasian unsur tradisi dengan inovasi kontemporari mengundang cabaran khususnya berkaitan kemungkinan berlakunya penghakisan terhadap keaslian nilai-nilai yang terkandung dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas*. Cabaran ini perlu ditangani dengan strategi untuk mengekalkan keseimbangan antara nuansa tradisional dengan pembaharuan artistik. Hal ini bertujuan agar pesan-pesan moral dapat dikekalkan.

Strategi untuk mengekalkan nilai-nilai keaslian *Gurindam Dua Belas* merangkumi pemahaman yang mendalam terhadap karya asal serta sikap selektif dalam penggunaan teknologi dan kaedah seni persembahan moden. Peluang pendidikan melalui media inovatif ini membuka ruang untuk melestarikan budaya di samping menjawab tuntutan estetika dan keperluan praktikal pembelajaran masa kini (Alkhaerani, 2023; Zaitun, Hakam & Ruyadi, 2018).

6. STRATEGI MEMENTASKAN GURINDAM DUA BELAS DALAM KONTEKS KONTEMPORARI

6.1 Reka Bentuk Produksi Yang Mengintegrasikan Tradisi dan Moden

Reka bentuk dramaturgi dalam pementasan *Gurindam Dua Belas* perlu menepati nilai tradisional di samping mengekalkan nilai estetika moden. Pendekatan ini menuntut kreativiti artistik yang bukan sahaja mempertahankan keaslian pesan tradisional, tetapi juga memanfaatkan teknik persembahan kontemporer bagi memperkaya pengalaman penonton. Penggunaan multimedia dan teknologi menjadi medium penting dalam memberikan dimensi baharu kepada persembahan, sekaligus membantu penonton memahami isi serta nilai yang terkandung dalam *Gurindam Dua Belas*. Hal ini membolehkan karya tersebut tampil dengan nuansa segar tanpa mengabaikan kehormatan makna asalnya (Asra, Yudarta & Mudra, 2024).

6.2 Seni Persembahan Nilai dan Pesan Moral Kepada Generasi Muda

Seni persembahan berasaskan *Gurindam Dua Belas* kini mula diarahkan sebagai medium edukatif dengan penekanan pada pembacaan nilai dan mesej secara interaktif serta penyampaian visual yang menarik bagi generasi muda. Strategi interaktif ini diharap dapat meningkatkan tahap penerimaan, pemahaman dan penghayatan terhadap nilai-nilai warisan (Asra, Yudarta & Mudra, 2024; Dahrani & Roza, 2024). Kolaborasi antara pendidik, penggiat seni dan komuniti tempatan turut memperkukuh jaringan pembangunan karya seni berasaskan pendidikan sehingga mampu menjangkau masyarakat yang lebih luas dan berterusan.

7. KESIMPULAN DAN CADANGAN

Usaha pelestarian *Gurindam Dua Belas* melalui integrasi tradisi, estetika sastra dan inovasi seni pertunjukan kontemporari menunjukkan hasil yang membanggakan. Karya ini bukan sahaja dianggap sebagai warisan sastra dan budaya Melayu, tetapi juga sebagai media pengembangan karakter dan pendidikan moral yang relevan dengan konteks moden. Kepentingan nilai moral dan pendidikan dalam lingkungan budaya Melayu yang berteraskan Islam memberikan dimensi yang kaya terhadap fungsi *Gurindam Dua Belas* sebagai karya sastra yang sarat dengan pengajaran akidah, etika serta kebijaksanaan sosial dan politik. Penggunaan media seni persembahan sebagai wahana pendidikan memperkukuh proses penghayatan terhadap pesan-pesan luhur tersebut, sekali gus membuktikan keberkesanan pendekatan multidimensi dalam usaha pelestarian budaya.

Penguatan pendidikan berasaskan kearifan tempatan yang disokong oleh karya sastra klasik seperti *Gurindam Dua Belas* merupakan asas penting untuk membangunkan karakter bangsa yang kukuh serta terjaga identiti budayanya. Seni persembahan kontemporari menjadi penghubung utama yang mempertemukan nilai tradisional dengan tuntutan zaman. Peranan dan kolaborasi antara ahli akademik, penggiat seni dan komuniti sangat penting sekali gus mengembangkan inovasi pendidikan berasaskan seni.

Pengembangan kaedah interdisiplin yang menggabungkan kajian sastra, seni persembahan dan teknologi perlu digiatkan lagi bagi mendalami potensi *Gurindam Dua Belas* sebagai medium pendidikan dan kebudayaan kontemporari. Eksplorasi secara intensif menerusi teknologi dan seni persembahan kontemporari membuka ruang baharu dalam usaha melestarikan *Gurindam Dua Belas* agar menjadi lebih

adaptif serta berkesan. Pembangunan program pendidikan dan latihan diperlukan bagi memperkukuh pemahaman serta pelaksanaan nilai-nilai *Gurindam Dua Belas* dalam pendidikan karakter secara meluas dan memberi impak.

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Embodied Mappings of Love: Force, Falling, and Illness Schemas in English and Malay Romantic Metaphors

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ABSTRACT

Romantic metaphors in English and Malay reveal how speakers conceptualize love through embodied schemas grounded in force, movement, and affective disturbance. Drawing on a bilingual corpus of 180 metaphors, this study examines how two linguistic systems map embodied experience onto the abstract domain of romantic emotion. Using Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) as the primary analytic framework, the analysis demonstrates that English metaphors overwhelmingly realise the mappings Love Is Violence, Love Is Physical Impact, and Love Is Catastrophic Source, whereas Malay metaphors foreground Love Is Falling, Love Is Internal Affective Movement, and Love Is Pathology. These patterns reflect divergent conceptualizations of emotional causality: English tends to externalise romantic experience as imposed force, while Malay internalizes it within the *hati* (heart/soul), which functions as a culturally salient affective locus. While sociocultural factors influence metaphor selection, the study shows that both languages rely on shared embodied foundations such as loss of balance, physical injury, and sickness. These convergences support the universalist claims of CMT, while the divergences highlight culture-specific elaborations of bodily experience. The study argues that cross-linguistic metaphor analysis illuminates how conceptual mappings organise emotional reasoning and structure the phenomenology of romantic experience.

Keywords: metaphor, cultural semiotics, language and power, cognitive linguistics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Romantic emotion is an abstract, multidimensional experience, yet across languages it is commonly described through highly concrete bodily metaphors. Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposes that such metaphors are not merely expressive but constitute a primary mechanism through which speakers conceptualize abstract domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Within this framework, mappings from embodied source domains—such as force, balance, motion, or physical harm—structure how individuals understand love, longing, and attachment. This study investigates how English and Malay romantic metaphors draw on these embodied domains to construct distinct but overlapping conceptualizations of love.

Previous research demonstrates that romantic metaphors often cluster around a small set of embodied schemas, including Falling, Force, Illness, Heat, and Madness (Kövecses, 2010; Gibbs, 2008). However, the extent to which these schemas are similarly or differently elaborated across linguistic communities remains a key question in metaphor scholarship. English has been shown to favour mappings such as LOVE IS A VIOLENT PHYSICAL FORCE or LOVE IS A CATASTROPHE, whereas Malay linguistic and cultural traditions often conceptualize emotion through internal somatic states involving the *hati*, a culturally specific affective organ central to Malay cognition.

By examining a bilingual corpus of 180 metaphors, this study compares the metaphorical mappings used in English and Malay to determine (a) which embodied schemas are shared, (b) how these schemas are elaborated differently, and (c) how cultural models shape the instantiation of universal mappings. This comparative approach contributes to ongoing debates regarding universality versus cultural specificity in conceptual metaphor, offering insights into how emotional concepts are grounded in both bodily experience and culturally structured cognition.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of romantic metaphors occupies a central position within Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT), which argues that metaphors are not ornamental linguistic devices but fundamental cognitive structures that shape how individuals conceptualize abstract experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 2008). Within this framework, the domain of love is structured through entrenched mappings from embodied source domains such as force, motion, falling, illness, and physical containment. These mappings give rise to conventional conceptual metaphors such as LOVE IS A FORCE, LOVE IS A JOURNEY, LOVE IS FALLING, and LOVE IS ILLNESS, which organise emotional reasoning across cultures (Kövecses, 2010). The present study draws primarily on this theoretical lineage to analyse how English and Malay speakers conceptualise romantic experiences through embodied schemas, while acknowledging that cultural elaboration plays a significant role in shaping metaphorical selection.

2.1 Cognitive Metaphor Theory and Embodied Emotional Schemas

CMT proposes that abstract concepts are structured by systematic cross-domain mappings from recurring patterns of bodily experience, or image schemas (Johnson, 1987). In the domain of romantic emotion, three schemas are especially salient: FORCE, FALLING, and ILLNESS, each of which reflects primary embodied experiences. The Force schema underlies English expressions such as “she hit me hard” or “love struck him,” which conceptualize romantic affect as an external, coercive impact. The Falling schema, associated with gravitational loss of balance, appears in “falling in love” and Malay expressions like *jatuh hati*. The illness schema maps physiological dysregulation onto

emotional disturbance, producing expressions such as “lovesick” or Malay *angau*. These schemas form the conceptual grounding for cross-linguistic metaphors of passion, longing, and romantic destabilization.

Cross-linguistic research confirms that such schemas recur widely, though languages differ in how they elaborate them (Kövecses, 2005). For example, Spanish metaphors foreground weaponry (*me flechó*, “she arrowed me”), while Japanese metaphors often emphasize spatial alignment or distance. This suggests that the embodied basis of metaphor is universal, but languages select and elaborate schemas in ways shaped by cultural salience and discourse practices. The comparison of English and Malay therefore offers insight into how two typologically distinct languages draw on shared bodily experiences while developing distinct metaphorical repertoires.

2.2 Universal and Culture-Specific Aspects of Romantic Metaphor

CMT distinguishes between primary metaphors, grounded in universal human experience, and complex metaphors, shaped through cultural combination and elaboration (Grady, 1999). Primary metaphors such as Emotional Intensity Is Heat, Love Is An Illness, or Affection Is Warmth evolve from early sensorimotor experience and appear across languages. In contrast, complex metaphors, such as Malay’s *jatuh hati* (“the heart falls”) or *hati tersentuh* (“the heart is touched”), arise from the interaction of primary schemas with culturally specific understandings of the body and emotion. Such elaborations reflect local ontologies of affect and embodiment.

In the Malay cultural-linguistic context, the *hati*—a term combining aspects of heart, liver, and inner self—functions as the

primary emotional organ (Asmah Haji Omar, 1995; Mohd Taib Osman, 1989). This differs significantly from Western conceptualizations of emotion centred on the anatomical heart. Metaphors involving the *hati* thus provide culturally rich elaborations of universal schemas: “touched heart” and “fallen heart” retain the universal mappings of contact and falling, but are instantiated through a culturally specific emotional locus. These distinctions highlight the value of cross-linguistic research for teasing apart universal embodiment from cultural modelling.

2.3 Romantic Metaphor in English: Force, Rupture, and Externality

English metaphor research has extensively documented the dominance of FORCE and VIOLENCE metaphors in conceptualizing romantic intensity (Fetterman et al., 2016; Landau et al., 2018). Expressions such as “heartbroken,” “crushed,” “shattered,” or “devastated” frame romantic experience as an encounter with overwhelming physical force. These metaphors instantiate complex mappings in which ‘emotional harm is physical harm’, deriving from the primary metaphor ‘emotional pain is physical pain’ (Kövecses, 2010). Catastrophe metaphors—“swept away,” “blown apart,” “a whirlwind romance”—use natural-force schemas to project instability and loss of control onto the emotional experience.

These English patterns align with broader tendencies in Western discourse to conceptualize emotional life through external forces acting upon the self. While socio-cultural factors shape these preferences, from a CMT perspective they reflect elaborations of core embodied schemas related to force dynamics, motion, and structural integrity.

2.4 Romantic Metaphor in Malay: Falling, Illness, and Internal Resonance

By contrast, Malay metaphors rely more heavily on FALLING, ILLNESS, and INTERNAL MOVEMENT schemas. The prevalence of *jatuh cinta* (“fall into love”) and *jatuh hati* (“the heart falls”) illustrates gravitational metaphors that conceptualize romantic attraction as an involuntary descent. Illness-based expressions such as *angau* (“love-sickness”), *demam rindu* (“fever of longing”), and *mabuk cinta* (“drunk on love”) map physiological dysregulation onto emotional vulnerability. Central to Malay metaphor is the *hati*, which serves as the site of emotional sensation, moral reasoning, and intuitive knowledge. This cultural model gives rise to metaphors such as *hati tersentuh* (“heart touched”) or *hati terpihat* (“captivated heart”), where the affective experience is localized internally rather than conceptualized as external force.

These patterns reflect culturally specific elaborations of universal schemas. The FALLING schema is universal; its use in Malay aligns with gravitational metaphors found cross-linguistically. The ILLNESS schema is also widely attested. However, the *hati* introduces a culturally distinct emotional topology that modulates how schemas are instantiated, reinforcing the value of Malay as a comparative case in conceptual metaphor research.

2.5 Additional Perspectives: Semiotics, Affect, and Discourse

While the present study centres on CMT, other theoretical traditions contribute complementary insights. Semiotic perspectives emphasize how repeated metaphorical expressions naturalize certain

conceptualizations (Barthes, 1972). Affect theory highlights how emotional discourse circulates culturally, influencing the salience of certain metaphorical frames (Ahmed, 2004). Feminist linguistic studies show how certain metaphors—particularly those involving pursuit, conquest, and capture—reflect and reinforce gendered relational dynamics (Cameron, 1990). While these frameworks are not the primary focus of this study, they provide valuable supporting context for understanding how embodied metaphors operate within broader cultural and discursive systems.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, schema-based approach grounded in Cognitive Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010) to examine how English and Malay conceptualize romantic emotion through systematic cross-domain mappings. The primary objective of the methodology is to identify the embodied image schemas underlying metaphorical expressions in each language and compare how these schemas are selected, elaborated, and distributed.

3.1 Corpus Construction and Sampling

A bilingual metaphor corpus of 180 expressions was compiled, comprising 110 English and 70 Malay metaphors related to romantic love. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure broad representation across linguistic registers. English items were drawn from contemporary literature, film dialogue, popular music, online discourse, and conventional idioms. Malay data were sourced from *pantun*, *syair*, song lyrics, conversational usage, social media expressions, and culturally salient idioms involving the *hati*.

Metaphors were included if they:

1. referred directly to romantic affect, attraction, longing, or heartbreak;
2. involved figurative cross-domain mapping; and
3. were recurrent or recognisable within each language.

Idioms tied exclusively to sexual desire, familial affection, or religious devotion were excluded unless they overlapped with romantic conceptualization. Malay items were restricted to Peninsular Malaysian usage to maintain dialectal consistency.

3.2 Identification of Conceptual Metaphors and Image Schemas

Analysis followed a CMT-driven procedure in which linguistic expressions were used to infer underlying conceptual metaphors (CMs) and corresponding image schemas (Johnson, 1987). Each metaphor was first examined for its surface figurative domain (e.g., violence, falling, pathology). Then, expressions were grouped according to the deeper embodied schemas they instantiate, including:

- Force/Impact Schema
- Falling Schema
- Illness/Pathology Schema
- Structural Integrity/Rupture Schema
- Motion and Directionality Schema
- Possession/Control Schema

From these schema clusters, broader conceptual metaphors—such as LOVE IS A VIOLENT FORCE, LOVE IS FALLING, and LOVE IS AN ILLNESS—were identified for each language. This allowed for cross-linguistic comparison of conceptual structure independent of surface lexical choices.

3.3 Coding Procedures and Reliability

Two coders with training in metaphor analysis independently classified each expression by (a) image schema, (b) dominant conceptual metaphor, and (c) secondary elaboration (if present). Ambiguous cases—particularly in Malay metaphors involving the *hati*—were discussed until consensus was achieved. Inter-coder reliability reached $\kappa = .86$, indicating a high level of agreement.

English metaphors often expressed a clearer mapping to external cause schemas (e.g., force, impact), whereas Malay metaphors frequently required identification of internal-state schemas connected to the *hati*. To avoid culture-specific bias, coders analysed Malay metaphors first at the level of embodied schema before considering cultural elaborations.

3.4 Analytic Framework

The analysis proceeded in three steps:

1. Schema Identification: Determine which embodied schema(s) each metaphor activates (e.g., *falling*, *rupture*, *impact*, *motion*, *illness*).

2. Conceptual Metaphor Mapping: Group related expressions into conceptual metaphors based on shared mappings (e.g., *heartbroken, crushed, shattered* → LOVE IS PHYSICAL INJURY).
3. Cross-Linguistic Comparison: Compare the prevalence and elaboration of schemas across English and Malay to determine:
 - which mappings are universal (e.g., FALLING, ILLNESS),
 - which are language-specific elaborations (e.g., Malay *hati* as emotional locus), and
 - how cultural models influence schema selection without contradicting embodied foundations.

3.5 Cross-Linguistic Considerations

Because English and Malay differ typologically and culturally, comparison focused on conceptual architecture rather than direct lexical equivalence. English metaphors tend to foreground external force dynamics, while Malay metaphors emphasise internal affective movement within the *hati*. These differences were analysed as elaborations of shared underlying schemas rather than independent metaphor systems.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All informal expressions from social media were paraphrased to avoid traceability. As the study analysed linguistic artefacts rather than human subjects, no formal ethics approval was required.

4. RESULTS

The analysis of the bilingual corpus revealed both shared and divergent conceptual structures in how English and Malay speakers map embodied experience onto the abstract domain of romantic emotion. Across both languages, three image schemas—Force, Falling, and Illness—emerged as the dominant grounding structures for romantic metaphor. However, the elaboration and distribution of these schemas differed substantially, particularly in relation to how each linguistic system localizes emotional causality and affective experience.

4.1 Dominant Image Schemas Across the Corpus

Three schemas accounted for the majority of metaphors in both languages:

1. Force/Impact Schema (e.g., *being struck, hit, crushed, broken*).
2. Falling Schema (e.g., *losing balance, downward motion*).
3. Illness/Pathology Schema (e.g., *fever, debilitation, intoxicatio...*

Additional but less frequent schemas included Possession/Control, Catastrophe, and Motion/Directionality. These schemas served as the basis for identifying the following dominant conceptual metaphors (CMs):

- LOVE IS A VIOLENT PHYSICAL FORCE
- LOVE IS FALLING
- LOVE IS AN ILLNESS
- LOVE IS A NATURAL CATASTROPHE

- LOVE IS LOSS OF CONTROL
- LOVE IS POSSESSION

4.2 English: External Force, Rupture, and Structural Damage

In the English dataset, romantic affect is predominantly structured through the schemas of **FORCE** and **VIOLENCE**, which construe love as an external agent acting upon the experiencer. Common expressions such as *falling for him*, *being swept away*, and *struck by love* position the subject as the target of an outside force that exerts pressure, movement, or impact. For instance, in the utterance *I was swept off my feet the moment I met him*, love is represented as an agentive force that destabilizes the subject's equilibrium. Although English also employs falling metaphors, these frequently co-occur with violent or force-based entailments, suggesting not inward vulnerability but subjection to an overpowering external cause. Taken together, these patterns reflect a dominant model of **external affective causality**, in which love is experienced as something that happens *to* the individual rather than emerging *within* them.

English metaphors overwhelmingly instantiated mappings based on the Force/Impact schema, producing conceptual metaphors such as:

- LOVE IS PHYSICAL INJURY (*heartbroken, crushed, shattered, hurt me*).
- LOVE IS A VIOLENT FORCE (*hit me hard, she struck me, swept me away*).
- LOVE IS A CATASTROPHE (*devastated, wrecked, torn apart*).

Frequency counts show that Force/Impact-based mappings accounted for 28%, the highest proportion in English. These expressions rely on embodied experiences of rupture, trauma, and external pressure, foregrounding a model in which emotional experience results from forceful external causation.

English also made frequent use of Weaponry-based extensions of the FORCE schema (e.g., “Cupid shot me,” “pierced my heart”), reinforcing an external-agency conceptualization of romantic affect.

Overall, English patterns emphasize:

- externality
- coercion by force
- loss of structural integrity

4.3 Malay: Falling, Internal Affective Movement, and the “Hati”

In the Malay dataset, romantic affect is predominantly structured through the schemas of FALLING and ILLNESS, which construe love as an internally unfolding state rather than an externally imposed force. Expressions such as *jatuh cinta* (“fall into love”) and *jatuh hati* (“the heart falls”) conceptualize attraction as an involuntary inward descent localized within the *hati*, a culturally salient locus of emotion, moral intuition, and inner thought in Malay cognition. For example, in the utterance *Saya jatuh hati padanya tanpa sedar bila ia bermula* (“I fell in love with her without realizing when it began”), the experiencer is not an active agent but the site of affective change.

Illness-based metaphors such as *angau* (“love-sick delirium”) and *demam rindu* (“fever of longing”) further frame romantic emotion as a condition of bodily dysregulation arising from within. Together, these patterns reflect a dominant model of **internal affective causality**, in which love is experienced as something that happens *within* the self rather than something that acts *upon* it.

Malay metaphors were dominated by the Falling schema, which accounted for 27% of the corpus, producing conceptual metaphors such as:

- LOVE IS FALLING (*jatuh cinta* “fall into love”; *jatuh hati* “heart falls”).

These metaphors rely on embodied experiences of gravitational loss of control but differ from English in centering inward emotional descent rather than external impact.

The second most frequent cluster involved Illness/Pathology schemas:

- LOVE IS AN ILLNESS (*angau* “love-sick delirium”; *demam rindu* “fever of longing”).
- LOVE IS INTOXICATION (*mabuk cinta* “drunk on love”).

These expressions conceptualize romantic emotion as a condition of bodily dysregulation.

A culturally specific elaboration occurred through metaphors involving the *hati* (heart/liver), functioning as the affective locus in Malay cognition:

- *hati tersentuh* (“heart is touched”)
- *hati hancur* (“heart shattered”)
- *hati terpiakat* (“heart captivated”)

While these map onto universal schemas of CONTACT, RUPTURE, and CAPTURE, their internalization within the *hati* differentiates Malay emotional conceptualization from English’s external-force orientation. Malay patterns emphasize:

- internal affective movementsomatic sensation localized in the *hati*gravitational inevitabiliillness as emotional dysregulation. Although both English and Malay employ shared embodied schemas such as FALLING and ILLNESS, the causal logic they encode diverges: English metaphors predominantly construe love as an externally imposed force acting upon the experiencer, whereas Malay metaphors frame romantic affect as an internally unfolding state localized within the *hati*.

4.4 Cross-Linguistic Comparison of Schema Distribution

Schema	English (%)	Malay (%)	Dominant Mapping
Force/Impact	28.1%	15.7%	LOVE IS A VIOLENT FORCE

F a l l i n g / Instability	13.6%	27.1%	LOVE IS FALLING
Illness/Pathology	15.4%	21.4%	LOVE IS AN ILLNESS
Catastrophe/ Natural	19.0%	11.4%	LOVE IS A NATURAL FORCE
W e a p o n r y / Penetration	12.7%	10.0%	LOVE IS A PENETRATING FORCE
P o s s e s s i o n / Captivity	10.9%	14.3%	LOVE IS POSSESSION

This comparison reveals:

- English → prefers Force/Impact, Rupture, Catastrophe
- Malay → prefers Falling, Illness, Internal Movement (*hati*)
- Both → share Loss of Control, Disruption, Involuntariness

From a CMT perspective, both languages rely on universal embodied schemas, but cultural elaboration determines which schemas receive emphasis and how they are instantiated.

4.5 Shared Universal Schemas

- Falling
- Illness
- Loss of control
- Force dynamics

Language-Specific Elaborations

- English elaborates Force/Impact via injury, rupture, and weaponry.
- Malay elaborates Falling/Illness via the *hati* and somatic dysregulation.

These patterns support the CMT claim that:

- embodiment provides shared cognitive grounding,
- cultural models provide distinct elaborations,
- linguistic metaphors offer insight into the conceptual structuring of romantic emotion.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study contribute to ongoing debates in Cognitive Metaphor Theory regarding the relationship between universal embodied schemas and culturally specific elaborations. English and Malay share a common set of embodied foundations for conceptualizing romantic emotion—namely the Force, Falling, and Illness schemas—yet diverge significantly in how these schemas are selected, foregrounded, and elaborated.

5.1 Universal Embodiment and Shared Conceptual Mappings

The presence of parallel metaphors such as “falling in love” and *jatuh cinta*, “heartbroken” and *hati hancur*, or “lovesick” and *angau*, indicates that speakers of both languages draw on similar

sensorimotor experiences—gravitational imbalance, physical rupture, and physiological dysregulation—to structure the domain of romantic emotion. These patterns support the CMT claim that conceptual metaphors reflect recurring bodily experience, producing cross-linguistic stability in image-schematic grounding (Kövecses, 2010).

The shared mapping LOVE IS FALLING reflects the universality of gravitational experience as a basis for describing unintentional emotional descent. Similarly, LOVE IS AN ILLNESS appears in both languages due to the common experience of physical symptoms accompanying intense emotion. These convergences reinforce the view that embodied cognition constrains how humans conceptualize affective states.

5.2 Language-Specific Elaboration of Shared Schemas

Although the same schemas are available across languages, English and Malay differ in how they elaborate them. English metaphors frequently invoke external physical force, producing complex mappings such as LOVE IS A VIOLENT FORCE, LOVE IS PHYSICAL INJURY, and LOVE IS A CATASTROPHE. These elaborations extend the Force schema into rupture, fragmentation, and impact, reflecting a conceptualization of emotional experience as externally caused and structurally disruptive.

In contrast, Malay metaphors elaborate the Falling and Illness schemas through a culturally specific emotional topology centred on the *hati*, the internal organ associated with affective experience, moral intuition, and inner thought. Metaphors such as *hati tersentuh* (“heart is touched”) and *hati terpijat* (“heart captivated”) maintain

universal schemas of contact and capture but instantiate them through an internalised emotional locus. This suggests that while embodiment provides the conceptual groundwork, cultural models influence the site and texture of emotional experience.

5.3 Internal vs. External Causation in Conceptualization

A key difference emerging from the analysis concerns the perceived causality of romantic emotion. English metaphors represent love as an external force acting upon the individual—something that “hits,” “strikes,” or “breaks.” Malay metaphors, by contrast, conceptualize love as a state that arises within the self, often framed as falling, resonating, or becoming ill. This distinction highlights how the same schema (e.g., Falling) can be elaborated differently depending on cultural understandings of the body and affect.

5.4 Implications for Cross-Linguistic Conceptual Metaphor Research

These findings underscore the importance of distinguishing between universal schemas (shared bodily grounding) and cultural elaborations (local instantiations of schemas). By comparing two typologically and culturally distinct languages, this study provides empirical support for a view of conceptual metaphor that integrates both embodiment and cultural modelling. The Malay data in particular demonstrate how embodied schemas such as Falling or Illness can be enriched by culturally specific notions such as the *hati*, resulting in conceptual metaphors that are simultaneously grounded and culturally distinctive.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined how English and Malay conceptualize romantic emotion through embodied metaphorical mappings, focusing on the FORCE, FALLING, and ILLNESS schemas that structure both languages' metaphorical repertoires. The findings support the central claim of Cognitive Metaphor Theory that abstract emotional experience is grounded in recurrent bodily patterns, giving rise to stable cross-linguistic conceptual metaphors such as LOVE IS A FORCE, LOVE IS FALLING, and LOVE IS AN ILLNESS.

At the same time, the cross-linguistic comparison demonstrates that cultural models play a decisive role in shaping how these shared schemas are elaborated. English predominantly externalizes romantic affect through metaphors of force, rupture, and catastrophe, construing love as an external agent acting upon the experiencer. Malay, by contrast, favors metaphors of falling, illness, and internal affective movement localized within the *hati*, conceptualizing love as an internally unfolding state. This contrast reveals a fundamental difference in affective causality: love is experienced in English as something that happens to the self, whereas in Malay it is experienced as something that arises within the self.

These divergent metaphorical patterns carry broader sociocultural implications. The prominence of FORCE and VIOLENCE metaphors in English romantic discourse aligns with feminist critiques of romantic language that emphasize conquest, domination, and asymmetrical power relations. While such metaphors do not determine social behavior, they may contribute to the normalization of relational dynamics framed through impact, injury, and loss of control. In contrast, the Malay emphasis on inward affective states foregrounds emotional

vulnerability and moral interiority, offering a different orientation toward romantic experience that centers endurance, resonance, and internal transformation. Neither model is inherently prescriptive or evaluative; rather, their contrast illustrates how metaphor participates in shaping culturally specific emotional logics.

By integrating schema-based analysis with cross-linguistic comparison, this study contributes to ongoing debates concerning universality and cultural specificity in conceptual metaphor research. The findings underscore the value of examining how universal embodied foundations interact with culturally situated models of emotion, morality, and agency. Future research could extend this approach through diachronic analysis, the inclusion of additional Austronesian languages, or interdisciplinary engagement with gender studies, affect theory, and discourse analysis. Such work would further illuminate how metaphor organizes emotional reasoning and structures the lived experience of romantic attachment across culture.

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Investigating the Creative Process in the Making of Malaysia's First Animation Feature Film: Hassan Muthalib's Silat Legenda (1998)

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the creative process in the making of milestone motion-picture *Silat Legenda*, the first animation feature film in Malaysian cinema history. It was the outcome of circumstances shaped by the interaction between the film's director Hassan Muthalib, as the dominant creative agent, with the evolving domain and field of animation production specifically within the Malaysian context. *Silat Legenda* is considered to have been the outcome of a creative process shaped by both enabling and constraining factors inherent to film production in Malaysia during the 1990s.

KEYWORDS: *Silat Legenda, Hassan Muthalib, Animation, Creativity, Malaysian Cinema.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysian filmmaker Hassan Muthalib made important contributions to the use of animation in the context of Malaysian television and cinema. While Muthalib's significant influence on animation practices in Malaysia has been periodically highlighted in the Malaysian press, there does not seem to have been much attempt however, to conceptualize through the lens of creativity his contribution to animation feature film production practices through the making of *Silat Legenda* in particular.

A milestone motion picture in Malaysian cinema, *Silat Legenda* was the result of Muthalib's creative problem-solving strategies, productive collaborations and adherence to as well as departure from filmmaking conventions in Malaysia.

This paper discusses Muthalib's making of the first Malaysian animation feature film *Silat Legenda* (Legendary Silat Warriors) in terms of a systemic creative process that involves the interaction between an individual, a domain and a field as well as diverse stages of creative problem-solving and collaborative relationships within the enabling and constraining factors inherent to making films in Malaysia during the 1990s – as a consequence of which something novel was created. Csikszentmihalyi (1988) developed a systems model according to which he deems creativity to be the outcome of the confluence of three components: domain (culture), field (society), and individual (personal background). Each component of that system is viewed as necessary but insufficient on its own. What is at play are dynamic relations of circular causality, where the three components are both influenced by and influence each other. Individualistic approaches that focus predominantly on personality traits are inadequate to thoroughly comprehend and explain creativity – which should be considered a multi-faceted complex phenomenon that is part of an ecological system and does not reside in any single cognitive or personality process nor occurs in any particular environment. Creativity might hence be best investigated and explained via a systems approach that recognizes the confluence of multiple factors which contribute to, influence and shape creative processes.

The specificities of the national setting must be given due consideration when analyzing filmmaking processes in order to understand the reasons behind the implementation of particular patterns

of production because of the considerable differences at play that inevitably exist between motion pictures being made for large, medium or small markets. In the Malaysian context, factors like available resources, government policy and audience size have an impact on how much risk film producers and directors are willing to take in trying new ideas and things not previously done, and ultimately on their subsequent creative choices and decisions. *Silat Legenda's* making during the 1990s reflects how its development, as something not previously done in Malaysia at the time, was a process marked by high sunk costs amidst complete uncertainty as to whether or not local audiences would subsequently have any interest in such a novel filmic variation in Malaysian cinema.

In film and media studies, the creativity inherent in the filmmaking process and in filmmakers' creative choices during problem-solving has tended to receive limited attention. As pointed out by Redvall (2016: 141),

while creativity studies have taken a great interest in the ways that new ideas emerge and meet the world, film and media studies have traditionally focused less on the processes of developing, writing and producing new works. [...]. One can argue that film and media studies have been more interested in the product and the person behind the product (with a focus on the director as the auteur) than in the process itself or the press, which is understood as the environment in which the creative work takes place.

The exploration by Ian Macdonald (2010) of the Screen Idea Work Group, in the European context, is one of few instances of "studies focusing particularly on the creative practice of making a specific film, relating current practice and the development of the text and discussing issues like creativity, collaboration and constraint in concrete production

settings” (Redvall 2012: 59). But there has been a paucity of research that concentrates on the analysis of film production in relation to filmmakers’ creative practices during the development and making of specific motion-pictures.

For a better analysis and understanding of how creative work occurs in movie production, applying concepts, models and theories derived from creativity research can prove to be very productive.

Knowledge of how practitioners’ intentions arise, develop and change, and what choices end up being influential in the development of a specific product are not only relevant for the sake of better understanding the process but also for theoretical discussions of artistic intentionality and authorship or for analysis of certain characteristics of certain works produced in certain film cultures at certain points in time. (Redvall 2012: 69).

Since concepts, models and theories generated by creativity research have not commonly been used in the scholarly study of film and media in Malaysia, this article first presents and explains some of them before proceeding with their application in discussing the creative process inherent to the development and production of Hassan Muthalib’s *Silat Legenda* as well as the constraints, opportunities, collaborations, and creative choices that occurred during its making.

2. THEORIZING CREATIVITY AND CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

Considering how the definition of ‘creativity’ has evolved during previous centuries in various contexts (visual arts, literature, and so on) and because of the multiple ways in which it has been studied and explained, it would be relevant to provide some guidance about the

application of the term 'creativity' herein. Hence, Sawyer (2012: 29-30) pertinently elaborates how the

individualist definition associates creativity with the human mind and associates the study of creativity with psychology. When we look for the creator of a created product, we instinctively look for a person. The sociocultural definition emphasises, in contrast, that creativity doesn't only emerge from human minds; many natural and social processes can generate appropriate novelty. These two definitions are complementary.

Investigating creative processes should indeed be carried out via a balance between individualistic and systemic approaches rather than at the expense of either one over the other.

Not favouring one particular definition and acknowledging instead both above-mentioned perspectives, according to his systems model, creativity is defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1988: 28) as

any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one. And the definition of a creative person is: an individual whose thoughts or actions change a domain or establish a new domain. It is important to remember, however, that a domain cannot be changed without the explicit or implicit consent of a field responsible for it.

Csikszentmihalyi's approach to creativity hence shifts the focus from the traits of the creative individual towards a broader understanding of creative work. The recognition of creative work is not only related to talent but also to "chance, perseverance, or being at the right place at the right time. Because creativity is jointly constituted by the interaction among domain, field, and person, the trait of personal creativity may help generate the novelty that will change a domain, but it is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for it" (Csikszentmihalyi 1988: 29).

A comprehensive understanding and explanation of the phenomenon is only gained through the adoption of a holistic approach and the undertaking of more inter-disciplinary research based on a systems view of creativity that acknowledges a confluence of inter-related forces operating at multiple levels. And this can be achieved by resorting to “all-encompassing systems theories of creativity designed to tie together and make sense of the diversity of perspectives found in the literature – from the innermost neurological level to the outermost cultural level” (Hennessey & Amabile 2010: 590). When all the behaviours in a system – in the wider context of its environment – are taken into account, the systems perspective permits trans-disciplinary thinking, a focus on the whole picture and not just a single element as well as an appreciation of how the different components interact.

A combination of perspectives that incorporates a balance between the social and individual aspects would be the most appropriate approach in the study of creativity, as illustrated below by the synthesized model proposed by Kuo (2011):

Mainly adapted from Csikszentmihalyi’s ‘Systems Model of Creativity’ (1988), the synthesized model by Kuo (2011) additionally amalgamates Amabile’s ‘Componential Theory of Creativity’ (1983) and Sternberg & Lubart’s ‘Investment Theory of Creativity’ (1991). It acknowledges the significance of the individual’s motivation and personality and of specific knowledge from an external source or domain to create a new idea or artifact – ‘creativity generation’ – that is accepted into the domain after its variation has been examined by the field’s gatekeepers.

The ‘domain’ is a formal system of symbols derived from information that can be understood as a set of instructions, procedures, rules and action: if one does not have access to the information within

a certain domain, one is unable to contribute with new knowledge. Within the domain of film and animation production, there are different understandings of best practice, like the right way to structure a screenplay, to make critical choices and resolve problems during production or to implement classical storytelling strategies, for instance.

The 'field' is the social organization of the domain and encompasses all the individuals who function as gatekeepers by deciding whether a new idea or an artifact should be included in the domain for individuals in the future to learn from (Csikszentmihalyi 1999: 315). In the Malaysian cinema context, government agencies' officials, movie producers and film critics are some of those in central positions who can choose which creative works deserve to be recognized, kept and remembered.

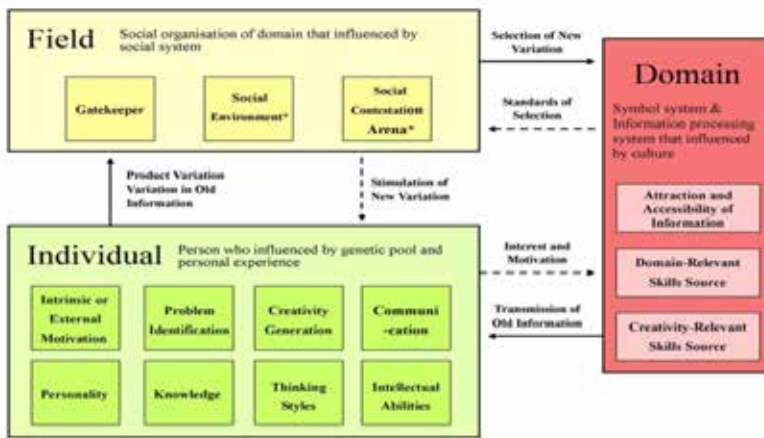
The 'individual' has a significant role in the creation of any cultural artifact and, according to Csikszentmihalyi (1988: 28), can be deemed to be creative when he/she uses the symbols in a specific domain, gets an idea, develops a new pattern or creates a novel artifact. It is also useful to think about how issues of novelty, quality and appropriateness relate to each other when looking into how the individual negotiates with the constraining and enabling factors in place with regards to what he/she intends to create in the context of filmmaking.

With regards to cognitive studies pertaining to creative processes, it should be highlighted that creativity has also frequently been viewed as a type of problem-solving. A problem can be considered as a situation wherein there is a desired outcome and an obstacle in the way. When faced with a well-defined problem, one can readily begin the process of solving it. But in many artistic endeavours however, the act of selecting which problem requires resolving is often a crucial aspect

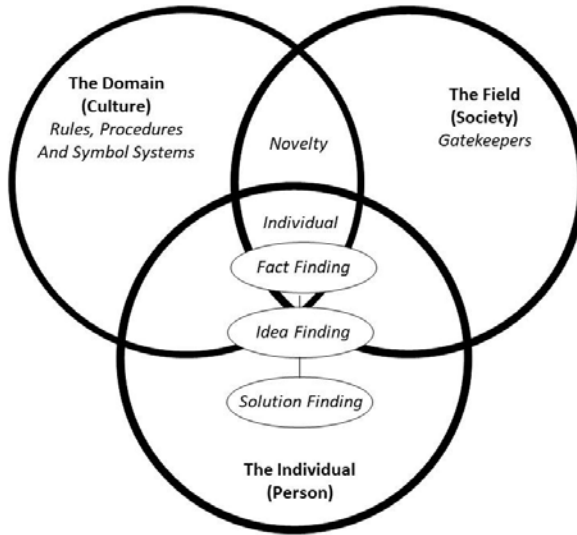
of the creative process itself. If artistic endeavours are understood as involving the pursuit of a conceptualization of creativity that is rooted in problem-solving through collaborations within a specific context, it would then be essential to acknowledge the frequently overlooked stage of first determining which problems truly need to be identified and resolved. Hence, if the production of a motion-picture is conceptualized as a series of different but inter-connected stages of problem-finding and problem-solving, some important questions that inevitably arise during those stages include: how do filmmakers go about creating a new film project? what are the challenges that emerge between initial concept to completed project? how are decisions reached about what ideas to pursue or to discard? what individuals will be involved and will need to do, and at what stages?

In applying the systems perspective to discuss creativity in filmmaking, a creative problem-solving model is also useful for better understanding the interaction between the individual, domain, and field. In 1953, Alex Osborn developed the basic ideas behind creative problem-solving (CPS) while trying to explain how to increase levels of creativity in individuals and groups. There were originally seven steps in Osborn's CPS model that he later modified to include only three: fact finding, idea finding and solution finding [for more details, see: Osborn (1963: 86)]. Originally intended for the purpose of teaching creativity, the CPS model can also be a great tool for breaking down the filmmaking process into different stages involved in the complex production of new audio-visual artifacts, such as problems identified and solutions developed, constraining and enabling factors as well as challenges faced by those involved, critical choices made, and so on.

Viewing creative endeavours from a systems perspective and addressing them as a process involving the identification and resolution



of challenges – aiming to generate innovative and high-quality projects – places the spotlight on the creative agents, their collaborations and their decision-making. It is essential to remember that what is at the core of all that process is not just any product, but a highly specific text that must meet precise requirements from field experts, and that is shaped by existing works and the principles of best practice within a domain. The combination of Kuo's synthesized systems model of creativity with Osborn's CPS model – as illustrated below – enables a productive framework for understanding longitudinal complex processes in relation to not only individuals but also to their operational contexts. And that would indeed be most productive in investigating the creative process involved in Muthalib's making of animation feature film *Silat Legenda* in the context of Malaysian cinema.



Applying a systems perspective of creativity, in combination with the CPS model, requires considering Muthalib as the principal creative agent who operates within the enabling and constraining factors inherent to the structure of film and animation production in Malaysia, as well as his interaction with the field (which includes producers, animators, and critics) that influences decisions about what particular approaches to animation production deserve to be recognized as ‘best practice’ and maintained in the domain as well as subsequently reproduced in later screen texts.

3. ABOUT HASSAN MUTHALIB

While referring to E.H. Gombrich’s study of art history, Bordwell (1997: 150) argues how innovation is often the result of the artist’s “urge to be different, to compete with others, to savour the exercise of skill, or to seek new challenges.” In the context of Malaysian cinema, Muthalib’s

making of *Silat Legenda* can be understood as the outcome of systemic creative processes involving a combination of imagination, inspiration, expertise, perseverance and problem-solving as a result of which: the old is transformed into something that is original, something novel and fresh is produced, and something innovative occurs. Creative acts like filmmaking inevitably occur within a framework that includes enabling as well as constraining factors. Structures inherent to the codes, symbol systems and customary practices specific to animation production and to the kind of film world that Muthalib operated in – which includes producers, animators, critics – not only constrained but also enabled him to be creative in his pursuits. In order for innovation to take place in the creation of an animation feature film, a specific set of rules and practices needs to be conveyed from the realm of animation production to the practitioner. This practitioner is then tasked with generating a fresh interpretation within the animation domain. Subsequently, the innovative variation must be chosen by the industry for integration into the domain.

The creative individual needs to possess a certain level of prior knowledge before attempting to introduce modifications to established practices within the domain. Looking into Muthalib's career highlights how significant creative accomplishments typically represent natural progressions of existing concepts, requiring extensive effort and numerous incremental advancements. This is because creative ideas do not emerge from thin air but rather stem from a deep reservoir of experience and dedicated training in a particular artistic practice. As recounted by Muthalib (2016: 93):

I believe my journey into animation started way back when I was a lad. [...]. My first exposure to animation was through the book, *The Art of Disney*, which I borrowed from the United States Information Service library. What attracted me were the

magnificent background paintings done for the Disney feature films rather than the animation. I should emphasize here that I had not been born a talented artist nor did I have the opportunity to study art formally. That did not deter me. I diligently copied the works of great artists, not realizing that I was, in fact, ‘learning’ from the masters.

While working as a decorator for Robinsons department store in Kuala Lumpur, Muthalib developed an interest in photography and ended up purchasing a second-hand Voigtlander camera in 1966. “Subsequently, I became well-known for taking professional-looking wedding photographs and posed stills. This then led me to a stint as a still photographer for a women’s magazine. Undoubtedly, this interest and involvement in photography contributed to my understanding of storyboarding and live action filmmaking” (Muthalib 2016: 95).

After starting work at Filem Negara Malaysia (FNM – National Film Studios) in 1968 as a titling artist in the Art Department, Muthalib only became seriously involved in animation “when the Art Department was asked by [then FNM director-general] John Nettleton to produce animated festival trailers” (Muthalib 2016: 43) each about one minute long, for television screening during the religious festivals of the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia. Muthalib believed that all his earlier initiatives gave him an advantage over the other designers when he made the 1972 Christmas trailer, which was his very first film: “With the years of experience in doing Christmas decorations at Robinsons, I bristled with ideas for my first film story. I was totally undeterred by the fact that I had never written a script, drawn a storyboard or animated before. It was an exciting challenge that I was raring to take on. The animation bug bit me then and animation was to become my next career” (Muthalib 2016: 96).

Muthalib's speciality became cel animation which requires characters and objects to be hand-drawn by artists on clear celluloid sheets – referred to as animation cels or animated cels – that are subsequently positioned over painted backgrounds. Cel animation came to prominence through Walt Disney's early works in particular during the 1930s and is, according to Muthalib (2016: 15), not only a technique but also “the understanding of all the elements that go into the making of a film. This is the only way to teach animation as the real purpose of making a film is to tell a story, not to try to impress the audience with beautiful pictures moving in space and time.”

While his early 1970s training was rudimentary at the start since he was just beginning to understand the subject matter, it was “the lectures by Disney veteran animator Clair Weeks in 1976 on the Disney philosophy of animation storytelling that were to have a profound impact on my belief than an understanding of storytelling was as important as understanding story-making” (Muthalib 2016: 253). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, FNM became known for its lively and humorous animated trailers, and his “literary background, knowledge of still photography, and frequent viewing of classic feature and animation films stood him in good stead in coming up with structured storylines that were almost always spiced with humour” (Muthalib 2013: 43). By the 1990s, Muthalib had contributed animation scenes to various feature films as well as directed a number of documentaries, PSAs and short animation films that had all been screened on Malaysian television.

4. THE DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION OF *SILAT LEGENDA*

According to Muthalib (2016: 66),

animation *per se* was only to surface with the establishment of the Malayan Film Unit in Kuala Lumpur. If not for a series of

fortuitous events, animation may have taken an even longer time to appear in Malaysia. These events enabled animation to first take root in the late 1940s in Malaya, to blossom in the early 1980s, then to flourish into a thriving industry into the 1990s. The millennium witnessed Malaysian animation making its presence felt in the global arena.

Animation evolved from the establishment of the Malayan Film Unit (MFU), a documentary film studio that was founded in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya by the British in 1946. Creating a film studio was M.C. Sheppard's idea while interned in Changi prison during World War Two: he saw the potential benefit of a film unit to a nation in the process of recovering from the war's aftermath. A chance encounter between Sheppard and Ralph Elton, a film director associated with the Crown Film Unit in London, subsequently facilitated the acquisition of film equipment from a British unit in Singapore about to be closed down. With the equipment also came British filmmaker R.E.D. (Gillie) Potter who had been working with the unit and was tasked with assisting in the MFU's set up.

Training and production work eventually commenced at the MFU in 1947 [see: Muthalib (2016)]. Potter provided instruction to the local community on the operation of film cameras and the art of directing. Unbeknownst to him at the time, his efforts not only equipped the locals with valuable skills but also played a pivotal role in establishing the groundwork for what would become the Malaysian animation industry. With Potter's supervision and guidance, "the Art Department made numerous effective titles and animated sequences for the MFU's documentaries and training films. [...]. The first animation made in MFU was the stop-frame sequences for the film *The Kinta Story* directed by Harry W. Govan in 1949" (Muthalib 2016: 76): it is the earliest example in Malaysia of the production of 2-D animation that

was at the time the most effective way to get the message across visually to a mostly illiterate local audience. Although Gillie Potter conducted the first training in animation during the late 1940s at the Malayan Film Unit, the next training would only happen about 20 years later, beginning in 1972 with the production of public service advertisements and festival trailers and on-the-job training provided to newly joined art graduates in the Design Unit of FNM.

From the early days of animation at the MFU, it would take almost fifty years to get to the making of Malaysia's first animation feature film. Started around the mid-1990s and completed for theatrical release in 1998, *Silat Legenda* contains "traditional cel animation with some 3-D animation in the backgrounds. 2-D and 3-D digital visual effects were used to enhance some scenes" (Muthalib 2016: 61). The film was produced by Peninsula Pictures owned by Hisham Harun Hashim (who also owned The Image Generation Company, a 3-D animation, CGI and post-production service facility in Malaysia).

Silat Legenda is based on the internal turmoils that characterized the old Malaccan Sultanate before it was invaded by the Portuguese about five centuries ago. Its story and theme of unity are essentially inspired by legendary Malaccan warrior Hang Tuah and his four close friends. As explained by Muthalib, it was the film's producer Hisham Harun Hashim who had the original idea and he

explained to me his idea of how the five legendary heroes Hang Tuah, Hang Jebat, Hang Lekir, Hang Lekiu and Hang Kasturi were friends who were united and were able to overcome a lot of things together. But then an incident occurred between the two main characters Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat who came into conflict with each other – basically brother had to go against brother on the orders of the king. We took the cue from there for *Silat Legenda*. (Venkatasawmy & Randhawa, 2025: 99).

And Muthalib further elaborates that during its making in the 1990s, there was a political conflict occurring in Malaysia between the then prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy prime minister Mr Anwar Ibrahim. “We thought: ‘Well, this is what we are talking about in our film’ (Venkatasawmy & Randhawa, 2025: 99), and that conflict essentially provided a guide for how to structure the film’s plot.

Originally meant to be a television series, producer Hisham decided to develop *Silat Legenda* as an animation feature film for theatrical release instead, after finding out that USD500 was all that local Malaysian television stations were prepared to pay per episode. To proceed with the production, professional staff

was now required but it soon became clear that there were not enough cel animators for the production. A decision was taken to plan the entire production up to key pose level and get it animated in Indonesia. A company called Citra Audivistama managed by Dwi Koendoro, a well-known editorial cartoonist and animator whom I had met on an earlier trip to Indonesia, was contracted to handle the animation in Jakarta. (Muthalib 2016: 210).

For his part, Muthalib had joined Peninsular Pictures in 1995 as a trainer and movie director, having recently left FNM: “working together with Hisham, I turned his story into a treatment. New characters and a more definite storyline emerged with a theme of unity” (Muthalib 2016: 209). From an artistic perspective, he discovered that the narrative needed to adhere to a specific creative process, involving the development of characters and stories through thorough research rooted in real-life experiences, pushing the boundaries of realism. During the phase of identifying challenges, he placed significant importance on

exploring a multitude of potential approaches to crafting stories. “From Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, I took his hero’s journey to formulate my structure, and the film never deviated from that. That’s probably the reason why the story of *Silat Legenda* has a certain flow, except for some parts wherein late changes had been made” after animation production had already started, explains Muthalib (Venkatasawmy & Randhawa, 2025: 85).

The making of *Silat Legenda* might have seemed to be a doomed enterprise from the start considering that none of the staff including the key people had ever worked on a cinema feature. Most of them did not have any experience at long form animation. Many could not even draw well. At Hisham’s request, background supervisor Cesar T. Coronado Jr. from Manila, Syed Hassan al-Mashoor and Hassan Muthalib conducted training sessions three times a week in the evenings for the staff in all aspects of animation production. (Muthalib 2016: 210).

These exchanges among diverse individuals, each playing distinct roles, were essential for the exchange of ideas, sharing of knowledge, and providing critical feedback on processes and outcomes. Consequently, *Silat Legenda* projects the collaborative efforts of creative teams comprising director, producer, animators, background painters, and so on. For example, as recounted by Muthalib:

One of the artists working on *Silat Legenda* came to me after four days with his drawings of ferns: I tore them up in front of him and told him to go to his house in Gombak (a district in the state of Selangor, Malaysia) to look at the ferns, at what is at their back, to touch them and feel what they are like. Only after that did I get good drawings of authentic ferns. [...]. I took the team to Belum National Park (located in the state of Perak, Malaysia) and we stayed there all night: I had everyone draw

trees, vines and so on. As a result, you can see that the flora in the film is very authentic. (Venkatasawmy & Randhawa, 2025: 85).

The involvement of numerous individuals was indispensable for the film's production, highlighting the essential nature of collaboration in the creative process. Within the realm of art, the realization of creative works often hinges on the collective efforts of multiple support personnel.

Many of the world's significant inventions and innovations have resulted not from the work of one lone genius but from that of groups of individuals with complementary skills collaborating with each other in resolving problems. This can be illustrated by the creative solution that was implemented for the scene in *Silat Legenda* wherein after the five heroes had come down from the mountain, they were going through various physical movements to practise their *Silat* (traditional Malay martial arts). The scene was meant to show that there was something different in the way they were doing their *Silat* moves after coming down from the mountain. But the animation of that important scene had somehow been overlooked during production. As explained by Muthalib:

for that scene, we already had the key animation finished and parts of other animation had also been done but were not all completed. And then an idea came to me, and I said: 'We'll do dissolves for that particular scene, so that it will look very unusual, and it will be very different from all the other scenes'. And this solution worked. In the finished film where you now see dissolves in the scene in which the five heroes are moving in tandem doing their *Silat* moves, that's because of animation not having been completed. (Venkatasawmy & Randhawa, 2025: 94).

Within the first year of production, various issues emerged with the Indonesian studio contracted to do the animation: its work was not up to par and there were repeated delays in delivering line tests. “It was decided that the animation work would be finished in Malaysia, as by this time many of the assistant animators had acquired skills through doing layouts and the training provide by Syed Hassan” (Muthalib 2016: 211). As commented by Muthalib (2016: 212), during the making of *Silat Legenda*

innumerable problems had kept cropping up, but through weekly meetings and professional updates by the production manager cum assistant director, Steven Lim, we thrashed it out and many times were forced to change direction. Executive producer Hisham was in the thick of things and involved in every aspect of the production as he began to master the intricacies of making an animated feature. Many of his ideas were also incorporated into the screenplay and production design.

This illustrates how creative individuals like directors, producers and various film personnel are usually embedded in social and professional networks that are made up of people working within the same domain of activity, and it is the ‘genius’ of the group as a whole that generates creative solutions and innovation in solving problems.

In explaining creativity, the equilibrium between imitation and innovation must be considered and the pivotal role convention and tradition play in the process must be recognized because “all creativity includes elements of imitation and tradition: there’s no such thing as a completely novel work” (Sawyer 2012: 28). Muthalib confirms precisely that when he explicates, for example, how *Silat Legenda* includes strong Japanese animé influences:

I was very keen on Hayao Miyazaki's style of background because I saw a resemblance to the Malaysian landscape. So, I gave the background supervisor, Cesar Coronado, a book that I had received from Miyazaki's studio (Studio Ghibli) which I visited in Japan in 1997. I wanted the sky in *Silat Legenda* to have lots of clouds because they represented God or spirituality which is an important element of the film's narrative. When *Silat Legenda*'s five heroes go to mountain Gunung Ledang and when they return, I wanted the sky to be full of Miyazaki's style of clouds to show that the heroes had now achieved something very different. (Venkatasawmy & Randhawa, 2025: 84).

Additionally, characters in *Silat Legenda* are very anim  -oriented because some of the artists involved in their design were predominantly experienced in the design of Japanese anim   characters while previously working on diverse projects commissioned by Japanese animation outfits such as Toei Animation Co and others.

5. FILM AND ANIMATION PRODUCTION IN MALAYSIA: ENABLING AND CONSTRAINING FACTORS

It is important to take into account that Muthalib's entry into animation was shaped largely by informal self-directed learning – from copying illustrations in borrowed books to developing visual storytelling skills through photography and on-the-job experimentation – rather than through structured academic training. In his time, formal education in animation was virtually non-existent in Malaysia. Sporadic workshops and rudimentary in-house instruction served as the only avenues for the development of animation skills of sorts. This highlights the systemic constraints of the industry in Malaysia during the last quarter of the 20th century, where foundational expertise depended far more on individual initiative and improvisation than on an established educational infrastructure.

There exists a distinct repertoire of abilities, knowledge, and methods linked to specific creative endeavours: the creative process in filmmaking is not solely the result of individual talent or inspiration but is also shaped by the constraints and opportunities in the milieu within which it occurs. Applying this perspective to Muthalib's work on *Silat Legenda*, it becomes evident how he had to operate according to the simultaneously constraining and enabling circumstances – technological, financial, and otherwise – inherent to film and animation production in Malaysia. This can be illustrated by Muthalib's comments about how at Peninsular Pictures in Malaysia,

we did not have animators in the real sense of the word: they had been working on animé television productions for Japanese companies, but they had never worked on feature film projects. We had just two key animators who had only worked on television productions, and they had four assistants who also did not have much experience. (Venkatasawmy & Randhawa, 2025: 86).

Furthermore, Muthalib considers that he did not really have key personnel that he could depend on and to whom he could provide directives that they would subsequently pass to their respective teams: “In the end, other than being the film's director I also had to become the production designer and the art director too because the guy employed for that was not up to it. There were too many things that I was handling and that was not the right way to be involved in an animation film or in any production” (Venkatasawmy & Randhawa, 2025: 86).

Because of their pivotal impacting role on the creative process, external variables like environmental and social influences have to be accounted for alongside individualistic considerations to effectively explicate why, when, and where new ideas or artifacts are generated from to consequently become established in a culture. There are social,

cultural, economic and institutional factors influencing creativity with regards to film and animation production. Malaysia was affected by the Asian financial crisis that occurred during the production of *Silat Legenda*.

None of the staff received any salary for nine months when the Asian financial crisis happened: they were locked out of their houses because they could not pay rent and they were all sleeping inside the studio. The producer Hisham Harun Hashim was bringing in food for all of them, and we were like a family or people on a ship that was floundering. But we all stuck together and made the deadline: we finally got it all done in three years as originally planned. (Venkatasawmy & Randhawa, 2025: 92).

Muthalib's work was shaped by the demands of film and animation production, including budget and resource constraints, as well as the expectations of an evolving audience. However, he also had some autonomy within this context as his experience and expertise allowed him to negotiate with the producer for much creative control: "only the two of us had the final say, and the producer depended on me: if I said to go a certain way, he would go along with my advice" (Venkatasawmy & Randhawa, 2025: 95).

6. CONCLUSION

Silat Legenda did not break even at the box-office in Malaysia from its RM5 million budget and its critical reception was mostly not positive, confirming how the process of developing a new film or television product is "marked by high sunk costs without any certainty as to whether there will be audience demand for this specific new variation" (Redvall 2016: 139). But it is still productive to think of film and animation production as creative work that attempts to create novel

artifacts as well as to examine the processes implicated according to a systems perspective which involves problem-finding, problem-solving and collaborations. This kind of approach brings the practitioners involved and their creative choices into focus without losing sight of what is at stake and that what people are collaborating on is not just any product, but a very specific artifact that meets the demands of experts in the field and that is influenced by works and ideas of best practice already existing in a domain.

Taking into account that the entire professional practice of animation feature filmmaking during the 1990s in Malaysia constituted by itself a significant constraint – for various reasons mentioned earlier – in hindsight the commercial failure of *Silat Legenda* was inevitable. What matters though is that the film was nevertheless completed and theatrically exhibited. And such a milestone, although not remembered by many, was an important enabler for the subsequent production of animation feature films in Malaysia from the 2000s onward, leading to many highly lucrative locally made animation franchises by the 2020s.

2023 marked the 25th anniversary of its theatrical release and talking about *Silat Legenda* is still an apt exercise, because of its significance in the evolution of Malaysian cinema and because of how little younger generations of film students actually know about it. The following years after *Silat Legenda* saw predominantly animation television series being produced in Malaysia.

Once animation feature films of those popular television series started being made, they became pretty much the top grossing films across Malaysian and Indonesian cinema theatres, such as: *Upin & Ipin: Keris Siamang Tunggal* (2019), *Ejen Ali: The Movie* (2019), *Mechamato Movie* (2022) and *Dongeng Sang Kancil* (2024).

Although diverse contemporary digital technologies may have rendered traditional cel animation techniques somewhat obsolete, the legacy of Hassan Muthalib's *Silat Legenda* remains relevant in terms of comprehending the transformation of animation feature film production in Malaysia. Muthalib's contributions to the evolution of animation laid the foundation for the type of animation films and TV series that are now prevalent in Malaysia, not to mention the ongoing influence of his creative practices and teachings on contemporary Malaysian animation filmmakers.

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Pembugaran Kajian Kearifan Tempatan Melayu Melalui Teks Sastra Melayu Lama

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan meneliti dan memugar kehebatan serta kepandaian masyarakat Melayu tradisional dalam pelbagai bidang ilmu melalui analisis teks sastra Melayu lama. Objektif kajian adalah untuk mengenal pasti dan menganalisis bentuk kearifan tempatan berdasarkan karya sastra Melayu lama (tradisional). Kajian ini berbentuk kualitatif dengan kaedah kajian kepustakaan dan analisis teks berasaskan **falsafah Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru**. Teks yang dianalisis meliputi beberapa buah karya terpilih seperti *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, *Sulalatus Salatin*, *Hikayat Raja Pasai* dan *Undang-undang Laut Melaka* dan juga yang diakses daripada pengkalan data Malay Concordance Project (MCP). Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa teks-teks tersebut bukan sahaja menyimpan nilai budaya, adat resam dan falsafah hidup, tetapi juga membuktikan keunggulan masyarakat Melayu dalam ilmu kearifan tempatan Melayu meliputi ilmu falak dan navigasi, ilmu mengenal tapak landskap, ilmu menggubah landskap Melayu, ilmu bedil dan ilmu gajah berdasarkan hubungan yang akrab dengan alam. Implikasi kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa teks sastra Melayu merupakan repositori ilmu tradisional yang mempunyai nilai epistemologi, budaya dan saintifik yang dapat menyumbang kepada pengukuhan falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru* sebagai kerangka ilmu kearifan tempatan; di samping membuka ruang integrasi warisan pengetahuan Melayu dalam penyelidikan interdisiplin dalam konteks kontemporari. Kesimpulannya, falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru* menunjukkan bahawa teks sastra Melayu lama berperanan sebagai khazanah ilmu yang masih relevan dan wajar dibugar dan perkukuh dengan kajian

lanjut untuk kegunaan masa kini dan masa hadapan.

Kata kunci: Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru, ilmu tradisional, identiti budaya, kearifan tempatan, sastera Melayu lama.

1. PENGENALAN

Kearifan tempatan atau *local wisdom* boleh didefinisikan sebagai pengetahuan, pengalaman, nilai dan amalan yang terbentuk hasil interaksi masyarakat dengan alam sekeliling serta diwariskan secara turun-temurun (Geertz, 1973; Alisjahbana, 2008). Dalam konteks masyarakat Melayu, kearifan ini tidak hanya bersifat praktikal, tetapi turut mengandungi falsafah hidup yang mencerminkan kebijaksanaan masyarakat dalam menyesuaikan diri dengan alam. Hubungan masyarakat Melayu lama dengan alam sangat akrab berdasarkan corak dan cara hidup mereka untuk kelangsungan hidup. Perkara ini mempunyai hubungan rapat dengan falsafah hidup yang dipegang oleh mereka suatu ketika dahulu, iaitu *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru*. Falsafah ini berasal daripada bahasa Minangkabau di Sumatera Barat “Alam takambang jadi guru”. Menurut Mohamad Hanif Abdul Wahab dan Azizi Bahauddin (2017), masyarakat Minangkabau telah lama menjadikan alam sebagai guru. Mereka bahkan sentiasa mendekatkan diri dengan alam sebagai satu proses pencarian ilmu melalui pengalaman merantau keluar dari tanah Minangkabau. Secara ringkasnya, falsafah ini menegaskan bahawa segala pemerhatian terhadap alam semesta dapat dijadikan panduan untuk memperoleh ilmu, membentuk nilai dan menghasilkan teknologi (Rahman Shaari, 2015).

Sehubungan itu alam dapat dijadikan sumber utama pengetahuan, panduan hidup serta asas kepada penciptaan teknologi masyarakat Melayu. Perkara ini boleh dikaji berdasarkan teks sastera Melayu lama yang menjadi sebahagian daripada dokumentasi sosial

berkaitan kehidupan masyarakat Melayu zaman silam, sama ada yang disampaikan secara lisan atau tulisan dalam pelbagai genre. Teks sastra Melayu lama merujuk kepada karya sastra Melayu tradisional yang dihasilkan sebelum tahun 1800 M, iaitu sebelum berkembangnya penggunaan alat cetak sebagai medium penyebaran kepada khalayak. Hasil karya sastra Melayu lama ini termasuklah yang disampaikan secara lisan ataupun tulisan.

Sastra lisan merujuk kepada karya yang disampaikan secara pertuturan daripada satu generasi kepada generasi yang lain, sama ada dalam bentuk puisi (karangan berangkap) seperti pantun, teromba, talibun dan jampi serapah; atau dalam bentuk prosa (karangan panjang) seperti cerita binatang, cerita lipur lara, cerita mitos, cerita lagenda dan cerita jenaka. Sementara sastra tulisan pula merujuk kepada karya yang disampaikan secara tulisan kepada khalayak, hasil daripada pertembungan dunia Melayu dengan tamadun luar, seperti India dan Arab Parsi. Sastra tulisan yang berkembang melalui tulisan Jawi hasil daripada pengaruh Arab Parsi (Islam) melahirkan pelbagai genre sastra yang lain pula, seperti sastra kitab, sastra undang-undang dan ketatanegaraan, sastra sejarah, sastra hikayat, sastra epik, cerita nabi dan tokoh islam dan ilmu kepustakaan Melayu.

Kesemua karya sastra Melayu tradisional ini bukan sahaja berfungsi sebagai dokumentasi sejarah peradaban bangsa atau hiburan, tetapi juga sebagai repositori ilmu pengetahuan yang menyimpan kearifan tempatan masyarakat silam. Dalam konteks kajian ini terdapat beberapa teks daripada genre karya sastra Melayu lama yang akan dianalisis. Antaranya termasuklah sastra sejarah seperti *Sulalatus Salatin*, *Hikayat Siak*; ilmu kepustakaan Melayu tradisional seperti kitab *Tajul Muluk*, *Mantra Gajah*, *Adat Segala Raja-raja Melayu*, *Petua Menembak Meriam*; cerita lipur lara, seperti *Hikayat Malim Deman*; sastra epik seperti *Hikayat Hang Tuah*; dan sastra hikayat, iaitu *Hikayat*

Jauh Manikam. Kesemua teks ini menjadi khazanah budaya bangsa kerana mencerminkan sistem nilai, adat dan ilmu yang berkembang sebelum tahun 1800 M serta memaparkan dimensi kearifan tempatan yang berhubung langsung dengan pengetahuan dalam pelbagai bidang yang masih kurang diketengahkan secara menyeluruh (Sweeney, 1987; Muhammad Haji Salleh, 2006).

Meskipun terdapat kajian yang membicarakan warisan budaya dalam sastera Melayu (Hashim Awang, 1985; Sweeney, 1987), penyelidikan yang memberi fokus kepada pembugaran kearifan tempatan berasaskan ilmu tradisional masih terhad. Teks sastera Melayu lama sering dianggap sekadar rekod hiburan atau catatan istana, sedangkan kandungan ilmunya yang mendalam kurang mendapat perhatian dalam arus pendidikan dan penyelidikan moden. Menurut Rahimah A. Hamid (2012), cabaran globalisasi turut memperlihatkan kecenderungan generasi muda menjauhi teks sastera Melayu lama, sekali gus menimbulkan kebimbangan bahawa warisan ilmu tersebut mungkin hilang daripada ingatan kolektif masyarakat. Keadaan ini menuntut satu penilaian semula terhadap teks sastera Melayu lama melalui falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru* supaya kearifan yang terakam di dalamnya dapat terus dipelihara dan dimanfaatkan.

Sehubungan itu, kajian ini bertujuan mengenal pasti dan menganalisis bentuk kearifan tempatan melalui karya sastera Melayu lama berdasarkan falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru*. Kajian ini penting kerana membuka ruang kepada pemahaman baharu bahawa teks sastera Melayu lama sebenarnya merupakan dokumen ilmu yang berlapis. Pertama, kajian ini menyumbang kepada usaha pemuliharaan warisan ilmu agar tidak lenyap ditelan zaman. Kedua, memperkukuh identiti budaya bangsa dengan menampilkan semula kepandaian masyarakat Melayu dalam menghadapi cabaran zaman mereka. Ketiga, hasil kajian ini berpotensi dijadikan asas untuk pengintegrasian

warisan ilmu dalam sistem pendidikan, khususnya dalam kurikulum kesusasteraan, sejarah, dan kajian budaya (Muhammad Haji Salleh, 2006; Rahman Shaari, 2015). Dengan itu, pengkaji, pendidik dan pembuat dasar dapat memahami bahawa teks klasik Melayu bukan sahaja warisan estetik, tetapi juga khazanah kearifan yang masih relevan untuk pembangunan masyarakat masa kini.

2. SOROTAN LITERATUR

Dalam tempoh lima tahun kebelakangan ini, pelbagai kajian telah dijalankan berkaitan kearifan tempatan masyarakat Melayu dan etnik lain di Nusantara. Walau bagaimanapun, kebanyakan kajian tersebut hanya menumpukan terhadap aspek makanan, pakaian, atau ritual budaya tanpa memberi perhatian mendalam terhadap teks sastra Melayu lama sebagai sumber ilmu tradisional. Sebagai contoh, kajian oleh Mohd Norahman Shah Mohd Salleh et al. (2025) berjudul *The Principle of Al-Tayyib in the Local Wisdom of Malay Community's Food Culture* bertujuan meneliti aplikasi prinsip *al-Tayyib* dalam budaya makanan masyarakat Melayu. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kualitatif dengan ulasan literatur sebagai metodologi, berpandukan prinsip Islam dan konsep kearifan tempatan sebagai kerangka teori. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa prinsip *al-Tayyib* masih diamalkan melalui penggunaan ulam, herba dan rempah dalam makanan tradisional Melayu, yang menggambarkan keseimbangan antara nilai agama dan budaya (Mohd Norahman Shah et al., 2025). Walau bagaimanapun, fokus kajian ini hanya terhad kepada aspek makanan dan tidak melibatkan teks sastra lama sebagai sumber kearifan, sekali gus memperlihatkan jurang penyelidikan yang boleh diisi oleh kajian ini.

Kajian lain oleh Rehayati, Hasbi dan Martius (2023) bertajuk *An Exploration of Local Wisdom: Rites of Passage in Malay Culture*

in Riau and Palembang pula meneliti nilai kearifan tempatan yang terkandung dalam ritual peralihan hidup masyarakat Melayu di Riau dan Palembang. Kajian yang mengaplikasikan metodologi kualitatif melalui temu bual dan pemerhatian lapangan ini menekankan bahawa ritual budaya seperti kelahiran, perkahwinan dan kematian dipengaruhi oleh nilai Islam serta menjadi cerminan adaptasi budaya tempatan dengan agama. Kajian ini mengukuhkan kefahaman bahawa kearifan tempatan bukan sahaja diwarisi tetapi turut mengalami penyesuaian dengan nilai agama (Rehayati et al., 2023). Walaupun penting dari sudut antropologi budaya, kajian ini tidak menggunakan teks sastra Melayu lama sebagai sumber analisis, dan yang menjadikannya berbeza daripada fokus kajian ini.

Dalam bidang kesusasteraan rakyat, Yaacob et al. (2024) melalui kajian *Moral Values in Malay Folklore: Perspectives of Learners* menganalisis nilai moral dalam cerita rakyat Melayu dengan mengambil perspektif pelajar universiti sebagai responden. Reka bentuk kajian ini adalah kuantitatif berasaskan soal selidik dan analisis perpustakaan terhadap teks cerita rakyat seperti *Tok Chok Penyelamat Kampung* dan *Bidan Mok Long Haji*. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa nilai moral dalam cerita rakyat dapat membentuk keperibadian positif pelajar melalui penghayatan nilai kesetiaan, kejujuran dan hormat (Yaacob et al., 2024). Walau bagaimanapun, kajian ini lebih menekankan aspek nilai moral berbanding warisan ilmu tradisional seperti falak, pelayaran atau perubatan.

Selain itu, Norjietta@Julita Taisin (2024) dalam kajian bertajuk *Pengaruh Kepercayaan dan Kearifan Tempatan terhadap Amalan Perubatan Tradisional Masyarakat Kadazandusun* meneliti hubungan antara kepercayaan budaya dengan amalan perubatan tradisional masyarakat Kadazandusun di Sabah. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan etnografi dan temu bual bersama pengamal perubatan.

Dapatan kajian membuktikan bahawa kearifan tempatan masih memainkan peranan penting dalam pemilihan rawatan, penggunaan herba serta interaksi pesakit dengan pengamal. Kajian ini mengesahkan bahawa perubatan tradisional merupakan manifestasi kearifan yang masih hidup (Taisin, 2024). Walaupun signifikan, kajian ini berfokus kepada komuniti bukan Melayu dan tidak meneliti teks sastra Melayu lama sebagai dokumen ilmu tradisional.

Dalam konteks estetika budaya pula, kajian *Islamic Aesthetics and Local Wisdom in Malay Traditional Attire: A Study on Baju Melayu* oleh Mohd Norahman Shah Mohd Salleh, Meerangani, Abdul Hamid, Hashim, & Abd Wahab (2025) meneroka nilai estetika Islam dan kearifan tempatan melalui reka bentuk serta pemakaian baju Melayu. Kajian ini mengaplikasikan metodologi kualitatif berasaskan analisis visual dan dokumen. Dapatan kajiannya pula mendapati nilai Islam seperti kesederhanaan dan kesopanan berjaya digabungkan dengan motif dan simbol tempatan dalam pakaian tradisional Melayu. Kajian ini memperlihatkan kearifan tempatan dari segi estetika visual dan identiti budaya (Mohd Norahman Shah Mohd Salleh, Meerangani, Abdul Hamid, Hashim, & Abd Wahab, 2025). Walau bagaimanapun, kajian ini tidak menyentuh dimensi pengetahuan tradisional yang terkandung dalam teks klasik Melayu.

Berdasarkan sorotan di atas, jelas bahawa kajian-kajian terkini banyak membincangkan kearifan tempatan dalam domain terpilih seperti makanan, pakaian, ritual budaya, nilai moral dan perubatan. Namun, hampir tiada kajian yang menjadikan teks sastra Melayu lama sebagai sumber utama analisis kearifan tempatan, khususnya dalam bidang ilmu tradisional seperti falak, pelayaran, seni bina landskap, ilmu bedil dan ilmu gajah. Falsafah tempatan *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru* juga masih belum digunakan secara meluas sebagai kerangka epistemologi dalam menganalisis teks sastra Melayu lama. Sehubungan itu, kajian ini cuba

mengisi kelompangan tersebut dengan memfokuskan kepada pembacaan teks sastra Melayu lama menggunakan falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru*, sekali gus mengangkat warisan ilmu tradisional Melayu sebagai asas penting dalam membina identiti budaya kontemporari.

3. METODOLOGI

Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kualitatif dengan pendekatan kajian kepustakaan dan analisis teks sebagai kaedah utama. Pemilihan reka bentuk kualitatif adalah sesuai kerana tujuan kajian adalah untuk memahami secara mendalam kandungan ilmu dan kearifan tempatan yang tersembunyi dalam teks sastra Melayu lama. Menurut Creswell (2018), pendekatan kualitatif membolehkan penyelidik meneliti makna, simbol dan nilai yang tersirat dalam data berbentuk naratif dan dokumen, sekali gus menjadikan analisis teks sastra Melayu lama lebih menyeluruh. Pendekatan ini juga membolehkan pentafsiran bersifat interpretatif berasaskan falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru* yang menekankan hubungan rapat antara manusia dengan alam sebagai sumber ilmu.

Sumber data utama bagi kajian ini ialah teks sastra Melayu lama yang dianggap sebagai dokumen budaya dan ilmu tradisional. Teks yang dipilih adalah daripada genre sastra sejarah seperti *Sulalatus Salatin*, *Hikayat Siak*, ilmu kepustakaan Melayu tradisional seperti kitab *Tajul Muluk*, *Mantra Gajah*, *Adat Segala Raja-raja Melayu*, *Petua Menembak Meriam*; sastra epik seperti *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. Sebagai contoh, *Sulalatus Salatin* bukan sahaja mencatat sejarah politik, tetapi turut mengandungi pengetahuan tentang ilmu mengenal tapak dan ilmu mengubah landskap Melayu. *Hikayat Hang Tuah* pula memuatkan maklumat mengenai pelayaran. Selain itu, teks-teks sastra Melayu lama juga diakses daripada pengkalan data *Malay Concordance Projek*

(<https://mcp.anu.edu.au/Q/mcp.html>) yang dianalisis menggunakan kata kunci tertentu bagi mengenal pasti dan menganalisis kearifan tempatan Melayu dalam ilmu falak dan navigasi, ilmu mengenal tapak landskap, ilmu mengubah landskap, ilmu bedil dan ilmu gajah.

Kaedah pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui kajian kepustakaan yang melibatkan pembacaan dan analisis teks yang melibatkan penafsiran teks sastra Melayu lama dalam bentuk manuskrip dan versi cetakan moden. Kajian kepustakaan turut merangkumi penelitian terhadap penulisan sarjana terdahulu yang berkaitan dengan kearifan tempatan dan falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru*. Analisis teks dilakukan dengan meneliti petikan-petikan yang berkaitan dengan bidang kearifan tempatan Melayu yang menjadi fokus utama kajian. Data-data daripada kajian lalu berkaitan kearifan tempatan turut dianalisis bagi menambah bukti dalam mengukuhkan dapatan kajian.

Dari segi kerangka teori, kajian ini berpaksikan falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru* sebagai asas epistemologi. Pendekatan ini menekankan bahawa segala bentuk ilmu masyarakat Melayu lahir daripada pemerhatian terhadap alam semula jadi dan pengalaman hidup yang diolah menjadi panduan serta amalan (Rahman Shaari, 2015). Analisis data pula menggunakan pendekatan tematik, iaitu mengenal pasti tema-tema utama yang menggambarkan kearifan tempatan. Data daripada teks disusun mengikut kategori bidang ilmu, seterusnya ditafsir berdasarkan prinsip *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru*. Sebagai contoh, deskripsi pelayaran yang menggunakan bintang dalam *Hikayat Hang Tuah* ditafsir sebagai manifestasi kearifan ilmu falak. Kaedah ini bukan sahaja mendedahkan kandungan ilmu dalam teks, tetapi juga menunjukkan cara masyarakat Melayu mentafsir alam untuk kelangsungan hidup mereka. Instrumen kajian ialah senarai semak analisis kandungan berdasarkan tema-tema bidang ilmu kearifan tempatan yang dikenal pasti berdasarkan falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru*.

Secara keseluruhannya, metodologi kajian ini menekankan integrasi antara sumber teks sastra Melayu lama dan falsafah tempatan. Hal ini bertujuan memastikan bahawa penguasaan kearifan tempatan melalui teks sastra Melayu lama dapat dijalankan secara sistematik, terperinci dan memberi sumbangan baharu kepada wacana ilmu serta pemeliharaan identiti budaya Melayu.

4. ANALISIS DAN PERBINCANGAN

Kajian ini meneliti kearifan tempatan Melayu melalui teks sastra klasik dengan memberi fokus kepada beberapa bidang yang telah dikenal pasti berdasarkan kajian kepustakaan dan analisis teks. Analisis ini dipandu oleh falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru* yang menegaskan bahawa alam semesta merupakan sumber ilmu pengetahuan dan panduan kehidupan (Rahman Shaari, 2015). Dengan menggunakan teks seperti *Sulalatus Salatin*, *Hikayat Siak*, teks ilmu kepustakaan Melayu tradisional seperti kitab *Tajul Muluk*, *Mantra Gajah*, *Adat Segala Raja-raja Melayu*, *Petua Menembak Meriam*; sastra epik seperti *Hikayat Hang Tuah*; dan data daripada *Malay Concordance Project*, kajian ini mendapati bahawa masyarakat Melayu silam telah membina epistemologi ilmu mereka yang tersendiri berdasarkan pembacaan dan tafsiran terhadap tanda-tanda alam. Perkara ini dibincangkan dengan lebih lanjut dalam subtopik berikut:

4.1 Ilmu Falak dan Navigasi Laut

Ilmu falak dalam konteks kearifan tempatan Melayu merujuk kepada gabungan pengetahuan astronomi tradisional dengan pengalaman, kepercayaan dan pemerhatian alam yang diwarisi secara turun-temurun. Ilmu ini digunakan bagi menentukan waktu ibadah, arah

kiblat, perjalanan pelayaran, perubahan musim pertanian serta mentafsir fenomena alam seperti gerhana sebagai sebahagian daripada pandangan kosmologi Melayu (Mohd Rosli, 2020; Nasir, 1984). Ilmu falak dalam *Hikayat Aceh* berfungsi sebagai asas teknologi maritim. Dalam hal ini terdapat frasa “angin timur” seperti yang ditunjukkan di bawah:

“Maka Sultan Ghorī pun kembali ke
ghorabnya. Maka **angin timur** pun bertiup.
Maka larat sauh segala angkatan Sultan
Ghorī itu lalu berlabuh ke Teluk Isyikidar.
... (*Malay Concordance Project*)

Sementara dalam manuskrip *Bo 'Sangaji Kai* pula naskhah milik Yayasan Museum Samparaja, [Kota Bima - 62 folios including supplementary 4 folios (35a-35h)], perkataan “angin timur” dapat ditunjukkan dalam petikan berikut:

... Sampai siang hari Ahad, baharu
berangkat lagi layar pukul satu, lagi belayar
yang hampir dengan negeri Sandrabone.
Kerana maka demikian belayar ini sebab
ditusuk oleh **angin timur** yang berbetulan
dengan uluan perahu, hanya belayar
meyusu[r] setengah hari juga adanya dan
perahu Tuan Kita dengan segala perahu
itu berlabuh di pihak Hujung ... (*Malay
Concordance Project*)

Perkataan “angin timur” dalam kedua-dua petikan karya di atas menjelaskan tentang aktiviti pelayaran masyarakat zaman dahulu yang dijalankan berlandaskan pemerhatian terhadap angin. Petikan ini menunjukkan bahawa masyarakat Melayu zaman dahulu menjadikan angin sebagai petunjuk arah, musim dan masa berlayar. Dalam konteks

ini Braginsky (1994) menyatakan bahawa teks sastra menyimpan ilmu praktikal yang diperlukan untuk kehidupan. Menurut Yatim (2020) pula ilmu falak Melayu berkembang selari dengan keperluan pelayaran, perdagangan dan penentuan waktu ibadat. Dalam kerangka *Alam Terkembang Jadi Guru*, angin ialah “guru” yang mendidik manusia untuk mengurus perjalanan laut selain berpandukan bintang. Hari ini, pengetahuan ini masih relevan, khususnya dalam konteks pendidikan astronomi, navigasi tradisional dan juga dalam meningkatkan kesedaran ekologi bahawa alam bukan objek yang ditundukkan, tetapi rakan strategik manusia.

4.2 Ilmu Perubatan Tradisional

Teks sastra Melayu lama juga memperlihatkan amalan perubatan tradisional melalui kisah-kisah yang dibawakan kepada khalayaknya. Walaupun teks-teks tersebut jarang memperincikan formula ubat-ubatan lengkap, konteks cerita yang diketengahkan menunjukkan bahawa masyarakat Melayu zaman dahulu mempunyai ilmu perubatan yang sesuai dalam konteks zamannya. Sebuah karya ketatanegaraan, iaitu *Taj al-Salatin* karangan Bukhari al-Jauhari (ed. Khalid M. 1992) mencatatkan penggunaan perkataan “ubat” dan “penyakit” watak yang terdapat teks melalui contoh petikan berikut:

Maka Hakim itu berkata, “Hai segala menteri dan hulubalang dan lain dari itu yang ada hadir sekalian. Ketahui oleh kamu bahawa Shah Alam sakit daripada penyakit dan **ubat penyakit** itu tiada dalam kitab hukumat ubat itu,

Hendaklah cari oleh kamu sekalian tanah dari tempat yang binasa dan tiada barang seorang duduk pada tempat itu supaya segera ... (*Malay Concordance Project*)

Demikian juga, perkataan “ubat” dan “penyakit” ditemukan dalam *Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnian* (ed Haji Khalid Muhammad Hussain, 1986) seperti yang diapaparkan dalam petikan di bawah:

“.... dari perut.” Maka dipersembahkan luka Hakim kata segala tabib itu. Maka sukacitalah Raja Darab. Maka Raja Darab menyuruh panggil akan mereka. Maka sabda Raja Darab, “Apakah **ubat penyakit** itu?” Maka sembah tabib, “Ya tuanku, akan ubatnya ada suatu daun Iskandar. Itulah akan ubatnya.” Maka sabda raja, “Adakah padamu daun dan kayu itu.” (*Malay Concordance Project*)

Sementara dalam *Taj al-Salatin* (Edisi Roorda, 1827) pula kedua-dua perkataan tersebut turut ditemukan dalam petikan berikut:

.... menghadap raja Nusyirwan. Maka hakim berkata: Hai, segala menteri dan hulubalang dan lain daripada itu yang hadir di sini, ketahui oleh kamu bahwa Yang Dipertuan ada sakit dan **obat penyakit** itu ada dalam kitab hikmat obat juga. Maka karena itu hendaklah cahari oleh kamu sekalian tanah daripada tempat yang binasa

di mana tiada barang seorang duduk
supaya... (*Malay Concordence Project*)

Berdasarkan petikan-petikan tersebut, boleh dikatakan ilmu perubatan telah wujud sebagai suatu bentuk kearifan tempatan Melayu yang boleh diperkukuh dengan kajian lain pada masa hadapan. Ilmu ini pula pasti wujud berdasarkan pengetahuan masyarakat Melayu hasil daripada pengalaman atau hubungan mereka yang akrab dengan alam. Dalam konteks *Alam Terkembang Jadi Guru*, tumbuhan, akar kayu dan herba telah dikenal pasti sifat-sifatnya untuk penyembuhan penyakit berdasarkan pemerhatian dan pengalaman hidup. Dalam konteks ini Rahimah (2019) turut menegaskan bahawa perubatan tradisional Melayu menggunakan pelbagai herba seperti tongkat ali dan kacip fatimah yang kini terbukti mempunyai khasiat saintifik. Walaupun teks sastera Melayu lama tidak menyenaraikan ramuan secara terperinci, catatan mengenai penawar membuktikan wujudnya tradisi perubatan tempatan. Dalam konteks kontemporari, warisan ini masih relevan kerana banyak kajian farmakologi moden menggunakan herba Melayu sebagai asas penyelidikan bioteknologi dan industri farmasi.

4.3 Ilmu Perkapalan dan Pelayaran

Aspek ilmu yang berkaitan dengan perkapalan dan pelayaran juga menonjol dalam beberapa buah teks sastera Melayu lama. Contohnya, dalam *Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang China* (Abdul Rahman al-Ahmadi, 1994), perihal keterlibatan masyarakat Melayu dalam ilmu perkapalan dan pelayaran tercatat dalam bait syair di bawah melalui beberapa perkataan seperti “layar kapal” dan “haluan”:

Telah ditarik **layarnya kapal**,
Memaling haluan membuang pal,

Sebuah pun tidak ada yang tinggal,
Belayar seperti nyuir sekapal.

Belayar kapal beriring-iring,
Delapan puluh sama bersaing,
Sama berperai, sama berpaling,
Temberang berdengung bunyi berdesing (*Malay
Concordence Project*)

Sementara dalam *Hikayat Hang Tuah* pula, dicatatkan tentang kewujudan kapal yang bernama *Mendam Berahi* sebagai kapal besar dan dilengkapi dengan meriam:

*Maka Mendam Berahi pun di-suroh
dayong ka-laut. Maka Laksamana
memasang meriam tujuh kali” (Malay
Concordence Projek).*

Petikan dalam beberapa buah karya di atas melalui beberapa kata kunci yang diketengahkan memperlihatkan pengetahuan masyarakat Melayu berkaitan aspek mengendalikan kapal dan layar berasaskan fenomena angin serta arus laut. Berdasarkan falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru*, tindakan mengikat layar, menarik tali dan menyesuaikan temberang ialah hasil daripada pembelajaran yang diperoleh daripada alam itu sendiri. Falsafah ini menepati pandangan Muhammad Haji Salleh (1998) yang menegaskan bahawa masyarakat Melayu tradisional memperoleh ilmu melalui pemerhatian terhadap alam dan mengasimilasinya ke dalam amalan kehidupan seharian.

Dalam konteks pelayaran, kajian Suleiman dan Omar (2010) menunjukkan bahawa pelaut Melayu memahami pola angin monsun dan arus Lautan Hindi bagi menentukan waktu belayar, arah haluan, dan teknik membuka atau menutup layar. Pengetahuan tentang pemilihan

kayu tempatan untuk pembinaan kapal turut didokumentasikan dalam *Sulalatus Salatin* dan *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka* yang menekankan pemilihan kayu seperti cengal dan merbau berdasarkan daya tahan serta ketahanan terhadap air masin (Rahimah Abdul Aziz, 2019). Prinsip tempatan ini turut relevan pada masa kini apabila teknologi perkapalan hijau kembali menekankan penggunaan tenaga angin semula jadi seperti sistem *wind-assisted propulsion* bagi mengurangkan pelepasan karbon, sejajar dengan trend global ke arah kelestarian maritim (*International Maritime Organization*, 2020).

4.4 Ilmu Mengenal/Memilih Tapak untuk Binaan Landskap

Melalui analisis terhadap teks *Tajul Muluk*, didapati bahawa masyarakat Melayu mempunyai kaedah tersendiri dalam menilai kesesuaian tanah, arah mata angin dan kedudukan air dalam menentukan tapak binaan sesebuah landskap. Landskap rumah atau istana biasanya dibina menghadap arah matahari jatuh ke barat yang melambangkan kiblat dan keberkatan. Perkara ini menunjukkan pemikiran Melayu yang amat menitikberatkan hubungan antara ruang fizikal dan kesejahteraan spiritual. Unsur-unsur alam seperti air, angin, dan tanah pula dianggap berjiwa dan berperanan dalam menentukan kesuburan serta kesejahteraan penghuni. Prinsip ini mencerminkan pandangan hidup masyarakat Melayu yang melihat alam sebagai rakan kehidupan, bukan sekadar sumber bahan binaan sejajar dengan prinsip *Alam Berkembang sebagai Guru*. Dalam hal ini karya Melayu tradisional, melalui *Tajul Muluk* menerangkannya seperti berikut:

Fasal pada menyatakan jika bumi itu
bersurut atau berlubang-lubang atau
berpusu-pusu atau berbukit-bukit
atau tebing yang bereban-reban atau

berlepas-lepas atau berlubang-lubang atau bertanjung-tanjung segala atau sembilan perkara inilah bumi yang amat jahat maka janganlah kita diam di sana alamat akan percitaan atau lagi dukacita dan tiada berkat pada pencarian kita datang kepada anak cucu kita WaLlaha'lam (Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi, 2000, hlm. 2).

Penelitian ini seiring dengan interpretasi Mohd Kipli Abdul Rahman (2016) yang menegaskan bahawa pandangan kosmologi Melayu melihat bentuk bumi, tanah, air dan angin sebagai unsur hidup yang saling berhubung dan mempengaruhi kesejahteraan manusia. Selain itu, masyarakat Melayu zaman dahulu juga membuat tinjauan dan analisis tapak berdasarkan susuk muka bumi yang tinggi atau rendah sesuatu kawasan. Dalam kitab *Tajul Muluk* dinyatakan bahawa kawasan yang berbekat-bekat tinggi rendah boleh menyebabkan anak menderhaka kepada ibu bapa dan hamba sahaya tidak setia kepada tuannya. Sementara kawasan yang mempunyai bentuk “bumi terbabas” pula dipercayai boleh membawa kedukaan kepada penghuninya. “Bumi lembang-lembang” dipercayai boleh mendatangkan bahaya dan kedukaan kepada penghuninya. Hal ini dijelaskan dalam kitab tersebut seperti yang berikut:

Ada pun tiga perkara yang nahas itu pertama yang berbekat-bekat tinggi rendah barang siapa yang duduk di sana alamat hamba sahayanya dan anak cucunya derhaka kepada ibu bapanya dan lari segala hamba sahaya padahnya. Kedua perkara jika bumi itu terbabas

barang siapa diam alamat dukacita
padahnya. Ketiga perkara jika bumi itu
lembang-lembang itu pun maha nahas
tiada harus diam di sana dukacita lagi
papa...(Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi,
2000, hlm. 23)

Keadaan di atas mencerminkan pemerhatian mendalam orang Melayu terhadap kesan bentuk geologi terhadap banjir, hakisan dan kestabilan tanah yang merupakan pengetahuan empirik yang selari dengan prinsip *Alam Berkembang jadi Guru*.

Dalam *Tajul Muluk* seperti yang dianalisis oleh Abdul Rahman al-Ahmadi (2000, hlm. 44) terdapat beberapa garis panduan dalam memilih tapak untuk membangunkan rumah kediaman, iaitu seperti yang digariskan di bawah:

- ❖ Kedudukan tapak pada arah bumi senget dari timur ke tenggara, selatan, barat daya, barat tepat, dan barat laut adalah tidak baik untuk dijadikan tapak perumahan.
- ❖ Kedudukan bumi di arah senget tenggara memberi alamat tersekat mata pencarian.
- ❖ Kedudukan pada arah senget ke selatan pula bermaksud alamat turun harta, kehilangan atau kematian.
- ❖ Kedudukan tapak pada arah senget ke barat daya membawa alamat saudara serta kaum keluarga dengki.
- ❖ Kedudukan tapak pada arah senget barat tepat alamat diri akan menjadi lembik, lemah dan berkurang temasam (mengubat orang sakit kerana keteguran hantu).

Kedudukan rumah yang menghadap matahari jatuh ke barat bukan sahaja

merujuk kepada simboliknya dalam Islam tetapi juga mengimbangi faktor cahaya, angin dan kesejukan, berdasarkan pemerhatian terhadap pola harian pergerakan matahari. Kedudukan rumah yang berhadapan sungai, tasik atau laut pula menunjukkan penghayatan Melayu terhadap fungsi air bukan sahaja sebagai sumber bersuci atau minuman, tetapi juga sebagai sistem mobiliti dan penghubung sosial, sekali gus mengesahkan bahawa alam berperanan sebagai instruktur bagi pembentukan budaya dan ruang hidup (Daud, 2012).

4.5 Ilmu Menggubah Landskap

Kajian terhadap teks sastra Melayu lama, khususnya melalui latar tempat dalam teks, menunjukkan masyarakat Melayu zaman dahulu arif dalam ilmu menggubah landskap ibu kota dan istana. Landskap ibu kota dalam *Sulalatus Salatin Sejarah Melayu* kerajaan Melayu digambarkan seperti berikut:

Syahdan akan negeri pun sudahlah
dengan kota dan paritnya, yang dari
hilir Sungai Kerting, yang dari hulu
Sungai Johor; maka bendahara dan Tun
Seri Nara Diraja menyegerakan orang
membuat istana dan masjid, balairung
kedua dan penanggahan, balai gendang,
kolam dan telaga sekaliannya. Setelah
mustaidlah dengan sepertinya, maka
Sultan Alauddin pun pindahkah ke
istana dengan isteri baginda diiringkan
biti dayang-dayang, perwara mandara
baginda; maka Bendahara dan Seri Nara
Diraja dianugerahi persalin seperti adat.
Maka segala menteri, hulubalang,

Orang Kaya-kaya, sida-sida, bentara
 sekalian masing-masing pindahlah ke
 rumah masing-masing arah tempatnya,
 dan lebuḥ pekan pesara pun penuh
 pepak kedai orang; pada masa itu
 kampung orang arah ke hilir datang ke
 Beladung, yang hulu sampai ke Bukit
 Piatu, di hulu Kuala Johor (A. Samad
 Ahmad, 1976, hlm. 291-292)

Petikan daripada *Sulalatus Salatin* menggambarkan dengan jelas cara-cara landskap ibu kota dibangunkan dengan mengambil kira struktur alam sekitar seperti sungai, bukit, aliran air serta topografi kawasan. Pembinaan istana, masjid, balairung, balai gendang, kolam dan telaga yang disebut dalam teks bukan sahaja memperlihatkan fungsi pentadbiran dan estetika, tetapi juga mencerminkan kefahaman mendalam terhadap susunan ruang yang serasi dengan bentuk muka bumi dan pergerakan alam (A. Samad Ahmad, 1976).

Penggubahan landskap ini amat berkait rapat dengan falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru*, iaitu ajaran bahawa alam menjadi sumber rujukan dan guru utama dalam membentuk kehidupan, pengetahuan dan organisasi sosial masyarakat Melayu. Menurut Muhammad Haji Salleh (1998), falsafah ini menekankan bahawa orang Melayu belajar daripada apa yang mereka lihat, dengar dan alami dalam alam sekitar. Maka, pemilihan tapak istana yang berhampiran sungai besar seperti Sungai Johor dalam petikan tersebut adalah hasil pemerhatian terhadap fungsi sungai sebagai laluan mobiliti, sumber air, pelindung pertahanan semula jadi dan pusat jaringan ekonomi.

Selain itu, susunan kediaman pembesar, halaman istana, kawasan pekan dan kampung rakyat seperti yang digambarkan: “Yang hilir datang ke Beladung, yang hulu sampai ke Bukit Piatu”,

menunjukkan bahawa struktur ibu kota dibentuk mengikut bentuk geografi semula jadi. Perkara ini adalah sejajar dengan pandangan Nik Hassan Shuhaimi (1992) yang menyatakan bahawa kota-kota Melayu tradisional biasanya berkembang mengikuti aliran sungai, sistem lembangan air dan kedudukan bukit sebagai titik kawalan atau sempadan. Dengan kata lain, masyarakat Melayu menyesuaikan reka bentuk ibu kota dengan maklumat yang ‘diajar’ oleh alam mengenai arah angin, paras air, risiko banjir dan bentuk muka bumi.

Pembinaan kolam dan telaga pula memperlihatkan hubungan rapat antara manusia dengan fungsi air sebagai elemen kehidupan dan ketamadunan. Daud (2012) menghuraikan bahawa air dalam budaya Melayu bukan sahaja elemen fizikal tetapi juga simbol pembersihan, keberkatan dan kelangsungan hidup. Kehadiran kolam, parit dan telaga dalam reka bentuk landskap ibu kota merupakan tanda penghayatan Melayu terhadap ajaran alam mengenai pentingnya air sebagai sumber kesuburan, ketahanan ekologi dan pengurusan bencana seperti kemarau.

Dengan demikian, struktur landskap ibu negeri seperti digambarkan dalam *Sulalatus Salatin* bukan dibentuk secara sewenang-wenangnya, tetapi merupakan hasil kearifan tempatan yang memanfaatkan tanda-tanda alam sebagai panduan. Seajar dengan prinsip *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru*, masyarakat Melayu memahami bahawa pembinaan ibu kota mestilah mengikuti ritma, aturan dan bahasa alam kerana daripada alam itulah manusia belajar bagaimana membentuk ruang hidup yang harmoni, berfungsi dan berkelanjutan.

Sementara itu *Hikayat Siak* menggambarkan kepandaian orang Melayu dalam menggubah landskap istana dengan elemen-elemennya yang tersendiri seperti berikut:

Maka segala orang Besar-Besar pun
berkerahkah orang negeri, menebas

dan menebang dan berbuat kota parit dan istana dan balai dendang dan masjid, pedapuran, penanggah. Setelah sudah, maka baginda pun pundan dari Buntan, semayam di Mampura dengan segala Orang Besar-besar, menteri, hulubalang, bentara dan sida-sida (Muhammad Yusof Hashim, 1992, hlm. 461)

Petikan daripada *Hikayat Siak* memperlihatkan kepakaran masyarakat Melayu dalam mengubah landskap istana dan kawasan pemerintah melalui kerja-kerja menebas, menebang, membina kota, parit, istana, balai dendang, masjid, pedapuran dan penanggah (dapur) (Muhammad Yusof Hashim, 1992). Aktiviti-aktiviti ini bukan sekadar kerja fizikal, tetapi merupakan manifestasi kearifan tempatan masyarakat Melayu dalam membaca, mengkaji dan menyesuaikan diri dengan keadaan alam sekitar. Hal ini secara langsung berkait dengan falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru*, iaitu prinsip bahawa alam menjadi sumber utama ilmu, panduan dan rujukan dalam kehidupan (Muhammad Haji Salleh, 1998).

Proses menebas dan menebang hutan untuk membuka kawasan istana misalnya menggambarkan pemahaman masyarakat Melayu terhadap topografi, jenis tanah, arah angin dan potensi banjir. Penelitian antropologi budaya Melayu menunjukkan bahawa pembinaan kota dan istana tradisional sering dilakukan di kawasan yang strategik dari segi pertahanan, akses air dan jaringan sungai, semuanya berdasarkan pemerhatian terhadap tingkah laku alam (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi, 1992). Pembangunan parit dan kota pula mencerminkan pengetahuan Melayu tentang fungsi air sebagai benteng pertahanan semula jadi dan sebagai elemen yang mengawal aliran banjir (Daud, 2012).

Pembinaan masjid dan balai dendang dalam kawasan istana menunjukkan integrasi antara fungsi sosial, ritual, pentadbiran dan ekologi setempat. Hal ini seiring dengan pandangan Hooker (2003) bahawa masyarakat Melayu membina ruang mengikut logik alam, iaitu berdasarkan arah cahaya, aliran angin, kedudukan matahari dan struktur permukaan tanah. Kesemuanya merupakan hasil pembelajaran daripada alam seperti yang ditekankan dalam falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru*.

Melalui petikan ini dapat difahami bahawa pembinaan pusat pemerintahan Melayu bukanlah tindakan spontan, tetapi hasil gabungan pengalaman, pemerhatian dan keserasian dengan alam. Maka, *Hikayat Siak* bukan sahaja mencatatkan jajaran sejarah politik, tetapi turut merakamkan kearifan tempatan Melayu terbentuk melalui interaksi intim dengan alam semula jadi sebagai guru yang mengajar tentang ruang, struktur dan kehidupan.

4.6 Ilmu Bedil

Kearifan tempatan Melayu dalam ilmu bedil seperti yang direkodkan dalam pelbagai manuskrip lama menunjukkan bahawa kepakaran orang Melayu dalam mengendalikan senjata api tidak terhasil secara tiba-tiba, tetapi melalui proses pemerhatian, pengalaman dan penghayatan terhadap sifat-sifat alam. Kajian oleh Wan Mohd Dasuki (2013) memperlihatkan terdapat kemahiran dan kepakaran orang Melayu dalam mendeskripsi kaedah pengendalian bedil yang sebenarnya lebih merujuk kepada penggunaan senjata api ringan (senapang).

Deskripsi tersebut menerangkan tentang cara-cara mengisi peluru dan ubat bedil, memposisikan bedil, membidik serta melepaskan tembakan. Hampir keseluruhan cara itu sudah tentu diiringi dengan pembacaan mantra, bahkan turut dikaitkan dengan pengkisahan mitos

yang menawarkan pengertian yang lebih rumit tentang hubungan ilmu atau perkakas material bedil dengan sifat-sifat sakral (Wan Mohd Dasuki, 2013). Proses ini sangat bergantung kepada kefahaman tentang aspek fizikal seperti arah angin, kelembapan udara, kering atau basahnya ubat bedil dan keadaan cahaya yang semuanya diperhatikan daripada pengalaman berdepan dengan alam. Hal ini bertepatan dengan pandangan Mohd Kipli (2016) tentang kosmologi Melayu yang menjelaskan bahawa kemahiran praktis Melayu terbentuk melalui hubungan langsung antara manusia dan alam sebagai ruang belajar.

Terdapat sebuah manuskrip yang berjudul *Petua Menembak Meriam* yang disimpan di Perpustakaan Bahagian Sejarah, Muzium Negeri Terengganu yang dikatalogkan dengan nombor 85.48 dengan judul “Istinggar” (Katalog Induk Manuskrip Melayu, 1993). Pada kulit manuskrip ini tertera ayat “Ini Buku Fasal Tembak Menembak Meriam Setinggar Melayu yang Dahulu-dahulu” dalam huruf Jawi (Wan Mohd Dasuki Wan Abdullah, 2013)

Selain itu, kewujudan ilmu bedil dalam manuskrip seperti *Adat Segala Raja-raja Melayu* menunjukkan bahawa masyarakat Melayu menempatkan ilmu pertukangan dan teknologi dalam satu sistem pengetahuan yang berhubung dengan elemen alam seperti api (pempaterian), air (pencampuran minyak), logam (membuat aloi) dan tanah (pemprosesan bahan galian). Kesemuanya adalah manifestasi pembelajaran daripada alam, bahawa sifat-sifat bahan dapat difahami hanya melalui pengamatan yang mendalam terhadap tingkah lakunya dalam keadaan semula jadi (Omar, 2014).

Dengan demikian, kearifan tempatan Melayu dalam ilmu bedil bukan sahaja membuktikan wujudnya kemahiran teknikal yang tinggi, tetapi juga memperlihatkan pemahaman terhadap fenomena alam menjadi asas kepada penciptaan teknologi tempatan. Prinsip *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru* jelas terpancar melalui integrasi antara

pemerhatian alam, bahan alam serta simbolisme unsur alam dalam membentuk satu tradisi ilmu bedil yang unik kepada masyarakat Melayu.

4.7 Ilmu Gajah

Kajian oleh Nurul Izzati Mustafa dan Adnan Jusoh (2018) terhadap *Naskhah Mantra Gajah* memperlihatkan bahawa masyarakat Melayu silam memiliki satu tradisi ilmu yang halus dan mendalam dalam memahami tingkah laku, emosi, tabiat dan ekologi gajah. Pengetahuan ini bukan sekadar teknik menjinakkan atau memelihara gajah, tetapi terbentuk hasil daripada pemerhatian berterusan terhadap alam, khususnya haiwan liar, sehingga melahirkan sistem pengetahuan yang selari dengan falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru*.

Falsafah ini menegaskan bahawa segala ilmu datang daripada proses manusia belajar melalui pengalaman mereka dengan alam sekitarnya, termasuklah memerhati gerak, tabiat dan watak haiwan (Muhammad Haji Salleh, 1998). Naskhah ini, yang berasal daripada simpanan Arkib Negara Malaysia dan pernah dikaitkan dengan tokoh pembesar Perak, mengandungi empat bahagian besar yang masing-masing mempamerkan kearifan tempatan Melayu yang dibentuk melalui hubungan rapat dengan alam.

Bahagian pertama memuatkan jampi serapah untuk melembutkan atau menundukkan hati gajah liar, iaitu “Om darang muaknya darang darang langli telun changku kau kusa mu hatiku akan chucha mu lidah kau akan sangkal mu tendurung ke kanan kendurung ke kiri tunduk cinta kepada kau puah rab”. Penggunaan mantra yang mengandungi metafora alam, seperti unsur angin, suara dan getaran menggambarkan kefahaman masyarakat Melayu terhadap bahasa simbolik alam yang dipercayai mampu mempengaruhi perilaku makhluk lain (Daud, 2012).

Dalam konteks kosmologi Melayu, hubungan manusia dan haiwan bukan hanya fizikal tetapi juga spiritual, selaras dengan kepercayaan bahawa setiap unsur alam memiliki semangat yang boleh dipujuk atau ditenangkan (Mohd Kipli Abdul Rahman, 2016).

Bahagian kedua pula menjelaskan kaedah merawat penyakit gajah menggunakan bahan-bahan semula jadi seperti buah mating yang dibakar, air limau nipis, madu, garam Siam dan kulit badak seperti berikut: “maka ambil buah mating bakar hangus-hangus, maka asah dengan air limau nipis, maka bubuh pada mata gajah itu.”

Penggunaan bahan alamiah sebagai ubat mencerminkan kefahaman empirikal orang Melayu tentang sifat perubatan tumbuhan, mineral dan bahan hutan, pengetahuan yang terhasil daripada pemerhatian jangka panjang terhadap tingkah laku haiwan dan reaksi tubuh gajah terhadap pelbagai bahan (Omar, 2014). Hal ini sejajar dengan falsafah *Alam Terkembang Jadi Guru*, iaitu tumbuhan, bau, rasa dan kesan fizikalnya menjadi guru yang mengajar manusia tentang fungsi penyembuhan.

Bahagian ketiga naskhah memperincikan pelbagai petua untuk memastikan gajah sentiasa sihat, gemuk, berani dan memiliki gading yang cantik. Petua ini merupakan bentuk ilmu praktis yang muncul daripada pengalaman berulang masyarakat Melayu yang hidup rapat dengan alam rimba. Petua seperti merendam kulit badak dan garam Siam di dalam air madu untuk dijadikan makanan gajah menunjukkan bahawa setiap bahan dipilih berdasarkan sifat naturalnya, ketahanan kulit badak, mineral garam dan khasiat tenaga madu. Semuanya itu merupakan pengetahuan yang diasah oleh pengalaman alamiah yang mendalam (Nurul Izzati & Adnan, 2018).

Bahagian keempat pula menekankan aspek perlindungan spiritual ketika menangkap gajah di tengah rimba melalui amalan menghalau hantu atau jembalang hutan. Perkara ini bukan sekadar

kepercayaan, tetapi menggambarkan cara masyarakat Melayu mentafsirkan risiko, bahaya dan “kuasa alam” ketika berada di wilayah haiwan liar. Hutan dianggap sebagai ruang hidup yang mempunyai semangat dan penjaga, seiring dengan pandangan kosmologi bahawa alam penuh dengan tenaga yang perlu dihormati (Hooker, 2003). Oleh itu, ritual perlindungan ialah sebahagian daripada kesedaran ekologi spiritual yang diajar oleh alam itu sendiri.

Keseluruhannya, *Naskhah Mantra Gajah* mempamerkan pengetahuan Melayu tentang gajah adalah terhasil melalui interpretasi alam, pengalaman rimba, pemerhatian haiwan liar dan hubungan spiritual manusia dengan ekosistem. Semua ini ialah manifestasi jelas tentang falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru* yang mengajar manusia seni memahami, mengubati dan menjinakkan makhluk yang kompleks seperti gajah.

5. KESIMPULAN DAN CADANGAN

Kajian ini menegaskan bahawa teks sastra Melayu lama bukan sahaja bernilai sebagai karya kesusasteraan, tetapi lebih penting lagi berfungsi sebagai dokumen ilmu yang merakam kearifan tempatan masyarakat Melayu. Melalui analisis terhadap *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, *Sulalatus Salatin*, *Hikayat Raja Pasai* dan *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka* dan lain-lain terbukti bahawa masyarakat Melayu tradisional telah menguasai bidang ilmu falak, perubatan, perkapalan dan pelayaran, serta seni bina landskap dengan berpandukan pemerhatian terhadap alam. Alam dijadikan sumber pengetahuan, manakala pengalaman empirik dijadikan asas pengukuhan ilmu. Pendekatan *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru* mengajar bahawa alam semesta merupakan guru yang mendidik manusia cara untuk menyesuaikan diri, mencipta teknologi dan mengurus kehidupan.

Dengan itu, jelaslah bahawa falsafah ini adalah inti epistemologi Melayu silam yang menghubungkan manusia dengan kosmos dalam satu sistem pengetahuan yang harmoni.

Dapatan kajian memperlihatkan bahawa prinsip ini amat relevan dalam konteks kontemporari. Ilmu falak yang dahulu digunakan untuk pelayaran boleh dijadikan inspirasi dalam pendidikan astronomi moden. Ilmu perubatan tradisional yang berpaksikan herba tempatan mampu disepadukan dengan penyelidikan farmasi kontemporari. Teknologi perkapalan dan pelayaran berasaskan angin serta arus boleh menyumbang kepada inovasi maritim hijau yang menyokong kelestarian alam. Seni bina Melayu yang berasaskan ventilasi semula jadi, rumah berpanggung dan penggunaan bahan tempatan pula boleh dijadikan model bagi pembangunan bandar lestari yang menepati prinsip ekologi. Maka, falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru* bukan sahaja penting untuk memahami masa silam, tetapi juga wajar dijadikan asas bagi menangani cabaran pembangunan moden yang kian mendesak.

Sehubungan itu, terdapat beberapa cadangan yang boleh diketengahkan. Pertama, institusi pendidikan perlu memberi ruang kepada integrasi teks klasik dalam kurikulum, bukan sekadar dari sudut estetika sastera tetapi juga sebagai sumber ilmu. Perkara ini membolehkan generasi muda memahami bahawa karya lama menyimpan pengetahuan saintifik, budaya dan falsafah yang masih relevan. Kedua, penyelidik wajar meneroka teks klasik menggunakan kaedah interdisiplin seperti ekokritikan, etnobotani, dan sains maritim untuk menghubungkan warisan dengan pembangunan semasa. Ketiga, penggubal dasar budaya perlu menilai semula khazanah ilmu Melayu ini sebagai aset strategik untuk identiti bangsa, pembangunan lestari, dan diplomasi budaya. Keempat, komuniti setempat boleh digalakkan untuk menghidupkan kembali pengetahuan tradisional ini melalui projek pemuliharaan, inovasi herba, pendidikan warisan dan pelancongan budaya.

Secara keseluruhannya, kajian ini mendapati bahawa falsafah *Alam Berkembang Jadi Guru* memberi asas kukuh untuk membaca, mentafsir dan menghidupkan semula kearifan tempatan yang terkandung dalam teks sastra Melayu lama. Alam telah menjadi guru kepada masyarakat silam dan prinsip ini wajar terus dijadikan pedoman agar ilmu tradisional tidak hilang, tetapi sebaliknya berkembang seiring dengan tuntutan zaman moden.

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Ecology of Rasa: A Relational and Embodied Framework in Malay Performing Arts

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes the *Ecology of Rasa*, a relational and embodied framework for understanding emotion, knowledge, and artistic expression in Malay performing arts. Moving beyond the reduction of *Mak Yong* and *Rebab* to mere melodic structures, the study positions these practices as dynamic vessels of intergenerational insight, transmitted through social, bodily, and affective networks. Through a comparative analysis of a Western-trained violinist and a lineage-based *Rebab* performer, the research demonstrates that conventional notation captures structural form but fails to account for the relational, kinesthetic, and improvisatory dimensions of *Rasa*. In contrast, *Rasa* emerges as a circulatory, collective phenomenon grounded in bodily experience, memory, and cultural continuity, moving fluidly among mentors, performers, instruments, and audiences. By articulating this framework, the study integrates perspectives from ethnomusicology, performance studies, and embodiment theory, establishing a conceptual and methodological basis for exploring traditional Malay arts in both scholarly and experimental contexts. *Ecology of Rasa* thus offers a robust theoretical lens to interrogate embodied cognition, relational aesthetics, and heritage pedagogy, while highlighting the epistemic authority of lived, performative knowledge.

Keywords: Mak Yong, *Rebab*, Violin, *Rasa*, Embodied Knowledge, Performance-as-Research, Traditional Malay Music, *Ecology of Rasa*, Kinesthetic Expressivity

1. INTRODUCTION

Rasa occupies a central yet theoretically under-articulated position in Malay performing arts. Commonly translated as emotion or inner

sensation, such equivalence inadequately captures its epistemic and relational dimensions. Within Malay performance practice, *rasa* does not function merely as affective expression; rather, it operates as an embodied mode of knowing that structures interaction among performer, instrument, audience, and environment. It is enacted through micro-gestural modulation, breath regulation, temporal elasticity, and cultivated attentiveness. Simultaneously, it is sustained intergenerationally through mentorship, kinship networks, and communal custodianship. *Rasa*, therefore, constitutes a relational field rather than an interior psychological state.

Despite substantial ethnomusicological documentation of Malay traditions—including studies on Mak Yong and the Rebab (Matusky, 1989; Darmawan, 2021)—scholarship has largely prioritised musical structure, repertoire, and performance technique. The relational and embodied processes through which aesthetic insight emerges *in situ* remain insufficiently theorised. Existing analyses tend to describe performance components without conceptualising the epistemological system that animates them. This gap signals the need for a locally grounded theoretical articulation capable of translating practice-based knowledge into analytical form without reducing its ontological complexity.

This article proposes *Ecology of Rasa* as a locally grounded theoretical framework originating from Malay performance epistemology. The framework conceptualises *rasa* as an ecological system constituted through dynamic interrelations among bodies, sonic materials, spatial atmospheres, pedagogical lineages, and communal memory. Rather than treating affect as individual sentiment or performance as textual reproduction, *Ecology of Rasa* positions aesthetic experience as emergent from relational co-presence. In doing so, it advances a conceptual model rooted in indigenous knowledge systems while contributing to broader debates in performance studies, embodied cognition, and affect theory.

By reframing *rasa* as an evolving relational ecology, this study shifts analytical emphasis from isolated technique to systemic interdependence. The Malay performance tradition is thus understood not as a repository of fixed forms, but as a living epistemic network sustained through embodied transmission. *Ecology of Rasa* offers both a theoretical intervention and a methodological orientation: it formalises practice-based knowledge without abstracting it from its cultural ground.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Rasa in Aesthetic Theory

The concept of *rasa* originates in classical Indian aesthetic theory, most systematically articulated in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, where it denotes the distilled aesthetic experience evoked in the spectator through the orchestration of performative elements (Hanes, 2019). Within this framework, *bhāva* refers to the enacted emotional states embodied by performers, while *rasa* signifies the aesthetic realisation actualised in reception. *Rasa* thus emerges not as raw emotion but as cultivated aesthetic cognition structured by dramaturgical design.

Subsequent scholarship on Southeast Asian performance traditions has expanded this formulation by emphasising relational co-presence. *Rasa* is not passively transmitted from performer to audience; it materialises through reciprocal attunement within a shared performative field. Meaning is generated through interactional dynamics rather than unilateral expression, foregrounding the intersubjective dimension of aesthetic experience.

In the Malaysian context, *rasa* acquires further specificity as an embodied-performative discipline. Aesthetic authority is indexed not only by emotional expressivity but by calibrated timing, micro-gestural precision, ornamental modulation, and nuanced instrumental

handling. *Rasa* is therefore operationalised through corporeal technique and relational sensitivity. This configuration aligns with contemporary performance theory that recognises embodiment, affective exchange, and participatory presence as constitutive of aesthetic production (Schechner, 2003; Sautman, 2017).

However, while existing scholarship acknowledges *rasa* as aesthetic affect and relational emergence, it has not systematically theorised its ecological organisation within Malay performance systems. The present study extends the discourse by situating *rasa* within an embodied-relational ontology, thereby laying the conceptual groundwork for the proposed *Ecology of Rasa* framework.

2.2 Transmission in Malay Performing Arts

Transmission within Mak Yong and its associated Rebab tradition operates through embodied apprenticeship rather than textual codification. The guru–murid system structures learning as sustained relational immersion, where musical competence, rhythmic elasticity, and expressive nuance are cultivated through observation, guided imitation, dialogic exchange, and participation in live performance contexts (Darmawan, 2021). Knowledge is therefore enacted before it is verbalised.

While notation may preserve melodic contour or rhythmic framework, it cannot capture reciprocal timing, improvisatory recalibration, micro-gestural inflection, or the subtle modulation of affective atmosphere that defines aesthetic authority in performance. These dimensions are not ancillary to technique; they constitute its epistemic core. Transmission in this context is not the transfer of information but the cultivation of perceptual attunement within a relational field.

This mode of learning foregrounds embodiment as the primary site of knowledge production. Performative decisions—timing shifts, ornamental density, tonal shading, spatial orientation—are generated through situational responsiveness rather than pre-scripted execution. Technique and understanding are therefore inseparable: technical refinement indexes the depth of relational alignment achieved within the pedagogical and performative ecology.

Such a transmission model substantiates the theoretical claim advanced in this study. If *rasa* operates ecologically, its continuity depends on embodied relational calibration across generations. The *guru–murid* system thus functions not merely as a pedagogical structure but as an ecological mechanism through which *rasa* is sustained, recalibrated, and renewed. Transmission, in this framework, is the operational infrastructure of the *Ecology of Rasa*.

2.3 Gaps in Scholarship

Despite substantial scholarship on Malay music and Mak Yong theatre, the theoretical articulation of *Ecology of Rasa* as an integrated, structured framework remains underdeveloped. Prior studies, including ecological analogies offered by Kant (2020) and Lim (2022), illuminate aspects of affective and relational dynamics in performance but do not systematically theorise how these processes operate as an interdependent, embodied, and generationally transmitted system.

This gap reflects a broader conceptual lacuna: while relationality, embodiment, and affect are acknowledged, their operational integration into a coherent theoretical model grounded in Malay performance epistemology has not been fully realised. Existing scholarship tends to describe phenomena phenomenologically or analogically rather than formalising them as analytic constructs capable of theoretical generalisation.

The present study addresses this gap by positioning *Ecology of Rasa* as a locally grounded, conceptually rigorous framework. It conceptualises *rasa* as an ecological assemblage in which aesthetic knowledge emerges through dynamic interaction among performers, instruments, audience, spatial context, and pedagogical lineage. In doing so, the framework not only consolidates existing insights into relational and embodied processes but also advances a systematic theoretical lens capable of capturing the affective, intersubjective, and ecological dimensions of Malay performing arts.

By framing *Ecology of Rasa* as both evolving and theoretically anchored, this study establishes a platform for subsequent scholarship to analyse performance epistemologies as complex, interdependent systems, while offering an empirically grounded model for comparative studies in global performance research.

3. DEFINING ECOLOGY OF RASA

Ecology of Rasa is conceptualised as a dynamic, intergenerational system of aesthetic cognition, enacted and sustained through embodied relational practice. It operates as an ecological assemblage, where affective, corporeal, and social dimensions coalesce to produce emergent performance knowledge. Its defining characteristics can be delineated as follows:

1. **Relational Transmission:** *Rasa* is transmitted from master to student and simultaneously circulates among performers, forming adaptive bonds in which affective attunement aligns with technical proficiency. Emotional resonance is inseparable from embodied capability, creating a continuous feedback loop that sustains collective aesthetic coherence.
2. **Embodied Modulation:** *Rasa* manifests through movement, breath, micro-gestural inflection, and temporal nuance. Timing—

including subtle pauses, ornamentation, and improvisatory turns—modulates affective intensity and shapes interpretive outcomes. Each performative gesture functions simultaneously as expressive act and epistemic signal, revealing that technical execution is intrinsically relational and context-sensitive.

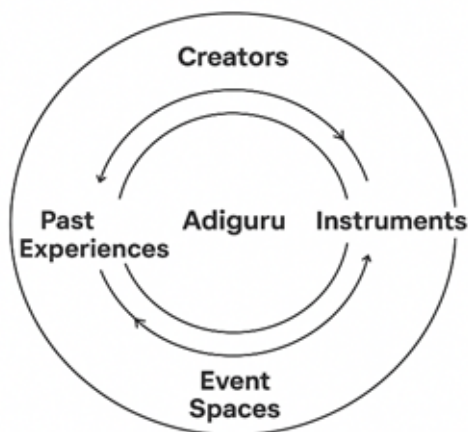
3. **Circular Interactivity:** Transmission is not unidirectional; information, affect, and performative insight circulate through the ensemble and audience. Feedback from listeners and fellow performers continuously recalibrates the aesthetic field, sustaining a dynamic system of co-created meaning.
4. **Intergenerational Memory:** Knowledge persists through instruments, techniques, and spatial practice, embedding historical and communal memory within contemporary performance. Performative choices, including site selection and material use, encode inherited insights, ensuring continuity of embodied epistemology across generations.
5. **Beyond Notation:** Conventional scores capture structural patterns but cannot represent the kinaesthetic, affective, and relational dimensions essential to *rasa*. Ecological transmission prioritises lived experience, bodily memory, and affective resonance as constitutive elements of aesthetic authority, demonstrating that performative knowledge cannot be reduced to symbolic representation.

In sum, *Ecology of Rasa* conceptualises Malay performing arts as a self-sustaining, embodied-relational ecosystem. It integrates emotional, technical, and communal processes into a coherent framework, articulating a locally grounded theoretical model that formalises practice-based knowledge for broader scholarly engagement.

A circular diagram explains *Rasa*'s function - *Adiguru* connects creators, instruments, event spaces, or past experiences. Links move

back and forth among them, reflecting emotional flow alongside knowledge transfer. One-part changes another gradually via interaction. Flow doesn't run straight; it circles, expanding when active.

Figure 1. A loop diagram showing how Rasa works in Adiguru-guided activity.



At the core stands the Adiguru, linking makers, tools, venues, and earlier encounters. Connections move both ways via lines, indicating shared feelings and mutual learning. One part slowly alters another through continuous contact, leading to an evolving, widening process instead of a straight path

4. CASE STUDY: VIOLIN VS REBAB PERFORMANCE

4.1 Research Design

This case study employs a qualitative, practice-based research design to examine embodied and relational dynamics in Malay performing arts, focusing on comparative performances of the Mak Yong melody *Mengulik* using the Violin and Rebab. The study foregrounds how aesthetic knowledge emerges ecologically through interaction, observation, and relational immersion rather than exclusively via textual notation. By contrasting Western notation-based pedagogy with lineage-based embodied learning, the design illuminates the operationalisation

of *rasa* as a system of intergenerational, embodied knowledge.

Multiple qualitative methods were integrated to capture the ecological and embodied aspects of performance:

1. **Participant Observation:** Live performances were systematically observed to document micro-gestural modulation, breath control, ornamentation, timing, and relational responsiveness between performer and audience.
2. **Embodied Engagement:** Researchers engaged in performance practice alongside Rebab and violinists to directly access embodied dimensions of skill, improvisation, and affective attunement.
3. **Reflective Journaling:** Detailed post-session journals recorded experiential insights, focusing on corporeal sensation, emotional resonance, and relational dynamics observed during practice and performance.



Figure 2. Conceptual framework for the *Ecology of Rasa*, illustrating the “Interconnected Elements of the Embodied Aesthetic System.” At the core of the system is *Rasa*, defined as an **Embodied Aesthetic Experiential**.

4. **Interviews and Dialogic Exchange:** Structured and semi-structured discussions with performers, mentors, and students contextualised observations within pedagogical lineages and communal knowledge transmission.



Figure 3. Rebab player seated and holding the instrument vertically, reflecting standard Mak Yong playing technique.

4.3 Analytical Approach

Data were analysed using phenomenological methods, identifying structures of experience, relational patterns, and embodied interactions that constitute aesthetic knowledge. Comparative analysis emphasised how relational depth, temporal flexibility, ornamentation, and communal transmission manifest differently in notation-based versus lineage-based practice. This approach aligns empirical observation with

the theoretical claims of *Ecology of Rasa*, highlighting how embodied, relational, and affective dimensions operate within Malay performance systems.

4.4 Strategic Justification for Instrument Selection

- The violin serves as a contrastive case representing Western notation-based pedagogy, demonstrating precision, technical accuracy, and formal performance standards.
- The Rebab exemplifies lineage-based, relational pedagogy, enabling direct observation of spontaneous modulation, communal transmission, and intergenerational resonance.

- Comparative analysis provides evidence for how ecological dynamics of *rasa*—interconnectedness, embodiment, and affective circulation—emerge distinctively in practice.

4.5 Comparative Analysis: Violin vs Rebab

Aspect	Violin (notation-based)	Rebab (embodied lineage)
Source of knowledge	Western notation	Oral transmission / lineage
Learning method	Reading, repetitive practice	Observation, imitation, immersion
Temporal expression	Fixed, metronomic	Flexible, responsive, context-sensitive
Ornamentation	Limited by score	Organic, dynamic, improvisatory
Relational depth	Low	High, intergenerational
Transmission	Individualized	Communal, circular, iterative

Observations indicate that while the violin reproduces notes accurately, it lacks the relational and affective depth observable in Rebab performance. The Rebab performer’s gestures, timing adjustments, and micro-variations reflect both intersubjective alignment and embodied transmission of *rasa*. Notation alone fails to capture these subtleties; instead, meaning emerges through relational interaction, situational responsiveness, and embodied memory.

4.6 Implications for Ecology of Rasa

This case study demonstrates that *rasa* functions as a dynamic ecological system, dependent on relational networks, embodied skill,

and intergenerational transmission. Technical execution is inseparable from affective and relational attunement. By foregrounding the Rebab as an exemplar of lineage-based pedagogy, the study provides empirical grounding for the *Ecology of Rasa* framework, showing that aesthetic knowledge in Malay performing arts is emergent, circular, and situated within both corporeal and communal contexts.

5. VIOLIN AND REBAB INTERACTION IN MAK YONG PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

In Mak Yong performance, the Rebab functions as the primary melodic guide, aligning dynamically with the singer's vocal range—referred to as Pak Yong. This alignment necessitates continuous pitch modulation, rendering the Rebab inherently flexible and context-dependent. Unlike the Rebab, the Violin is conventionally constrained to fixed pitches. Consequently, ensemble coordination requires the violinist to engage in real-time adaptation, recalibrating intonation, phrasing, and articulation to maintain consonance with the Rebab's fluid melodic contour.

This interaction exemplifies relational and embodied musical cognition: tonal and temporal alignment emerges through continuous perceptual attunement rather than pre-determined notation. Violinists negotiate phrasing or articulation strategies contingent on the evolving musical and affective environment, highlighting how technical execution is inseparable from relational responsiveness. The process illustrates that performance meaning is co-constructed, with expressive nuance arising from the interplay between instrument, singer, and contextual cues.

Such dynamics substantiate the theoretical claim of *Ecology of Rasa*: aesthetic knowledge in Malay performing arts is emergent, circular, and relationally transmitted. Pitch, timing, and phrasing are not merely technical parameters but carriers of embodied understanding, affective

resonance, and intersubjective alignment. The Rebab–Violin interaction thus provides empirical evidence for the framework, demonstrating how *rasa* circulates, adapts, and sustains itself within intergenerational and performative networks.

5.1 Retaining Standard Violin Tuning

When maintaining standard violin tuning, the performer continuously adapts to the pitch set by the Rebab, which itself is aligned with the singer's vocal range. This practice demands acute aural perception and advanced technical mastery, as the violinist negotiates rapid string transitions, microtonal inflections, and ornamentation inherent in the Rebab's melodic contour. Execution is not solely mechanical; it entails embodied attunement to subtle tonal shifts and temporal dynamics, reflecting relational and situational responsiveness. By aligning precisely with the Rebab, the violinist participates in a co-creative aesthetic ecology, demonstrating that technical facility and affective sensitivity are mutually constitutive within Malay performance epistemology.

5.2 Adopting Rebab-Based Tuning

Alternatively, violinists may retune the instrument—typically reducing to three strings—to match the Rebab's pitch system. This adjustment enables the violin to approximate the timbral qualities, microtonal inflections, and expressive phrasing characteristic of the Rebab. Mastery requires internalising Rebab-specific bowing techniques, ornamental gestures, and phrase shaping. In this configuration, the violin transcends its conventional role as accompaniment, becoming a relational, performative counterpart that sustains melodic integrity and affective depth. Such adaptive tuning exemplifies embodied relational knowledge, in which technical modifications are inseparable from aesthetic attunement, reinforcing the circular and interdependent transmission of *rasa*.

5.3 Theoretical Implications for the Ecology of Rasa

The interaction between the Rebab and the Violin in Mak Yong performance practice provides substantive empirical grounding for the *Ecology of Rasa* framework. Whether the violin retains standard tuning or adopts a Rebab-based configuration, both approaches demonstrate that aesthetic coherence is achieved through relational attunement rather than structural uniformity. Pitch alignment, phrasing flexibility, and ornamental responsiveness are not secondary embellishments but constitutive mechanisms through which *rasa* circulates and stabilises within the ensemble.

The necessity for continuous adaptation—aural, technical, and affective—confirms that musical knowledge in this tradition is enacted rather than merely reproduced. Tuning systems, bowing gestures, and melodic contours function as embodied epistemic structures: they encode intergenerational memory, situational awareness, and communal sensibility. The violinist's role, therefore, is not that of an external adjunct to a pre-existing tradition, but of an active participant within a living aesthetic ecosystem.

Crucially, the Rebab–Violin encounter demonstrates that notation alone cannot regulate expressive authenticity. Standardised pitch frameworks remain subordinate to relational calibration. Meaning emerges through iterative adjustment, mutual listening, and contextual responsiveness. This process substantiates the central theoretical claim that *rasa* functions ecologically—circulating across bodies, instruments, and social relations in a dynamic, reciprocal flow.

Accordingly, Mak Yong performance practice affirms that aesthetic knowledge is neither fixed nor individually contained. It is distributed, adaptive, and sustained through embodied transmission. The Rebab–Violin interaction thus stands as a concrete articulation of

the *Ecology of Rasa*: an interdependent system in which sound, gesture, memory, and communal presence co-constitute artistic meaning.

Figure 4. Musical notation transcription of *Mengulik*, divided into sets of notes.



6. RELATIONAL AND EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE IN VIOLIN–REBAB MAK YONG EXPERIMENTATION

6.1 Emergence of *Rasa* as Relational Process

This study examines how *rasa* emerges through the interaction between a traditionally trained Rebab performer and a Western-trained Violin player within Mak Yong performance practice. The investigation is not framed as a technical comparison of instruments, but as an inquiry into epistemological encounter—where embodied lineage-based knowledge intersects with notation-centred musical training.

Two distinct knowledge systems converge in this interaction:

1. **Embodied transmission grounded in bodily habitus and intergenerational memory**, sustained through oral pedagogy,

imitation, and affective attunement.

2. **Codified European methodological systems**, structured through notation, standardised pitch organisation, and formalised pedagogical sequencing.

The study systematically analyses how these epistemic orientations negotiate timing, phrasing, gesture, and tonal alignment during shared performance. Rather than treating *rasa* as a subjective emotional by-product, the research conceptualises it as an emergent relational phenomenon generated through coordinated bodily movement, micro temporal adjustment, and reciprocal listening.

Attention is directed not only to observable technical execution but also to the subtle processes that structure inter-performer synchronisation: shifts in breath rhythm, kinaesthetic recalibration, and the modulation of phrasing in response to the other's tonal contour. These dimensions are treated as primary data, demonstrating that *rasa* materialises through embodied coordination and intersubjective alignment rather than through structural accuracy alone.

6.2 Research Context and Procedural Design

The study was conducted within a controlled rehearsal environment designed to maximise acoustic clarity and perceptual responsiveness between performers. The setting enabled detailed observation of microtonal adjustment, articulation patterns, and temporal negotiation.

One performer executed a Mak Yong melody from internalised memory, relying on embodied recall and lineage-based transmission. The second performer reproduced the same melody using standard Western notation as the initial reference framework.

Data collection focused on:

- Upper- and lower-limb gesture patterns
- Bowing directionality and pressure variation
- Breath regulation and its correlation with phrasing
- Micro-temporal alignment and divergence
- Reciprocal adaptation in melodic contour
- Emergent synchronisation dynamics during repetition cycles

Observations were analysed phenomenologically to identify patterns of coordination, interruption, recalibration, and convergence. Particular emphasis was placed on how rhythmic stability was achieved—or destabilised—through relational negotiation rather than metronomic consistency.

This procedural design substantiates the central thesis of the *Ecology of Rasa*: aesthetic coherence in Mak Yong does not derive from structural replication but from embodied, adaptive interaction. The emergence of *rasa* is therefore demonstrable as a relational process sustained through mutual responsiveness, kinaesthetic intelligence, and contextual attunement.

6.3 Experience of the Rebab Player: Embodied Knowledge and Bodily Memory

The experiential account of the Rebab performer constitutes primary phenomenological data in this study. Rather than serving as anecdotal testimony, the performer's reflections are treated as empirical evidence of embodied cognition within Mak Yong performance practice. Analysis reveals a tightly integrated coordination of breath regulation, bow trajectory, micro-gestural modulation, and rhythmic elasticity,



demonstrating that musical coherence emerges from somatic integration rather than premeditated sequencing of discrete notes.

(a) Breath as the Structuring Principle of Melody

The performer explicitly identified breath as the generative axis of melodic articulation. Micro-variations in inhalation and exhalation corresponded directly with bow pressure, shoulder rotation, wrist flexibility, and fingertip weight distribution. These coordinated adjustments were not consciously pre-

calculated but enacted through deeply sedimented bodily memory formed through prolonged immersion in Mak Yong tradition.

Crucially, the performer reported perceptible disruption when required to read notated music concurrently with performance. While pitch information could be decoded accurately, the act of visual adherence to notation introduced temporal rigidity that constrained expressive elasticity. The inner kinetic impulse—described as an urge toward melodic expansion beyond fixed rhythmic values—was inhibited under such conditions. This observation substantiates the study's theoretical position that *rasa* cannot be reduced to pitch correctness or rhythmic exactitude; rather, it is sustained through breath-governed phrasing and continuous kinaesthetic recalibration.

The performer further characterised Rebab tones as “alive,” indicating an ontological understanding of sound as dynamic and relational. Excessive precision, in this context, was perceived not as refinement but as diminution of tonal vitality. Such testimony provides critical evidence that Mak Yong aesthetics prioritise expressive fluidity over metric uniformity.

(b) Melody as Communal and Kinaesthetic Memory

Temporal stretching, suspension of phrases, and spontaneous pauses observed during performance were not deviations from structure but enactments of collectively internalised memory. These interpretive



Figure 5. Azlan Che Othman-adapting to the Rebab’s tiny pitch shifts.

decisions emerged from long-term exposure to Mak Yong staging conventions and narrative pacing rather than from written prescription. The melody functioned as embodied archive—stored within motor patterns, breath cycles, and affective anticipation.

This finding reinforces the argument that Rebab performance operates within an affective-kinetic epistemology. Expressive meaning is generated

through relational responsiveness to dramatic context, co-performer interaction, and narrative intensity. Musical structure remains present, yet it is continuously reshaped through embodied negotiation.

The performer's reported constraint under notational dependence provides analytic confirmation that fixed pitch systems and standardised precision are insufficient explanatory models for Mak Yong expressivity. Notation stabilises tonal reference but cannot encode the microtemporal elasticity, breath-inflected contouring, and intersubjective timing through which *rasa* becomes perceptible.

Taken together, the data demonstrate that *rasa* in Rebab performance is a dynamic emergent property produced through somatic intelligence, relational attunement, and adaptive phrasing. It constitutes a living aesthetic process rather than a reproducible structural template. The performer's experiential evidence therefore substantiates the central claim of the *Ecology of Rasa*: aesthetic knowledge in Mak Yong is embodied, distributed, and enacted through movement, sensation, and communal memory, and is fundamentally diminished when reduced to static representational systems.

6.4 Experience of the Violinist: From Notational Dependence to Embodied Attunement

The Violin performer initially approached the Mak Yong melody through conventional Western parameters: calibrated intonation, metric stability, and adherence to notated pitch structure. However, once the Rebab entered the shared performance space, a perceptible structural dissonance emerged. The Rebab's microtonal inflections, elastic phrasing, and non-metric contouring destabilised the violinist's reliance on fixed pitch coordinates and linear rhythmic sequencing.

This moment of instability constitutes a critical analytic point within the study. It demonstrates that the epistemic assumptions embedded in Western notation—pitch discreteness, rhythmic regularity, and structural predictability—are insufficient for negotiating Mak Yong's fluid tonal ecology. The violinist's initial difficulty in matching

microtonal shifts confirms that *rasa* cannot be accessed through structural replication alone.

(a) Technical Constraint as Epistemic Friction

The violinist reported abandoning visual reliance on the score when attempting to align with the Rebab's phrasing. This shift was not merely practical but epistemological. The recognition that the Rebab "does not play fixed notes" reflects a transition from a discrete pitch ontology to a relational tonal orientation.

The inability to follow the written notation precisely did not indicate technical deficiency; rather, it revealed a misalignment between two musical knowledge systems. The microtonal glides and breath-inflected elasticity of the Rebab exposed the limits of standardised

notation as an expressive guide. This friction functions analytically as evidence that Mak Yong's tonal logic operates within a continuous rather than segmented pitch field.

(b) Transition to Embodied Listening and Kinaesthetic Adaptation

Subsequent adaptation by the violinist illustrates a measurable epistemic reconfiguration. Performance adjustments included:

- Reduction of left-hand muscular rigidity to accommodate microtonal shading
- Modification of vibrato width and oscillation speed to align with the Rebab's breath-shaped phrasing
- Controlled reduction of bow pressure to soften tonal attack
- Relaxation of metric strictness in favour of responsive temporal elasticity

These modifications were not superficial stylistic changes but indicators of perceptual realignment. The violinist shifted from visually mediated execution to kinaesthetic listening—where auditory perception and bodily movement became integrated processes. Conscious analytical control gradually yielded to responsive, movement-based attunement.

This transition substantiates the study's theoretical claim that *rasa* emerges through relational embodiment rather than structural compliance. The violinist's movement from notational dependency toward somatic responsiveness exemplifies the transformation required to enter Mak Yong's aesthetic ecology. Precision was not abandoned; rather, it was recalibrated within a dynamic relational framework.

Analytically, this progression demonstrates that access to *rasa* involves a redistribution of cognitive authority—from external visual systems to intercorporeal coordination. Musical meaning, in this context, is not extracted from notation but co-constructed through adaptive listening, breath synchronisation, and shared temporal negotiation.

The violinist's transformation therefore provides critical corroboration of the *Ecology of Rasa* thesis: aesthetic coherence in Mak Yong arises when performers relinquish rigid structural absolutism and participate in a distributed, embodied field of interaction. *Rasa* is not imposed through technical dominance; it materialises through relational recalibration and kinaesthetic intelligence.

6.5 Convergence Point: The Relational Circulation of Rasa

The moment of convergence between the Rebab and the Violin marked a decisive shift from epistemic friction to relational coherence. Analytical observation indicates that synchronisation was not achieved through metric conformity or pitch standardisation, but through reciprocal temporal negotiation and kinaesthetic calibration. As both performers

stabilised within a shared rhythmic field, tonal blending emerged as a by-product of intersubjective attunement rather than structural enforcement.

This convergence demonstrates that *rasa* materialises when performers enter a state of distributed responsiveness. The musical texture no longer reflected two parallel systems attempting alignment; instead, it functioned as a single adaptive organism sustained through mutual regulation of breath, gesture, and tonal shading.

(a) Synchrony Without Verbal Mediation

Empirical observation documented measurable indicators of non-verbal synchronisation:

- Melodic trajectories began to co-evolve, maintaining independence while exhibiting coordinated overlap
- Microtonal oscillations stabilised through reciprocal adjustment rather than imposed correction
- Eye contact, breath pacing, and subtle postural shifts operated as regulatory signals
- Bow pressure and articulation timing converged without explicit instruction

These phenomena confirm that synchrony in Mak Yong performance is intercorporeal rather than mechanical. Alignment did not result from identical note execution but from affective resonance and temporal elasticity. The ensemble coherence observed here supports the theoretical claim that *rasa* arises through relational entrainment—an embodied synchronisation process grounded in shared perceptual awareness.

(b) Distributed Reciprocity: One to All, All to One

At the point of convergence, the violinist effectively internalised Mak Yong's tonal logic, while the Rebab performer recognised the violin as an integrated extension of the shared sonic field. This mutual recognition signifies more than technical success; it reflects the activation of a distributed aesthetic system.

Within this relational matrix, the following elements operated recursively:

- Intentional orientation
- Bodily movement
- Sonic articulation
- Embodied memory
- Cultural transmission

Each component both influenced and was influenced by the others, forming a self-regulating loop. This recursive circulation constitutes the operative mechanism of the *Ecology of Rasa*. Meaning did not reside within either performer individually; it emerged through dynamic feedback across bodies, instruments, and inherited tradition.

The convergence observed in this experiment therefore provides direct empirical substantiation for the central thesis of this study: *rasa* is neither a fixed aesthetic attribute nor a purely internal emotional state. It is an emergent relational phenomenon produced through adaptive coordination within a living performance ecology. Structural systems may initiate interaction, but only intersubjective attunement sustains aesthetic vitality.



Figure 6. Azlan and Baisah – interacting with their environment created a loop essential to the Ecology of Rasa.

6.6 Summary of Case Study Findings

The findings of this case study demonstrate that *rasa* cannot be adequately theorised through symbolic representation, conceptual abstraction, or notational systems alone. Empirical analysis confirms that *rasa* emerges through embodied enactment—specifically through iterative practice, intercorporeal calibration, and affective responsiveness situated within performance. It is neither reducible to semiotic coding nor fully capturable through structural description. Rather, it materialises through lived execution within a relational field.

Four principal findings substantiate this conclusion:

1. **Breath-Structured Embodiment Rooted in Lineage Transmission**

The Rebab performer demonstrated that melodic formation is governed by breath cycles and sedimented bodily memory shaped by hereditary pedagogy. Expressive coherence was sustained through kinaesthetic continuity rather than through externally imposed metric regulation.

2. **Epistemic Reconfiguration from Structural Control to Kinaesthetic Intuition**

The Violin performer underwent a measurable transition from notation-centred execution toward embodied listening. This shift confirms that access to *rasa* requires perceptual realignment, whereby cognitive authority migrates from visual-symbolic systems to somatic and relational attunement.

3. **Emergent Synchrony through Relational Entrainment**

Convergence between performers occurred when both entered a shared temporal ecology characterised by adaptive responsiveness. Synchronised movement was not achieved through identical note production, but through reciprocal micro-adjustment in breath, bowing pressure, vibrato modulation, and phrasing elasticity.

4. **Embodied Actualisation of Knowledge within Contextual Alignment**

Musical knowledge became operational only when bodily movement aligned with narrative intention and situational context. Purpose directed action, and action materialised meaning. Knowledge, therefore, functioned as an enacted phenomenon rather than a stored abstraction.

Collectively, these findings provide empirical validation for the *Ecology of Rasa* as a theoretical framework. Traditional Malay performance practice—exemplified here through Mak Yong interaction—operates as a dynamic, self-regulating system in which bodily expression, cultural memory, intentionality, and affective resonance interact recursively. Aesthetic meaning is not transmitted linearly from structure to performer; it circulates through a complex ecology of movement, sound, and shared consciousness.

Accordingly, *rasa* must be understood as a distributed emergent property arising from relational embodiment. Any analytical model that isolates technique from sensation, or structure from lived execution, remains incomplete. The case study therefore establishes that Mak Yong performance embodies an integrated epistemology in which knowledge, memory, and affect are inseparable from corporeal enactment.

7. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL PERFORMANCE EPISTEMOLOGY

The findings of this study extend beyond the specific interaction between the Rebab and the Violin in Mak Yong. They intervene directly in broader debates within global performance studies, ethnomusicology, and embodied cognition by challenging the epistemological dominance of notation-centred analytical models.

7.1 Reframing Musical Knowledge Beyond Notational Authority

Prevailing Western musicological paradigms privilege symbolic inscription as the primary site of musical knowledge. Pitch, rhythm, and structure are treated as stabilised entities that can be codified, archived, and reproduced independently of context. The present study demonstrates the analytical insufficiency of this assumption when applied to Mak Yong performance practice.

In Mak Yong, notation—where used—functions only as a secondary mnemonic device. It does not regulate expressive timing, tonal elasticity, or affective contour. These dimensions are

governed by embodied memory, breath-synchronised phrasing, and intersubjective responsiveness. Consequently, musical knowledge must be reconceptualised as enacted rather than encoded.

This repositioning does not reject notation but rather relativises its epistemic authority. While notation stabilises structural reference, it cannot generate *rasa*. Aesthetic vitality emerges only within relational performance ecology.

7.2 Embodied Cognition as Primary Analytical Category

The case study substantiates embodied cognition not merely as a theoretical metaphor but as an operational mechanism. Breath cycles, muscular tension, bow pressure modulation, and microtemporal recalibration function as knowledge-bearing processes. These are not expressive “add-ons” to structural form; they constitute the form in performance.

Accordingly, analytical frameworks in global performance scholarship must move beyond representational models toward process-oriented paradigms. The *Ecology of Rasa* offers such a model by situating aesthetic meaning within dynamic circulation across:

- bodily movement
- sonic articulation
- cultural memory
- intentional orientation
- relational interaction

Meaning is therefore distributed rather than contained. It arises from recursive feedback loops between performers, instruments, and context.

7.3 Decentring Universalist Pitch Ontologies

The violinist's epistemic transition reveals a deeper theoretical implication: pitch in Mak Yong operates within a continuous relational field rather than as discrete, fixed units. This destabilises universalist pitch ontologies that assume equal-tempered or standardised tonal systems as neutral baselines.

Microtonal inflection in Rebab performance is not deviation; it is normative structure within its own aesthetic logic. The inability of Western notation to fully capture these inflections exposes the limits of universalising analytic frameworks. Global performance epistemology must therefore accommodate plural tonal ontologies grounded in lived practice.

7.4 Toward an Ecological Model of Aesthetic Knowledge

The Ecology of Rasa proposes that aesthetic knowledge is:

- relational rather than individual
- emergent rather than predetermined
- embodied rather than abstract
- adaptive rather than fixed

This model repositions traditional Malay performance not as a peripheral ethnographic subject but as a site of theoretical

production. Mak Yong practice generates conceptual insight into how knowledge circulates through movement, sensation, and shared temporal experience.

By articulating *rasa* as a distributed, intercorporeal phenomenon, this study contributes to a broader reconfiguration of performance theory—one that recognises cultural traditions as epistemic systems capable of informing global discourse.

8. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The case study presented in this article does not merely document an intercultural instrumental encounter; it exposes a deeper epistemological divergence in how musical knowledge is constituted, stabilised, and transmitted. Through the interaction between the Rebab and the Violin, this study has demonstrated that Mak Yong performance practice operates within a relational aesthetic logic irreducible to notational abstraction.

8.1 Beyond Notational Primacy

Dominant paradigms in global musicology continue to privilege notation as the principal repository of musical knowledge. Structure, pitch stability, and metric regulation are often treated as universal foundations of coherence. However, empirical findings from this study reveal that in Mak Yong, notation functions at best as a secondary stabilising device. It cannot generate microtemporal elasticity, breath-shaped contouring, or tonal fluidity—the very dimensions through which *rasa* becomes perceptible.

This does not negate the value of notation; rather, it relativises its epistemic authority. Structural representation preserves skeletal form, yet expressive vitality emerges only through embodied negotiation. Accordingly, musical meaning must be reconceptualised as enacted rather than inscribed.

8.2 Embodied Cognition as Structural Mechanism

The interactional data confirm that breath cycles, muscular recalibration, bow pressure modulation, and microtonal inflection are not ornamental additions to structure; they are structural in performance. Meaning formation occurs through kinaesthetic adjustment within a shared temporal ecology.

The violinist's epistemic transition—from visual-symbolic dependence to somatic listening—demonstrates that access to Mak Yong's aesthetic logic requires perceptual reorientation. Knowledge shifts from external codification to intercorporeal synchronisation. This shift substantiates the argument that *rasa* operates through embodied cognition as a primary organising mechanism.

8.3 Plural Tonal Ontologies

The friction observed between fixed pitch systems and the *Rebab*'s continuous tonal field reveals a fundamental ontological difference. Within Mak Yong, pitch does not function as a discrete unit stabilised through equal temperament. It unfolds relationally—negotiated in real time through breath and gesture.

This finding challenges universalist pitch ontologies that assume tonal discreteness as normative. Microtonal elasticity in Rebab performance is not deviation but constitutive logic. Analytical models must therefore accommodate plural tonal epistemologies grounded in lived enactment rather than abstract standardisation.

8.4 Ecology as Analytical Paradigm

The convergence achieved between performers illustrates that aesthetic coherence arises when participants enter a recursive feedback system. Breath, gesture, tonal shading, memory, and intentionality interact dynamically. No single element dominates; each modulates and is modulated by the others.

This relational circulation defines the *Ecology of Rasa*. Within this framework:

- Meaning is distributed rather than centralised
- Knowledge is adaptive rather than fixed
- Tradition is activated rather than archived
- Synchrony is negotiated rather than imposed

The ecology metaphor is not figurative embellishment but an analytical description of how aesthetic processes self-regulate within Mak Yong performance.

8.5 Repositioning *Rasa* in Global Discourse

Taken together, these findings require a repositioning of *rasa* within global performance scholarship. *Rasa* cannot remain categorised as a culturally specific emotional descriptor. It functions as an organising epistemic principle—structuring relational flow, guiding interpretive elasticity, and sustaining aesthetic coherence.

The study therefore contributes to a broader methodological shift: from analysing musical artefacts to examining performative processes; from privileging inscription to investigating embodied circulation; and from treating tradition as static heritage to recognising it as living theoretical production.

Yet this intervention remains grounded in context. The conclusions derive from Mak Yong practice and invite comparative inquiry rather than universal projection. The *Ecology of Rasa* is proposed not as a totalising theory, but as a transferable analytic orientation capable of engaging traditions where embodiment, memory, and relational responsiveness structure aesthetic meaning.



Figure 7. Azlan and Baisah – viewing *Rasa* as a living organism.

If Section 8 establishes the analytical and theoretical implications of the findings, then the logical culmination of this inquiry is a conceptual consolidation. Having demonstrated that *rasa* regulates relational flow, structures embodied cognition, and destabilises notational primacy, the question that remains is one of epistemic authority:

If *rasa* demonstrably organises knowledge in performance, on what grounds can it continue to be treated as secondary to symbolic abstraction?

Section 9 therefore advances the final claim of this study—not merely that *rasa* operates ecologically, but that it must be recognised as a legitimate epistemic authority within global performance discourse.

9. CONCLUSION – RECLAIMING RASA AS EPISTEMIC AUTHORITY

This study has advanced a central claim: *rasa* in Mak Yong performance is not merely an aesthetic sensation, nor a poetic metaphor for emotional resonance, but an epistemic force—an operative mode of knowing enacted through relational embodiment. By examining the interaction between the Rebab and the Violin, this research has demonstrated that aesthetic coherence in traditional Malay performance emerges not from structural conformity but from adaptive intercorporeal attunement.

The *Ecology of Rasa* framework proposed in this article establishes that musical meaning is neither contained within

notation nor reducible to abstract theoretical systems. Rather, it circulates dynamically across breath, gesture, sonic contour, cultural memory, and intentional orientation. These elements operate as interdependent variables within a living aesthetic ecosystem. *Rasa* therefore functions as a distributed emergent property—materialising through recursive feedback between performers, instruments, and the dramaturgical environment.

The empirical case study provides critical substantiation for this claim. The Rebab performer's breath-governed phrasing and sedimented bodily memory illustrate a mode of knowledge that precedes symbolic mediation. Musical articulation was shaped by kinaesthetic intelligence formed through intergenerational transmission, not by reliance on written codification. Conversely, the violinist's transition from notation-centred execution toward embodied listening reveals the epistemic limits of representational authority. The friction encountered between fixed pitch systems and microtonal elasticity was not simply technical difficulty; it exposed an ontological divergence in how sound is understood, organised, and enacted.

At the point of convergence, synchrony emerged not through mechanical alignment but through relational entrainment. Breath cycles stabilised, bow pressure recalibrated, vibrato patterns softened, and phrasing became reciprocally responsive. This convergence confirms that *rasa* is activated when performers enter a shared temporal ecology characterised by mutual adjustment and perceptual openness. Meaning arises in the space between bodies, not solely within individual mastery.

The theoretical implications extend beyond Mak Yong. Dominant musicological paradigms have long privileged notation as the primary repository of musical knowledge. Structure, pitch stability, and rhythmic regularity are often treated as universal foundations of musical coherence. This study challenges that assumption by demonstrating that in Mak Yong performance practice, notation cannot fully account for expressive vitality. It may stabilise reference points, but it cannot generate *rasa*. The authority of aesthetic meaning resides in embodied circulation rather than symbolic inscription.

Reclaiming *rasa* as epistemic authority therefore necessitates a decentring of universalist analytic frameworks. It requires acknowledging that traditional performance systems are not merely cultural artefacts for ethnographic documentation, but coherent knowledge structures with their own ontological logics. In Mak Yong, pitch operates within a continuous relational field; temporality unfolds through elastic negotiation; and memory is stored within the body as motoric and affective patterning. These features demand analytical models capable of engaging process rather than static representation.

The *Ecology of Rasa* offers such a model. It conceptualises aesthetic knowledge as:

- relational rather than individualised;
- emergent rather than predetermined;
- embodied rather than abstract;
- adaptive rather than fixed.

Within this framework, performers do not execute pre-existing forms; they co-produce meaning through dynamic interaction. Instruments are not neutral tools; they function as agents within an interdependent sonic ecology. Tradition is not a static archive; it is a living reservoir activated through bodily enactment.

Importantly, positioning *rasa* as epistemic authority does not romanticise intuition nor dismiss structural knowledge. Instead, it reorders analytic priority. Technical precision remains significant, but it is subordinated to relational responsiveness. Structure persists, yet it is continually reshaped through contextual negotiation. Knowledge is not abandoned; it is embodied.

This reordering carries broader consequences for global performance epistemology. If *rasa* operates as a valid mode of knowing, then embodied traditions must be recognised as sites of theoretical production rather than peripheral case studies. Mak Yong performance does not merely illustrate existing theory; it generates conceptual insight into how aesthetic meaning circulates across bodies, memory, and environment. In this sense, traditional Malay performance contributes not only cultural diversity to global discourse but epistemological innovation.

The reclamation proposed here is therefore methodological as much as conceptual. It calls for research approaches that privilege intercorporeal observation, microtemporal analysis, and phenomenological attentiveness to breath, gesture, and sonic inflection. It demands that scholars treat performer testimony not as anecdotal reflection but as data articulating embodied cognition.

It requires analytic sensitivity to tonal systems that resist equal-tempered standardisation and temporalities that unfold beyond metronomic regularity.

Ultimately, this study affirms that *rasa* is not an ineffable residue beyond analysis. It is observable in coordinated breath cycles, traceable in microtonal adjustment, and measurable in the convergence of gestural timing. Its operation is subtle yet structurally decisive. When performers relinquish rigid structural absolutism and enter a field of adaptive reciprocity, *rasa* emerges as the organising principle of aesthetic coherence.

To reclaim *rasa* as epistemic authority is therefore to recognise that knowledge in performance traditions such as Mak Yong is enacted through movement, sensation, and relational awareness. It is to affirm that embodied practice constitutes a legitimate and generative mode of theory. And it is to assert that within the living interaction of the Rebab and violin, one encounters not only musical collaboration but a model of how knowledge itself can circulate ecologically—through bodies in time.

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Stages of Identity: Faridah Merican and Postcolonial Malaysian Theatre

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ABSTRACT

Known as the First Lady of Malaysian Theatre, Faridah began her career acting in plays written in the post-independence era. As a pioneering member of the modern theatre community in the 1960s, the plays she was involved in were instrumental in creating dialogue on postcolonial themes of identity, nationalism and social justice. She later became one of the first female theatre directors in Malaysia, and has challenged patriarchal norms, created inclusive performance spaces and adapted western works to Malaysian perspectives. Through readings of journals and articles on her productions, observations of her rehearsal process, and conversations with selected people, this paper discusses her career trajectory through components of postcolonial theory, and in doing so, provide an evidence-based account of her contributions to acting, producing, and directing within Malaysian theatre.

Keywords: Malaysian theatre, Faridah Merican, The Actors Studio, cultural identity, Postcolonialism theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Faridah Merican has carved herself as a significant figure in Malaysian theatre, with a career trajectory that has both resulted from and contributed to the formation of the country's cultural identity. From her involvement with postcolonial theatre productions in the 1960s to her creation of original Malaysian works in the 1990s and 2000s paralleled Malaysia's broader negotiation of cultural identity amid nation-building. By

discussing her trajectory within the postcolonial context, her artistic and strategic choices are reflected upon intersecting factors such as cultural identity, negotiations with state policies and institutional restrictions, and gender, particularly her position as a woman in the field.

Faridah's career began in Kuala Lumpur where she met other pioneering theatre luminaries: Krishen Jit, Syed Alwi, and Usman Awang. She started working with them as an actor in the country's earliest contemporary theatre productions such as *Lela Mayang* (1968), *Tok Perak* (1975), *Alang Rentak Seribu* (1979) and *Uda & Dara* (1972) (Ishak, 1987). Faridah's involvement as an actor was important at the time, as the plays she was involved in were commentaries on the conflicts present in the social and political milieu post-independence (Rajendran, 2012). Through these postcolonial works, theatre became a space to discuss identity, nationhood and social justice, and Faridah, through her portrayals, contributed a perspective shaped by a woman's lens (Ishak, 1987).

In 1989, Faridah and her second husband, Joe Hasham, established Malaysia's first privately owned and operated theatre company, The Actors Studio. Through The Actors Studio, Faridah honed her craft not only as an actor but also as a producer, and director, earning recognition for her diverse contributions. This was when her career as a director began. She is credited as one of the pioneering women directors in Malaysia, alongside Rohani Yousoff and Fauziah Nawi (Abdullah, 2016). These three women are important as they paved the way for future Malaysian women directors. Faridah's directorial debut was a monodrama titled *I'm Not Talking to My Mother* in 1996 (Iskandar, 1996). This was after she was selected for a Director's Workshop in England, organized by the British Council in 1993. Her next play was a staging of *Hamlet* at the National Arts Academy (ASK, now known as ASWARA) in 1999 (Abdullah, 2016). She has also directed *Rashomon* (2003), *Hamlet* (2005 and 2016), *Uda dan Dara* (2015) and

Thunderstorm (2017 and 2019). Her 2003 version of *Rashomon* was nominated for 4 awards at the Cameronian Arts Awards. Faridah has been commended for her efforts in making classics more accessible to the masses. She has adapted *Hamlet* in Bahasa Malaysia with students of ASWARA (Ishak, 2008), adapted Usman Awang's *Uda dan Dara* to comment on the social and political climate of the 2000s (Pillai, 2016), and introduced the Chinese classic *Thunderstorm* to the English-speaking community by translating it to English (Chalil, 2019). This has established Faridah not merely as an award-winning director, but as one who continually interrogates Malaysia's evolving social microsystems and cultural landscapes through her work (Abdullah, 2014).

In curating, creating, and staging productions for The Actors Studio, Faridah lives by the motto 'Arts for All', which has since become the company's ideology (Kumar, 2021). In line with this, Faridah has produced plays and musicals to reflect the company's inclusive values. The 2012 play *Stories for Amah*, written by Mark Beau de Silva and directed by Joe Hasham, explores the struggle between the authoritative discourse of race and identity in Malaysia (Philip, 2004). This trajectory continued when Faridah Merican began the *Life Sdn Bhd* series in 2004 to explore the meaning of the term 'Malaysian'. The process, which began with the prompt 'What does it mean to be a Malaysian?', presented real-life stories of the performers who shared poignant experiences. The performances seemed to be cathartic for not just the performers, but also for the audience, as espoused in a review: 'The true stories told had a certain power to help people feel less alone in their life situations and feelings' (Shamsunahar, 2021). Faridah, with her brand of what 'Life' is, promotes the idea that our shared experiences can unite us more than the focus on race.

In 2007, The Actors Studio produced the musical *Tunku*. A patriotic work focusing on the events surrounding Malaysia's

independence, the production was staged in August, shortly before Hari Merdeka (Independence Day) to evoke patriotic sentiments among audiences (Hon, 2007). Productions such as *Tunku* illustrate Faridah's ongoing interrogation and articulation of Malaysian identity.

As a theatre producer, Faridah established and operated performance spaces under the banner of her theatre company, The Actors Studio. The Actors Studio was first operating in Dataran Merdeka (1995), then in Bangsar (2001), and now (2021) at the The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (from 2004). The Actors Studio also opened venues at Sungei Wang Lot 10 (2009) and Penang (2011), which have now ceased operation. The Actors Studio Dataran Merdeka housed a theatre, and an experimental black box. The venue operated for 9 years, until a flood destroyed the compound (Daneels, 2007). In 2001, The Actors Studio and Bandar Raya Developments Berhad collaborated to open a venue at Bangsar Shopping Centre. A 250-seater, the venue was a popular choice amongst the English-theatre community of Kuala Lumpur, until it closed its doors in 2009. Faridah now operates The Actors Studio at the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre, which she also manages as the Executive Producer (Shanin, 2014). The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre consists of a 504-seater main theatre, a 200-seater experimental theatre, IndiCine for films, and 10 studios. The venue has won the Malaysian Architect Association awards in the Adaptive Reuse category (Goethe, 2005). The Actors Studio is one of the longest running, pioneer theatre companies in Malaysia. It has operated for 32 years and is still going strong due to Faridah's strong leadership, business acumen, and financial planning (Engku Abdul Rahman, 2021).

Although Faridah has never received formal education and training in theatre, her accumulation of knowledge through experience over the decades, has resulted in an expansive resource of information in

the performing arts of Malaysia, which has never been comprehensively documented (Sivanatham, 2016). The following chapters will endeavour to frame Faridah Merican's contribution to Malaysian theatre through components of postcolonial theory. It studies her involvement as an actor performing texts written by her male counterparts in the 1960s to carving her own postcolonial perspectives as a producer and director from the 1980s.

Methodologically, this study relied on several secondary and primary sources which comprised academic journals that included Faridah as an actor, newspaper articles documenting her productions and theatre entrepreneurship. Observations were conducted on her acting process in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *Sisa-Sisa*, as well as her directing methodology of *Thunderstorm* and *Life Sdn Bhd* to articulate her artistic methodology and recurring thematic choices. In addition, interviews with key collaborators involved in these productions were carried out to expand on insights derived from textual analysis and performance observation.

2. ACTING THROUGH A CHANGING MALAYSIA

Faridah Merican has acted in plays since the 1960s. 'An Analysis of Modern Malay Drama' by Nur Nina Zuhra and 'Histrionics of Development: A Study of Three Contemporary Malay Playwrights' by Solehah Ishak provide a foundational framework to the social and political milieu in Malaysia when Faridah first started as an actor. In an interview with Faridah (Personal communication, 2022), she said:

"The 1960s was a time when every Malaysian wanted to do something for the country. Post-independence, we were energized with patriotism, and young creatives at the

time wanted to be heard, and the stage was an avenue. I remember rushing from the radio station where I worked to rehearsal spaces- we all had an urgency to tell this new Malaysian stories. It was the discovery, of our newfound voice.”

Solehah’s study is both necessary and comprehensive, tracing the roots of the contemporary Malaysian stage via the analysis of three Malay play amidst the developing political and social landscape of the country, while Nur Nina’s documentation of the growth of the modern Malay drama provides a trajectory and narrative that would fit the timelines of many Malaysian theatrical icons, including Faridah’s. Faridah is mentioned as Nur Nina expounds on the Malaysian Arts Theatre Group (MATG)¹, and especially in the chapter on Syed Alwi. Her involvement alongside her pioneering counterparts is a testament to the necessity of theatre at the time as a tool of expression and empowerment by the people to reclaim, rediscover and redefine a cultural identity that has been eroded and erased by colonization, a lasting effect of the British colonial rule (Gandhi, 2019).

1 Malay Theatre Arts Group (Group) was conceived by the British during colonial rule. During its inception, English actors played main roles while locals played supporting roles. This changed when Syed Alwi took over leadership of the group.



Picture 1: Rehearsal picture of Faridah Merican and Syed Alwi.
Source: Photo provided by The Actors Studio Malaysia

Susan Philip's thesis, 'Re-Scripting Identities: Performativity in the English-Language Theatre of Singapore and Malaysia' provided more information on Faridah's involvement in *Lela Mayang*. The play written by K.Das, and directed by Syed Alwi, with Faridah in the role of *Mayang Sari*, was a landmark production as it signaled the transition of the Malaysian Arts Theatre Group's (MATG) leadership from the British to a Malaysian, Syed Alwi (Philip, 2005). As part of this new leadership, Syed Alwi endeavored to put forth local writings on stage, hence the staging of *Lela Mayang*. When asked about the performance, Faridah (2023) shared:

Syed Alwi was not just a director, but someone who had many pertinent things to say about the state of the country, particularly the welfare of the Malays. At the time, people like K Das and Syed Alwi were instrumental in documenting the way our nation was shaping up. A play like *Lela Mayang* documents what Malaysia was like at the time. It was the performance that started my career, and I never looked back since.

Other writings on Faridah analyses the production's discussion of language in relation to race and identity. Susan Philip's thesis, 'Re-Scripting Identities: Performativity in the English-Language Theatres of Singapore and Malaysia' discusses this, especially the play, *Lela Mayang*. In the analysis, Susan notes that Rahim Razali, who acted alongside Faridah, felt a discrepancy being a Malay actor in a Malay role, mouthing the English text of the play (Philip, 2005). In this study on Faridah, an inquiry on her process in the production of *Lela Mayang* might yield a different response to Rahim's, due to her Anglo-English education. When asked about this, Faridah (Personal communication, 2023) responded:

"I think the topic of connectivity between race and language will go on forever in our country. Even today, when I see works by young people, race and language are debated often on stage. The tensions that arise even today between the races in our country only prove that there is much dialogue that is necessary, and the stage is one avenue for this."

Faridah's involvement and presence during this period illustrated a colonized body grappling with cultural hybridity and patriarchy. Her upbringing and education placed herself as a product of colonization negotiating her ethnic mother tongue and the language of the colonizer, which was used to effect by writers like K.Das (Said, 1978).

Other writings on the dynamics between the ethnicity of the actor, and language used are explored in reviews on the play *Tok Perak* by Adibah Amin and Mat Solo. Adibah's review is a thorough analysis of the 1975 play, commenting on its directing by Krishen Jit, and the complexities of the script and how the director and cast tackled the source material. Faridah, who acted as Azizah in Syed Alwi's *Tok Perak*, was praised (as part of the ensemble) for her natural responses to the other cast members and displayed bold choices as an actor on stage (Amin, 1975). Mat Solo's article provided a perspective of the play's process and stated that although the play was staged in the Malay language, theatre writers who visited the rehearsals noticed the commitment of the English-speaking actors, like Faridah, in perfecting their Malay language delivery (Solo, 1975). These writings illustrate that the discussion on language and the body (identity) of the speaker have been prevalent since the 70s. Faridah continues this trajectory of examining the relationship between the Malaysian body and language throughout her career. She has acted and produced in plays like *A Chance Encounter* (see below), and most recently the bilingual play by Kuo Pao Kun, *Mama Looking for her Cat* in 2023 where she learned and spoke smatterings of *Hokkien* on stage, alongside a predominantly Chinese-speaking cast.

Charlene Rajendran's analysis of Krishen Jit's *A Chance Encounter*, and Hatta Khan's book on 4 musicals provides insight into Faridah's creative choices, as an actor. The revelation that she was not a trained musical theatre singer (but still managed to pull off singing in a musical), and showcased improvisational skills in an original play, depicts her beginnings as someone 'hands-on'.

Hatta Khan's book on the study of 4 musicals dedicated a few paragraphs on the performance of the 1972 version of *Uda dan Dara*. Hatta complimented Faridah Merican and Ahmad Yatim's (they were both the leads) singing voices. He elaborates that despite not being trained singers, or known for their singing, Faridah and Ahmad were commendable in their performance, and managed to deliver the simple melodies (Khan, 2014). Hatta's observation gives an insight into the way Faridah works as actor. She may not be classically trained and schooled in the craft of acting but works hard in rehearsals with the director and actors to produce performances that have made her a sought-after stage actor today. When asked on the acting methodology used at the time, Faridah (personal communication, 2023) would credit Joy Zinoman, an American theatre practitioner as a main influence:

"I have never gone to theatre school to learn acting. Everything I apply as an actor was learned through working with directors over the years. In the early 90s, a bit after opening the Actors Studio, I met Joy Zinoman. She is a determined director who would do all it takes to bring out the character in you, and in doing so achieve her vision for the play."

Actors like Faridah who relied on their own efforts and occasionally refer to Western models of theatre training reveals the lasting psychological and epistemic effects of colonization. While the colonized body is in the process of self-discovery, there is still the need to look to the former colonizer as a source of validation, highlighting internalized colonial mentality (Mikula, 2008).

The epistemic dependence of the colonized subject is explored more explicitly as theatre practitioners like Faridah commented on this directly in the plays. In the 1999 production of *A Chance Encounter*, which was devised by Krishen Jit, with two performers (Rowland, 2015), Faridah drew upon her upbringing when devising the dialogue of her character in the play, Fatima. Indian-Muslim cultural references and Malay superstition and beliefs were used to develop Faridah's character.

Rajendran (2010) discusses multiculturalism on the Malaysian stage by citing a newspaper review's (Dass), mention of Faridah fervent use of language in *A Chance Encounter*. Although her performance was not analyzed thoroughly in the article, it notes Faridah's ability to devise and improvise, effectively using her position as a colonized body as a form of creative methodology. (Latiff and Foley, 2017) also has a perspective on the same play, and notes Faridah's naturistic performance which owed to her embracing her cultural identity and channeling into her artistic practice.



Picture 2. Faridah Merican in rehearsal with Patrick Teoh in *Philadelphia Here I Come*.

Source: Photo provided by The Actors Studio Malaysia

Faridah's later roles pushed the discussion on cultural identity of a colonized body by portraying multiple roles of different ethnicities. She learned simple *Hokkien* to play the role of a Chinese mother in 2016 in the play *Sisa Sisa*. Other notable roles include thrice (1994, 1998, 2013) as Madge (adapted to Mak Cik Esah) in *Philadelphia Here I Come* (all times by Joe Hasham), and Auntie Noni in *Adam the Musical* (2010 and 2018). Through her portrayals, Faridah illustrated facets of postcolonial identity, while simultaneously reflecting on the evolving role of women in Malaysia across different periods. Her role in *Sisa Sisa* discussed the changing role of a motherhood through the lens of cultural hybridity, while Mak Cik Esah and Auntie Noni were figures negotiating space and voice in a patriarchal environment (Mikula, 2008).

3. RESHAPING COLONIAL MODERNITY THROUGH COMMERCIAL THEATRE IN MALAYSIA

From the lens of postcolonial theory, Faridah's work as a producer can be analyzed as a disruption into patriarchal structures. By producing works which presents strong female figures, taboo subjects and discussions of sexual identity, she challenges local patriarchal norms and what is traditionally deemed acceptable.

(Latiff and Foley, 2017) discusses how Faridah was compared as less political than Krishen Jit in the analysis but was noted for her liberated stance in advocating controversial issues on stage, with the producing of plays like *Vagina Monologues* and gay-themed skits- she provided an avenue for the voiceless, even if it meant negotiating with the authorities. In an interview with Joe Hasham (personal communication, 2022), he supported this view:

“Faridah and I wanted to provide a space for anyone to say something, which is why when we first started the Actors Studio at Dataran Merdeka, we had something from anyone to everyone. Afdlin Shauki presented his early stand-up material there, Dama Orchestra found a little home to showcase their love for music, and Lee Swee Keong experimented with movement. We were aware of what could and couldn't be done, but as artistes, we had to try our best to express what we wanted to.”

With the flourishing of self-expression in the 1990s to 2000s, theatrical concerns shifted from cultural identity to explorations of selfhood. Faridah, as part of the Actor's studio understood this transition. Her programming choices were not merely commercial calculations but reflected a keen awareness that for theatre to remain sustainable as both an art form and a business, the works produced and curated must resonate with the spirit of the times. As the nation's identity evolves, so too must its art (Gandhi, 2019).

This need to provide an inclusive space for a diverse range of expressions is balanced with Faridah's role as a pioneering female entrepreneur in the arts. Rowland (2015) discusses the impact of state policies on Malaysian English language theatre and provides more insight into the growth of Faridah and the Actor's Studio amidst challenges posed by policies which impacted the economic welfare of the theatre. The chapter in the paper on the corporatization of Malaysian theatre, cites Faridah as a pioneer of this movement when in 1995, The Actors Studio began operating at Dataran Merdeka, with the support of three corporates: Transfield, Carlsberg, and Malaysian Airlines. The space, underneath the Dataran Merdeka (Independence Square) of Kuala Lumpur which housed a 153-seat theatre, a 90-seat black box, and 4 rehearsal studios, was a successful venue for the arts fraternity of Kuala Lumpur and operated for almost 10 years, and Kathy's paper quotes theatre icon Mano Maniam as describing it as 'the most important development in Malaysian theatre in the 90s'.

(Abdul Rahman, 2021) credits the management of The Actors Studio for its longevity. She states that the Actors Studio's financial planning (under the leadership of Faridah Merican) has managed to keep the theatre company operating for more than 2 decades, despite the shortcomings from the state. She writes that many theatre companies do not survive due to the lack of governmental financial support, but The Actors Studio has stood the test of time by having a strong business strategy, and a well-thought-out annual budget. Faridah (personal communication, 2023) has shared the need for more government and corporate support over the years, and in an interview added:

“It hasn't been easy. Of course, there is the praise when people think we have managed for so long, but not without sacrifices, and a lot of help for certain individuals. For example, when we lost Dataran Merdeka to the floods, it was the help of Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, the late first wife of Tun Abdullah Badawi, and Tan Sri Francis Yeoh that kept The Actors Studio running. And then during the Covid-19 pandemic, corporate sponsors like Mr. DIY and Yayasan Sime Darby provided financial assistance that covered much of our operating costs.”

Headed by Faridah Merican and Joe Hasham restored and refurbished the Kuala Lumpur Performing Centre in 7 months, at the cost of MYR 30 million. When it first began operation, a 40-member team was hired to oversee the management team, the marketing team, the creative team, and the technical and maintenance team. The center in its first year was aided by corporates such as Mercedes Benz Malaysia Sdn. Bhd (a sponsor until 2020) and Yayasan Budi Penyayang. (Kamaruddin & Harun, 2014).

Faridah's negotiating of changing cultural landscapes in the country as reflected in her creative programming with the state's institutional requirements illustrates the postcolonial challenge of a female figure within a historically patriarchal landscape. Her creative and entrepreneurial decisions helped inform the trajectory of future colonized bodies navigating the arts. Her endeavours in this regard I by having a *Uda* of Chinese descent and rooting the feuding families in two distinct locales one in rural *Kampung Penchala* (Penchala Village), and the other in posh *Taman Tun Dr Ismail*.² The paper concludes by commending Faridah's vision of recreating a new version of *Uda dan Dara* that leaves the audience in search of 'other possible meanings' in life. His summary of the performance highlighted Faridah's adaptations has now gone beyond language, to consider the deconstruction of the culture of the 'world of the play'. This is true for other adaptations that Faridah has done since *Uda dan Dara*, particularly the Chinese play *Thunderstorm*, which received a localized treatment.

In 2023, Faridah began working on an adaptation of *The Soong Sisters*. Staged in 2024, the play recounts the lives of the three sisters who played pivotal roles in early 20th-century Chinese politics, but highlighted themes of nationalism which Malaysian Chinese could relate to.

Faridah (Personal communication, 2024) states:

"I wanted to tell the story of these three extraordinary women who made their mark during a time dominated by men. I also

2 A mid-sized township in Kuala Lumpur, with modern amenities and known for its mid to high range housing.

believe many strong Malaysian women would relate with the Soong sisters' struggles, and this story is tribute of sorts to them."

4. CONCLUSION

Faridah Merican's journey as a theatre actor, producer and director has demonstrated the trajectory of a colonized body's endeavour to reflect upon, question and shape a nation's cultural identity through theatre. Her work as an actor, together with her pioneering counterparts have collectively shaped and presented the Malaysian identity on the stage. This success encouraged her growth into a theatre producer and director, where she continuously questioned the meaning of being Malaysian, as a colonized people, and as a country finding its identity through its diverse communities. Her culturally thoughtful adaptations, inclusive programming, and entrepreneur leadership have challenged patriarchal structures and expanded the possibilities for Malaysian theatre, particularly for women. Her legacy lives not only in the productions she has staged, but arts institutions she has established, the younger generation of artistes she has groomed and inspired, and the postcolonial dialogue she has started and continued to encourage.

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