

CHANGE IN VALUES AND WORLD-VIEW: MALAYSIAN MALAYS IN PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

The Malays or indigenous people are by definition those who practise the Malay value culture and adhere to the value system. Malays are Muslims as their religion is Islam. Their values are very much influenced by their religious teachings and beliefs. Malays conform to Islam as it is a way of life to them. The perspectives of Malaysian Malay culture and value orientation in the fifties and sixties are used to illustrate behaviour and norms of the Malays as discussed in this paper. This is important as it helps moderate western theories appropriately using the context where the analysis is undertaken – Malaysia. Thus, experts' observations about the Malayan (Malaysian) Malay's values and beliefs with regard to culture and thought are used as basis of racial and cultural value system analysis. In short, the value system prevalent in the fifties and sixties are used with special consideration to the fact that values of the communities may have changed over time. With respect to the Malay values, no data-driven studies carried out by Malays on Malays have been found. There are studies on ethnicity and community but none that defined the Malay character and behaviour pattern explicitly. Mohd Taib (1988: 9) relates his view on this:

“[What] we need now is in-depth research on the Malay value orientation so that we will know the obstacles to change that are embedded in the traditional Malay culture.”

References to the value orientation of the Malays of the fifties and sixties are derived from observations made by local and foreign experts during the specified era. Values

observed in the fifties and sixties or approaching the fifties and leading to the early seventies are considered in this analysis. This is because the value orientation cannot be rigidly compartmentalized into a specific period. This is subjective and an approximate estimate of the period (fifties and sixties) is taken.

VALUES AND BELIEFS OF THE MALAYS

Values of the Malays have changed over time. Mohd Taib Osman (1988: 9) refers to the change in values and beliefs as cultural change in the values and world-view of the people with regard to the environment they live in. He defines values as the arrangement of measurement about what is desirable and what is not in a culture. According to him world-view is knowledge and beliefs about the environment found in a culture. He claims acts of behaviour in a society are based on the value system and the world-view, and both are the product of socialization.

This paper is evidence to claim that literature is a valid means of identifying social and other issues or problems, so that they may be resolved before they become critical. Literature pertaining to a particular period of a society is a reflection of its people's life. Literature is also a mirror of real events. According to New Historicism, history and literary texts create each other. This is because writers in a particular time in history write stories based on historical events that take place within that period. Hence, this paper hopes to investigate if conflicts are depicted in literature of the period between 1957 and 1961. The value orientations of the Malays in the fifties and sixties are highlighted in the analysis of the stories. The basis for text selection is these stories embody instances of conflicts and they were written by Malaysian writers in the period representing the four quarters (1957 to 1961).

The stories are:

Malay Stories

First Quarter

Longkang [Drain] by A. Samad Said (1958)

Kembali dari Perantauan [Home from Abroad] by Hasbima (1959)

Second Quarter

Di Tengah Keluarga [Stuck in the Middle] by Shahnnon Ahmad (1960)

Johor Baru [Johor Baru] by Arena Wati (1961)

FIRST QUARTER (1957 TO 1959)

Based on the analysis of the short stories, it is found that in the first quarter, the conflict in this situation seems to result not only from a clash between values and expectations of the younger and older generations but also from the anxiety of losing the son's commitment to take care of his aging parents. Ma'Anjang's (*Kembali dari perantauan* [Home from Abroad] 's negative reaction is one of an individual distrusting the English resulting from being provoked by earlier British people's behaviour in Malaya. The clash between values and expectations of the younger and older generations emerges when Bedul insists on marrying the English woman even though his mother is against the idea. Ma'Anjang feels racial prejudice and suspicion towards the British while Bedul thinks very highly of them. Ma'Anjang represents the older Malays who are religious and lives by the Muslim law. This is what being a Malay is all about. By constitutional and legal definition, a Malay is and must be a Muslim. For the Malays, to abandon Islam would be a renunciation of their way of life and loss of all legal and political rights accorded them "on the basis of their claim of being indigenous people. Islam gives the Malays bonds of communal identity as strong as those developed by social and political institutions. The Malays speak bahasa Melayu." Ibrahim goes on to say that "Malays practise the Malay customs, culture, and belief." Ibrahim (1980:16) adds as:

"Constitutionally the Malay is a person who speaks Bahasa, practises Islam and follows Malay customs. There are Muslim Indians and Chinese but they are not regarded as Malays."

The issues in the stories in the first quarter are that the younger educated Malays demonstrate tolerance of the other races especially towards the English people although they were once colonized by the British. Educated Malay sons prefer to use the English language compared to their mother tongue, the Malay language. English language is still seen as the colonial's legacy and is not much looked up to by the older Malays for fear of jeopardizing their national language status. This sudden change in beliefs, preferences and values in the younger generation of educated Malays is expected as values and beliefs are bound to undergo some changes as stated by Mohd Taib Osman. This change in values is indicated in their tolerance towards the English people. The educated young Malays are also demonstrating a change in their values when they bring their English girl friends back to their village. This is indeed a huge and daring act as the Malay value system does not permit pre-marital intimacy between sexes or with the other races. Interestingly, the

younger Malays are obviously having a new mindset to this when they are involved in relationships with the opposite sex and with the other races. The Malays in the fifties and sixties also adhered to social or communal values like saving face, giving face, filial piety, and respect for elders much like the Chinese and Indians too. Page (1968:17) observes how the younger members of a Malay group do not talk much or correct the elders as an act of saving face, giving face and respecting elders:

“And usually in groups, even though conversation may be general and not very serious, the younger members of the party do not talk much. You will rarely hear a younger brother correct the elder, or a son openly disagree with something his father has said.”

Hence, for the educated young Malays to oppose their elders is a huge unthinkable step then, as they relentlessly impinge on their ancestors' Malay value orientation and religious code. What made them deviate from their social norms? It is indeed reckless as the Malays are commonly observed to show filial piety and great respect towards their parents. Sheppard (1956:7) records Malay sons as having to wear a *songkok* or a Malay cap in their fathers' presence in the fifties. If the son is not wearing it, he demonstrates respect to his elders in this way, “He stood up when his father came in and crossed the floor to greet Mustafa, holding out his right hand, at the same time putting his left hand on the crown of his uncovered head, for he was not wearing a *songkok*” (Sheppard, 1956: 7). Now this practice is absent as Malay sons nowadays wear the *songkok* only for specific purposes such as going to the mosque during Hari Raya or other religious festivals.

If one were to view the young Malays' social change then with contemporary lens, it could be justified that the new generation of educated Malays is merely expressing their preference as normal human beings who are capable of loving, regardless of race and nationality. They are indefinitely visualizing the message to their elders that love is truly borderless and unconditional.

SECOND QUARTER (1960 TO 1961)

The issues discussed in the stories in the second quarter are clearly identifiable as the younger Malay generations in the rural and urban areas experiencing change in their beliefs and value systems where they do not seem to see eye to eye with their elders. They do not demonstrate anger towards the other races like the British, and educated Malay sons marry them without their parents' blessing. They do not seem to believe in

demonstrating hatred towards other races and are willing to adopt babies from other ethnic groups. This is undeniably a change in values which their elders are against. The younger urban Malays also showed this change and tolerance towards the other races when they acted freely and were not entrapped in the old-fashioned way of life. School children wear their uniforms differently and walk indifferently in front of their elders to indicate their openness. The working young Malays are no different in demonstrating their open-mindedness that could indicate modernization. The young men confess to dating and having fun with women and even visit brothels. This is definitely a big change in values as Muslims are not allowed to indulge in intimacy with the opposite sex without legal ties. Harper, C.L (1998) says according to Linear Models of Change, change is cumulative, non-repetitive, developmental and usually permanent. He cites examples from Redfield's theory about the transition from "folk" to "urban" societies, Durkheim's theory of the transition from mechanical to "organic" solidarity where these theories though different, agree on the broad historic pattern of change in human societies as involving the transition from small, undifferentiated societies with a homogeneous culture to large societies with a high degree of structural differentiation and a heterogeneous culture. Hence, amongst the Malays exists this new heterogeneous culture.

Foreign and local experts have observed that the Malays are gentle, courteous, polite and well-bred people. Ismail and Muhammad Azaham (2000:72) say that the Malay cultural personality is traditionally reputed to be genteel, polite or well-bred. Craig agrees with this when she says that the Malays are a gentle people and courtesy, etiquette, and good manners form an essential part of their everyday life" (Craig, 1979:77).

In fact values such as good manners and courtesy are embedded subtly in Malay proverbs which were created in relation to things found in the Malay environment. The reason was to advise Malay folk indirectly or subtly on how to live life the right way according to the values, beliefs and norms of the Malay culture. The indirectness or subtleness of the advice and message embedded in the proverbs are true exemplifications of how the Malays conform to the values of face-saving and avoiding embarrassment to others.

This indicates the tolerance of certain acts as a result of their association with the other races. The Western media also provides inviting pictures and scenes that are not permissible by the Muslim religion. What was once a taboo amongst the Malays is accepted by the younger generation and this indicates a new mindset. I believe this new desire to change is the effect of globalism that existed even in the fifties, perhaps not as rigorously as now, but it did cause differences in world-view and value orientation

amongst the Malays then. Harper, C.L. (1998) defines globalism as the product of the possibilities of profit-making within an expanding system of world trade, as well as of the deepening interdependencies regarding resources and environmental problems. He says it is the product of the penetration of “modern” technology, ideas, and culture.

Globalism will grow because it relates to how people make a living and *who* they depend upon to survive (Harper, 1998: 286).

CONTEMPORARY MALAYS

If we were to look at the values of the Malays in the fifties and sixties and compare these with the present values, we can see some very prominent changes in beliefs. Some values which were strictly followed and conformed to by the people then are not considered part of their value orientation now. Formerly, people were generally interested in taking care of the family. The father being the breadwinner claimed superiority and respect from members of the family. Hence, sons and daughters demonstrated unquestionable respect for the father. As time passed, priorities of the people changed. Now both parents work to support the family and more often than not leave their children to the care of maids and aging grandparents. Children still respect their father, but the duty to respect and uphold the superiority of the father is subjective. With the influence of western modernization seeping into the eastern culture, we find many of the old values and beliefs being neglected and forgotten. This causes changes in the cultures of the different races. However, not all cultures change at the same rate and pace. Mohd.Taib says:

“[There] are cultures that change fast while others are slow undergoing a change.”
(Mohd Taib, 1981: 9).

These Malay proverbs were written by the Malays a long time ago. Ismail and Muhammad Azaham (2000:73) say “the Malay cultural personality is transparently evidenced in the allegorical or simile forms of expression.” The proverbs were written for a purpose, that is, to advise and educate the Malay race. They were important and useful in the Malay people’s lives in the past. How significant are they to the Malays now? Perhaps the older generation still remembers and refers to the proverbs once in a while. The younger ones who prefer listening to hip hop and rap music to reading Malay proverbs may not see their significance. Syed Alwi (1960: xiii) professes his fear and sadness that more and more Malay values and customs are being affected by western influences. He wants the situation to be remedied to prevent more damage:

"[We] feel sad that many of the distinguished Malay values and customs are defaced due to Western influence and this damage must be repaired to avoid more damage."

In the past when life was undemanding and peaceful in the Malay villages, it was appropriate for the people, especially the women folk, to be gentle. As time went on, Malays faced more challenges and stiff competition as they joined the rat race in order to achieve their vision. Women now have professional vocations and are no longer confined to their homes. Thus, the pressure of modernization may cause Malays to lose some values like being genteel and courteous.

In the fifties and sixties the Malay community conformed to the values of neighbourliness and helping one another. Syed Alwi (1960:3) says if a family knew of a neighbour who had just moved in; the parents must quickly go to the new family to assist and to get to know the newcomers. Craig (1979:77) states that the Malays have 'community spirit'. She explains:

"Friends, relatives and neighbours feel a responsibility to help each other in times of joy, need and grief."

The Malays in the past offered whatever help they could give to the new neighbours. Now, this situation is still very apparent in the villages where people still help one another in times of joy and despair. The Malays in the villages still help their neighbours in wedding preparations, but it differs with the urban Malays. We have at times neighbours who do not know that others exist in their neighbourhood. This may be caused by the impact of modernization where residents work most of the time and fail to interact with their neighbours. Page (1968: 9) observes Malays' neighbourliness when he describes this.

"When a death occurs the village headman should be told and neighbours too. This may be done personally or by a special solemn bedok from the surau."

Forbes (1966: 192 – 193) describes the Malay religious practice in the villages as strong when he notes that "A kampong Malay must go to the mosque for the Friday prayers – the *Sembahyang Jumaat*. If he does not do so the *penghulu*, the headman, gets hold of him and gives him his dressing down". In fact, Forbes (1966) notices that if a kampong Malay neglects his religious duty a second time, the *penghulu* writes him a warning note and if

the Malay does not take heed of the warning note, he could be expelled from his village or kampong.

The headman (*penghulu*) as a leader in the community was given great respect by the people in his community and this resulted in his orders being obeyed by the people. Normally the headman was religious and ensured that his people strictly obeyed the Islamic teachings. This phenomenon is totally absent even in the villages now. No Malay man gets expelled from his own village because he misses the Friday prayers at the mosque. There could be various reasons for this. The Malay communities are no longer peasants or rubber tappers like they used to be. Some travel to town to do other kinds of odd jobs and perform their prayers there instead. Hence the headman (*penghulu*) may feel odd if he keeps track of the Malay men's attendance at the Friday prayers. Lifestyles change and changes in values are inevitable.

CONCLUSION

As time went on, certain value diminished amongst some Malays. S. Husin Ali (1981: 42) notices the different degrees of conformity to Islam amongst the Malays:

The attitude of an individual toward his religion differs from person to person; there are those who believe deeply and practise it fervently and there are those who hardly practise it at all, whose faith is only skin-deep, despite the fact that they have been born Muslims.

The change in value orientation amongst the Malays is still debatable in terms of its significance in this ever changing and challenging world. What was strictly adhered to by the Malays in the fifties and sixties may seem insignificant now as they strive to meet the demands of modernization.

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