

Winning the Hearts of the Malays: The Perspective of the Author of *Syair Tuan Hampris* Towards the Colonialists

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This study was aimed at identifying the author's perspective of the colonialists, and to analyse her relationship with one of them in her poem. The British colonisation of the Malay world in the nineteenth century gave rise to various reactions and attitudes among the indigenous communities, the majority of whom were opposed to colonisation, as recorded in traditional Malay literary works. Most of these works expressed the anxiety and hardships they encountered in life under the colonial government. Therefore, it would have been disturbing if any Malay writer were to heap praises on the British colonialists, more so if the writer happened to be a female, as according to the patriarchal system that dominated the conventional Malay literary world, women should be 'silent'. Nevertheless, this tradition was broken by Hajjah Wok Aisyah Nik Idris from Terengganu with her writing of *Syair Tuan Hampris*, in the early twentieth century. Ironically, in her poem, the author appears to have forgotten the miserable state of the Malays in the other states under the British administration. As such, did Hajjah Wok Aisyah have her own reasons for writing the way she did? Was the author of *Syair Tuan Hampris* captivated by the British administrator? Did the British administrator, J. L. Humphreys, succeed in winning the hearts of the Malays in Terengganu? The method of text analysis was employed in this study, guided by the eight ways proposed by the first British Resident General of the Federation of Malaya, Sir Frank Swettenham, to *Syair Tuan Hampris*. This study found that *Syair Tuan Hampris* invites its readers to savour the unique spectrum of relationships that existed between the colonised people, and the colonialists. The colonialists are no longer regarded as individuals who brought ruin and destruction to the local community, but instead, all their actions are held as being honourable. Thus, the author, being a woman, was able to perfectly explain her closeness to one such colonialist in the verses of her poem. In conclusion, *Syair Tuan Hampris* is a strong and direct proof that women had



a voice in the community at that time, even though they had to go against the conventions of Malay literature.

Keywords: *Author's perspective, Syair Tuan Hampris, Hajah Wok Aisyah Nik Idris, J. L. Humphreys, British colonialists*

INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century witnessed the rapid expansion of the power and influence of the West in its colonies, such as in the Malay world. In the first three centuries (1511–1800), these Western colonialists were not interested in getting to know and involving themselves in the colonised communities (Sweeney, 1987). The Portuguese, who conquered Malacca in 1511, are not considered successful colonialists because they failed to make any scholarly impression in their colonies (Ismail Hussein, 1974). Their presence, which was more economically motivated, did not have a profound impact on Malay literary activities. Nevertheless, during the years 1800–1850, in reaction to the Industrial Revolution in Europe, these colonialists were zealous in their desire to immerse themselves in the literature, culture, and language of the colonised communities (Ismail Hussein, 1974; Sweeney, 1987). At the same time, the Darwinism theory, which was developing rapidly in Europe, created concepts such as the ‘white man’s superiority’, and ‘the white man’s burden’, which reinforced the perspective of racism in Western society. The world community was then classified directly into inferior (colonised), and superior (colonialist) groups. Through the colonial ideology, European officials, and those who inherited their thinking, developed a biased attitude towards the indigenous peoples. These colonial scholars ignored studies on the negative aspects of colonialism and instead, claimed that ‘Western methods and cultures’ were superior, the British should rule the world, they felt entitled to reap the wealth of the East, and were the best administrators. At the same time, the colonialists blamed the colonised communities for being backward and exploitative. On the other hand, their exploitation of the colonised communities was considered an honourable gesture to bring about improvement, and as a form of education (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1977). Many research reports were produced on the colonised communities covering their flora and fauna, and culture and literature, and these have been safely preserved in academic journals, such as the *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (since 1878), and *Bijdragen and (Nieuwe) West-Indische Gids* (since 1919) (Knaap, 1994).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a number of Malay literary works appeared in the countries that were under Western rule. Where formerly, these literary works revolved around ‘*the palace and the Malay rulers*’, they were now being written to fulfil the requests of the Western administrators, who were referred to as the ‘white rajahs’. These literary works were

aimed at promoting the significance of their presence to the colonised communities (Sweeney and Phillips, 1975: xxiii). Thus, there emerged local individuals, such as Lau'din, Ahmad Rijaluddin, Abdullah al-Misri, Khatib Lokman, and several others, who wrote for their European patrons. The control of the 'European courts' that were based in Singapore over the Malay literary works that were produced, intensified when Abdullah Munsi emerged with his autobiography titled, *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah*, in 1838, and *Hikayat Abdullah*, in 1843. Abdullah Munsi's closeness to the colonialists, as their interpreter, was of immense benefit to him as a writer. He was free to experiment with a new and rapidly growing genre in Europe known as realism, in which works were produced that gave a true record of the life of a community. Accordingly, all the sensitive experiences of degradation and poverty were openly stated. Milner (1995) described Abdullah Munsi as the individual who initiated "[...] the use of first-person pronouns, reality descriptions of historical events and harsh criticisms of the culture, socio-political culture and practices of the Malay community". Obviously, the Malay authors were unfamiliar with this style of writing, and it even challenged the conventional Malay literature that had been passed down. It became worse when criticisms were boldly hurled against the palace and nobles to the extent that Malay readers began to feel discomfited by Abdullah Munsi. He was labelled an 'Anglophile', and a 'stooge of the English' because he dared to challenge the conventions that had been handed down. Nevertheless, it was this 'exception' that won him the title of 'Father of Modern Malay Literature', thereby directly marking the start of the modern era in the corpus of Malay literature (Skinner, 1978).

The Malay literature became more creative and liberal as the Europeans began to introduce Malay writers to different forms of literature and writing, such as journals, magazines, and newspapers, including stories about travels, history, and battles (Noriah Taslim, 2016). Literary activities gradually moved away from the scope of the palace, and new authors came forward from among the lower classes and ordinary (marginalised) people. In reality, these 'new' authors were no longer from among those who been raised by the palace traditions of the Malays. According to Parnickle (1995: 111):

"The mingling of Malay writers (referring to the palace authors) with Westerners was still limited as some of them were theologians or nobles, who were confined in their social environment and stayed away from all things Western and un-Islamic. As usual, it was the marginal people who little by little began to approach the culture of the West and its promoters, and they were the ones who eventually became the reformers of Malay literature".

The birth of these new authors was described by Skinner (1959) as a 'transition age', i.e. the phenomenon of a cultural transition from the traditional to the modern. Most of these authors wrote to captivate the hearts of their European patrons. For example, Abdullah al-Misri wrote *Hikayat Siam* in 1834 for the Dutch Governor General of Batavia, Philip van der Capellan,

while the author Muhammad Altiff ibn Kadir Muhayuddin wrote *Syair Perang Betawi* for Sir Stamford Raffles in 1811, in which he praised the latter's leadership in the war between the English and the Dutch, as in the excerpt below:

The clever General Raffles
Maintained peace in the country
All the people felt safe
On hearing his decrees

The wise General Raffles
Was famous everywhere he went
His name is perfect
Protecting those who are humble and lowly

Then, there was Syekh Abdullah Muhammad al-Misri, the author of *Hikayat Mareskalek*, which tells the story of the French Governor General of the East Indies, Maarschalk Herman Willem Daendels, who was stationed in Batavia (Zaini-Lajoubert, 2008: 13–15). In his work, he praised the leadership and wisdom of Maarschalk, who surpassed the English before him in his rule of Java, as described below:

“Hence, Mareskalek ruled favourably over the land of Java, earning himself the title of King of Mangkurat. He ruled the land of Java with courage and wisdom. God willing, Mareskalek's wisdom will be apparent in this paper [...]”.

(*Hikayat Mareskalek*, pg. 97)

The same could be said of the poem honouring Queen Victoria, on the occasion of her Golden Jubilee in 1887. Raimy Che-Ross (2008:53), a headman in Perak, expressed his delight over the reign of the English queen through the following poem:

Praise to Her Majesty the Queen
Queen Victoria, the wise one
Praise to the government of England
May it prosper and gain renown

In this world it's hard to find
Someone like Her Majesty, the Queen
Like a crown flower stalk
She shines brightly throughout the country

The phenomena described above clearly show that the Malay writers, during the colonial period under the patronage of the 'European Court', were unusually free to express themselves to their favoured rulers. Gone was the demand that all writers should heap praises on the Malay rulers. It was this freedom that ultimately resulted in most of the works, either in prose or poetry, embracing a new convention that was in line with the development of

Western colonisation in the Malay world, as mentioned below by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1998:27) in describing the 'power' that writers exercised over their readers:

“A writer tries to persuade his readers, to make them not only view a certain reality but also from a certain angle of vision. The persuasion can take the form of a direct appeal on behalf of a writer's doctrine or an indirect one through 'influencing the imagination, feelings and actions of the recipient' in a certain way toward certain goals and values, consciously or unconsciously held by him”.

Accordingly, the objective of this study was to identify the author's perspective of the colonialists and to analyse the relationship between the author, and a colonialist in her poem.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a text analysis was performed on *Syair Tuan Hampris*, with a focus on four activities to fulfil the two objectives of the study. To fulfil the first objective, which was identifying the author's perspective of the colonialists, the following activities were undertaken:

- i. The author's perspective of the colonialists in her poem was described.
- ii. This was compared with the guide to colonialists on 'winning the hearts' of the Malays.

The second activity was based on the guide on 'winning the hearts' of the Malays by the first British Resident General in the Federation of Malaya, Sir Frank Swettenham, in his 'Malay Sketches' in 1895. According to Swettenham (1895:20), in order to capture the heart of the Malay, a colonial official should fulfil the eight elements below, namely he must:

- a) Live in his country
- b) Speak his language
- c) Respect his faith
- d) Be interested in his interests
- e) Humour his prejudices
- f) Sympathise with him
- g) Help him in his troubles
- h) Share his pleasures

The first objective was achieved by comparing the author's perspective of colonialists in her work against the above guide on 'winning the heart' of the Malay by Swettenham (1895). This, in turn, led to the fulfilment of objective two, namely, to analyse the relationship between the author and the colonialist who was the focus of her poem, thereby directly

addressing concerns over her writing of *Syair Tuan Hampris*, which went ‘against the tide’ of that traditional era.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The east coast of the Malay Peninsula is often described as the birthplace of many religious scholars and renowned literary figures, such as Tok Kenali, Tok Pulau Manis, and a few others. However, it was also from here that a remarkable work emerged, one that was not produced by a stereotypical man from the Straits Settlements. This rare work was the *Syair Tuan Hampris*, which was written by Hajah Wok Aisyah binti Haji Nik Idris in 1928, in Batu Buruk, Terengganu. This poem attracted little attention compared to another contemporary piece, *Syair Tawarikh Zainal Abidin III* (Bottoms, 1965). This poem was first introduced by a Terengganu historian, Hj. Mohd. Salleh Hj. Awang (Misbaha), in his working paper at a seminar in 1975, and then, in 1978/79, it was studied by Ramlah bte Abdul Hamid of the Department of History at the University of Malaya to fulfil the requirements for her Bachelor of Arts.

This poem is comprised of 232 verses, and begins with a preamble that is different from that of other poetic works, such as the *Syair Perang Mengkasar*, *Syair Aceh* and *Syair Lampong Karam*, in which a doxology is used as the opening verse. Instead, this poem begins with a call to its readers not to reject what has been written:

Listen to a tale
A poem composed by a strange traveller
It's not meant to display wisdom
But to serve as a reminder

I'm not out to show how smart I am
But my only desire is to teach
Wherever I am able to do so
My plea is that I will not be rejected

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 1)

This is because what the author is about to write is unique in the sense that the main focus of this poem is a ‘foreigner’, namely, a ‘colonialist’. For this reason, the poet uses her wisdom to strike a balance between her loyalty to the ruling king, and the figure that is the centrepiece of her work. In examining this work, it was found that in the first part of the poem, the author depicts the greatness of Sultan Zainal Abidin III, while in the second part, she describes an important figure in the history of modern Terengganu, namely, J. L. Humphreys, a colonial administrative officer who served from 1915–1925 (Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, 1988). In this poem, the author praises the sultan as a ‘royal ulama’ and recounts significant events in his life, particularly his pilgrimage to Mecca. It was because of the sultan’s personal interest in religion during his reign that Terengganu prospered and progressed through the blessings

of the Almighty. He was the ruler of Terengganu who succeeded in maintaining the 'independence' of the State from British colonial influence. Following the signing of the Terengganu-English Treaty on 24 May 1919 in Singapore, the British officer, who was formerly transferred to the state as a 'representative', was now being sent as an 'advisor' (Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, 1988). Meanwhile, the author inserts the account of J. L. Humphreys, so that the dedication and good deeds of this gentleman will remain fresh in the memory of the people of Terengganu in view of the progress achieved by the State during his term of service as the British Advisor.

This poem draws attention to a specific person, namely, J. L. Humphreys, who was probably deliberately selected by Hajah Wok Aisyah Nik Idris. What stands out about this female writer is that she was not bound by the 'Malay Literature of the Malay Courts' or the 'Malay literature of the European Courts'. Instead, she was an independent writer who was able to convey her own personal worldview. Muhammad Yusoff Hashim (1988) categorised her as an 'amateur writer' who was special compared to other contemporary female writers from the nobility at that time, such as Tengku Dalam Kalthum binti Tengku Wook Khazaki, who wrote the *Syair Tawarikh Zainal Abidin III*, as well as Tengku Mariam binti Sultan Ahmad, who arranged the manuscript, *Syair Perkahwinan Dahulu Kala*.

The courage of Hajah Wok Aisyah Hj. Nik Idris in stepping forward as a writer stemmed from her background of being constantly surrounded by British officers. Her husband, Haji Busu, was the Secretary of Islamic Religious Education and Registrar of the Terengganu High Court. This provided her with the opportunity to get close to this group and to choose the British Advisor, J. L. Humphreys, as the main character for her work, while forgetting the 'struggle' that the traditional Malay rulers had to go through with the British officers when this advisory system was first introduced to the State. Ironically, by focussing on this 'British' personality in her work, the author appears to have forgotten the struggle of the Malay community in dealing with the confusion created by the British administration in other states. However, if one looks at it rationally, Hajah Wok Aisyah had her own reasons for writing the way she did. Thus, to understand what was so special about J. L. Humphreys from the perspective of the author of *Syair Tuan Hampris*, Swettenham's (1895) suggestion on the ways of 'winning the heart of the Malay' was applied to every action of this colonial figure.

AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE OF COLONIALISTS IN SYAIR TUAN HAMPRIS

The entry of Islamic tradition into Malaya introduced 'the deeds of the reed pen' to Malay writers (Braginsky, 1993), who then became aware of the importance of literature in their lives or what was termed by Braginsky (1993; 2004) as 'literary self-awareness'. This literary awareness, which accompanied the development of Islam, enabled the people to know the goals, purposes, essence, facts, types, and the process of literary creativity in line with matters related to the 'deeds of the reed pen'. Clearly, the literary awareness that was instilled

among the Malay writers following the arrival of Islam caused these intellectuals to realise that they were not writing in vain. An examination of *Syair Tuan Hampris*, composed by Hajah Wok Aisyah binti Hj. Nik Idris, revealed that the author strove to produce a work that fulfilled this ‘literary self-awareness’ for the benefit of her readers. More importantly, this work would promote the reputation of the colonial administrator as the British advisor in Terengganu, which clearly was in contradiction with previous works. Most of the works produced during the colonial period incited the Malays to fight for freedom from colonialism. However, it was discovered that the author of *Syair Tuan Hampris* was more than happy with the presence of this personality and was even sad when he was transferred to another state on completing his term of service in Terengganu.

Hence, to describe the author’s perspective of the colonialists in this poem, this study used the eight ways given by Swettenham (1895:20) in his book, *Malay Sketches*, to ‘win the heart’ of the Malay. According to Swettenham (1895:20), to capture the heart of the Malay, a colonial officer must live in his country, speak his language, respect his faith, be interested in his interests, humour his prejudices, sympathise with him, help him in his troubles, and share his pleasures, as explained below.

i) An administrator who is loved by the whole community

According to Swettenham (1895), to win the hearts of the Malays, a colonial officer must live in their country, in order to assimilate the customs and culture of the colonised community. He must possess sufficient knowledge to carry out his responsibilities efficiently and effectively in the colony. In the introduction to the poem, *Syair Tuan Hampris* (hereinafter referred to as STH), the author mentions the educational level of J. L. Humphreys, the British advisor in Terengganu. Indirectly, this suggested that the British advisor assigned to them was not just ‘any individual’ but was someone who was highly knowledgeable about administrative matters and was capable of adapting himself during his long term of service in Terengganu. This verse in the poem, “He was educated at a university in the village of Oxford”, is meant to inform the Malay reader that J. L. Humphreys, with his great knowledge and fine character, is capable of interacting with the colonised community, as in the excerpt below:

His refined manner of speaking
Is matchless and irreplaceable
He deserves to be a state official
A government representative who can be anywhere

He is gentle in his actions
Courteous in his speech
His appearance matches his name
Everyone has nothing but praise for him

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 2)

The author also includes the information that J. L. Humphreys served in Terengganu for ten years, when she mentions, “It took approximately ten years to put things in order in this state” (*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 14). Added to this, was the verse: “Because of his loving and friendly nature, he was able to remain long in this country” (*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 20), which proves that J. L. Humphreys had followed Swettenham’s guide on the importance of living in the colony to win the hearts of the people.

ii) An administrator who was admired for his fluency in the language

There is a saying, that ‘language is the soul of a people’. As such, every colonial officer should desire to enter the soul of the people by learning to speak their language. The author describes J. L. Humphreys as someone who was fluent in the dialect of the Terengganu Malays, until he proved to be even better than the locals themselves, as in the following verses:

The young master was highly skilled
He wasn’t awkward in speaking Malay
He was even better than the Malays themselves
He spoke on topics in a refined manner

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 2)

iii) An administrator who respected Islam

The murder of J.W.W. Birch in 1875 was a warning to every colonial officer, including J. L. Humphreys. Even though they were British advisors, they had no right to interfere in matters concerning the religion, customs, and culture of the Malays. According to the author of STH, in his wisdom, J. L. Humphreys introduced civil laws on marriage and divorce to deal with this situation systematically. Marriage and divorce forms had to be completed so that all the marriage documents would be properly recorded and maintained. The excerpt below captures the situation after the regulations on marriage and divorce had been introduced, to show the great respect that the British advisor in Terengganu had for Islam, and how he did not arbitrarily interfere in such matters:

One more thing that he did
New rules beyond our custom
Marriage and divorce were to be documented
Both being serious matters

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 14)

The reason why he did this
Was because in this state
Many are divorcing their spouses

And quarrelling throughout the day

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 15)

The rules are very firm
Divorce and marriage must be documented
Report first to the office
If not, you will be penalised

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 15)

iv) An administrator who wrote in Malay

The author of STH describes how this British advisor mastered Jawi, which was the main method of writing in the official system of communication at that time. The fact that he personally wrote in Jawi proved that he was serious in his commitment to the people of Terengganu, to the extent that he took pains to master everything that was practised in the community, including their writing. Indirectly, this reflected that J. L. Humphreys took pains to be interested in the practices and interests of the community, as in the excerpt below:

He wrote in the Malay language
To have rules upstream and downstream
Permanent laws and schemes
For ministers, officers, and headmen

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 14)

v) An administrator who wisely handled all social prejudices

According to Swettenham (1895:20), a British officer must win the heart of the Malay by wisely handling his prejudices. The author of STH describes how a section of the Malay community in Terengganu was opposed to the action taken by Sir Humphreys to build roads and markets. However, his intelligent and interpersonal style of communication drowned their opposition until the Malays ultimately admitted that his wise plans and actions were for the advancement of Terengganu. When J. L. Humphreys did not take their criticisms of his action seriously, he won the trust of the community, as mentioned below:

When it was time to widen the roads
A notice was sent out by the Town official
Those living in the houses along the road
Had to vacate immediately

On hearing about the notice
Many of those concerned
Began to say without knowing for sure
“This must be the White Man’s idea”

Some, on the other hand, replied
“He is doing this for our benefit
By making the roads even
The horse-drawn carriages can easily pass.”

He was not highly praised
But when the roads and markets were completed
All the people set up their stalls there
Both men and women gathered together

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 7)

vi) An administrator who sympathises with the problems of the people

Poverty was a major problem for the Malay community until the early twentieth century. In STH, the author mentions that the presence of J. L. Humphreys in Terengganu was like a ‘shining light’ for the Malays. Several schemes, involving government staff at various levels, were improved in a fair manner with more impartial rules that were not constrained by any discrimination, as in the verses below:

Having rules for everything
From low to high schemes
New laws were instituted
With separate schemes for ministers and officers

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 14)

vii) An administrator who helped them in their trouble or distress

Hajah Wok Aisyah Nik Idris wanted future generations to know about the great British advisor in Terengganu, known as J. L. Humphreys, not only in terms of his large contributions, but also his willingness to ‘get down to the field’ and risk his life to get rid of a wild animal (tiger) that had killed and injured several people in Kuala Terengganu. According to Muhammad Yusof Hashim (1988), the tiger was shot dead at Nesan Empat near Kedai Hilir, about one mile away from Kuala Terengganu. To stop the tiger from further endangering the lives of the people of Terengganu, J. L. Humphreys courageously shot it. The community held his service in high regard because he was willing to risk his life for the safety and well-being of others. Thus, as mentioned by Swettenham (1895:20), to win the hearts of the Malays, a colonial administrator must be prepared to help them, especially when they are troubled or distressed. It was here that J. L. Humphreys emerged as the ‘hero of the community’, an accomplishment which, according to the author, should be remembered forever. The verses of the poem below are evidence of this phenomenon:

I know only this one thing
When the tiger entered the state
Sir Humphreys himself came

Took precise aim and shot the tiger

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 18)

He was destined by God, who is rich in blessings
To exercise his power as a servant of God
The mighty tiger was dead
Shot by Sir Humphreys

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 18)

viii) **An administrator who shares in their pleasures**

If a colonial administrator succeeds in building the trust of the local community, then his presence in that community becomes a significant one. The author of STH was able to prove this through the many deeds of J. L. Humphreys, who provided the people with several infrastructures, including: widening and improving roads; markets; establishing several government departments to handle the development of the State, such as the Public Works Department; setting up dispensaries to supply medical drugs to the people; teaching the people the importance of time by building a clock tower in the centre of Kuala Terengganu town; establishing mosques, and police stations to facilitate the systematic implementation of all regulations and civil laws; and introducing golf, and cricket, as appropriate sports for the nobility and elites. According to the Annual Report of Terengganu in 1923, and 1924 (Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, 1988), the roads that were widened included the road connecting Gong Kapas to Bukit Payung; from Losong to Cabang Tiga, and Kuala Terengganu to Bukit Jong. Meanwhile, the stalls or markets were arranged in a systematic and orderly manner, such that by the early twentieth century, the people of Terengganu had three shopping centres, namely, Kedai Hilir, which was close to Tanjung, Pasar Tanjung, and Kedai/Pasar Payang, which is the central market in Kuala Terengganu, even still today (Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, 1988).

His efforts at development really touched the heart of the author of STH, who regarded him as ‘the person responsible for bringing progress’ to the people of Terengganu. This coincided with Swettenham’s (1895:20) view, that anyone wishing to win the hearts of the Malay must first and foremost be prepared to share in the pleasures of the community by bringing about any form of development that can improve their standard of living and their social status, as mentioned in the excerpt below:

He was not highly praised
But when the roads and markets were completed
All the people set up their stalls there
Both men and women gathered together

The first thing that was seen to be successful
Was the Public Works office
Under the administration of this noble gentleman

Everything was made easy by him

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 7)

Secondly, just take a look
At the medical dispensary
Health was available to the people
Rich and poor were offered treatment

The government offices were huge and long
With the court on the opposite side
Beside it was a field
For games to be played in the morning and evening

This is what I heard
From sportsmen in the state
As well as from merchants
All spoke well of the master's wisdom

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 8)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AUTHOR AND THE FIGURE

Hajah Wok Aisyah Nik Idris also included some of her personal viewpoints that reflected her closeness to the British advisor, J. L. Humphreys. Indirectly, her readers could sense that there was a unique friendship between the author of STH, and the British advisor, as evidenced below:

i) The author knew the figure well

From the beginning of the poem, the author includes several personal details about this British advisor, so much so that her readers would know about his marital status, and his parents, whom he had left behind in England. In reality, this awkward situation can only be explained by the fact that the two of them were close friends. For example, verses such as: "It is said that he is still a bachelor" (pg. 2), and "He is a young single man, while his parents are living over there in Europe" (pg. 2), clearly prove that the author was close to the individual who was introduced by her in her work.

ii) Every incident in his life is remembered

The author's acquaintance with J. L. Humphreys was further proven by her narrations of his preferences and hobbies, and about the capsizing of the boat carrying J. L. Humphreys to the ship for his return to England. The author describes both these incidents at length and in extensive detail, especially the accident that happened to her British friend. At the time, the huge turnout of people of all races in Terengganu to bid farewell to him reflected the extent

of their love for this figure. The following excerpt from the poem is evidence of this phenomenon:

Both golf and cricket are as one
Sir Humphreys excelled in both
He was always the champion
Known everywhere for his renown

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 8)

At one time, as narrated
He went on a holiday
Back to his land in Europe
Taking with him some proper appliances

Crowds of Malays and Chinese
Reportedly in huge numbers
A wealthy Chinaman accompanied his departure
The so-called Towkay Ang Sun Huat

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 9)

The boat capsized
Breaking into pieces, the people were drifting
Some drifted here and others there
Their hands groping in panic

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 12)

iii) Praying for his well-being

In several previous works that were published before STH, such as *Hikayat Abdullah*, *Syair Hikayat Mareskalek*, *Syair Queen Victoria Golden Jubilee*, and several others, the authors prayed for the well-being of their 'colonial masters'. Their action of praying that the British administrators would be blessed by Allah with a long life was a phenomenon that took place during the British colonisation of Malaya. Therefore, it is no surprise that the friendship that Hajah Wok Aisyah Nik Idris shared with J. L. Humphreys led her to dedicate several verses of her poem, as below, to praying for his well-being, so that future generations would remember the significance of his contributions to the people of Terengganu:

His good deeds are too many to be recorded
He made this into a civilized state
He was a wise advisor
It is difficult to get or find such a person

(*Syair Tuan Hampris*, pg. 15)

iv) His tearful transfer

The author expresses the grief experienced by the people of Terengganu in the early twentieth century on hearing that J. L. Humphreys was being transferred to Kedah after serving for almost ten years in Terengganu. The author invites the audience to recall the ‘tale of the tiger’ that was terrorising Terengganu until this British advisor risked his life to save the community from further attacks. She reminds the people of Terengganu that the noble efforts of this figure, to put an end to this terror, can never be repaid. The verses in the poem below attest to the sadness that was felt, as they recalled his good deeds:

I cannot go on with my eulogy
Because my heart is really down
The tale of the tiger is at an end
Now we hear that he is to be transferred

(Syair Tuan Hampris, pg. 19)

On hearing of this news
He cannot delay any longer
The order to sail has been issued
All the officials are heartbroken

(Syair Tuan Hampris, pg. 20)

v) Author imagines the absence of this personality

The creative imagination of the author of STH was proven in this poem, which reflected her closeness to this figure. It is highly possible that through her conversations and the books read by her, she was able to describe in detail the season of winter in England, as though she had been there. This extraordinary appreciation shows that the author was constantly thinking of this figure, even though he was no longer by her side. The verses in which the author described the winter season in England as “Slippery and crystal clear”, “all the leaves fell off immediately”, and “Even the light of the sun was dimmed” (pg. 24), explain the author’s interest until she was able to describe a weather that she herself had never experienced.

vi) The author continues to search for news, even though the person is no longer in Terengganu

The beautiful nostalgia of J. L. Humphreys when he was still in Terengganu remained fresh in the memory of the author. His absence was no excuse for forgetting him. The author continued to take an interest in his situation until the end of his life. This implied that they were in a close relationship with each other, where they kept each other informed, so much so that the author knew about all the latest developments in the life of her friend. This situation is apparent in the excerpt from the poem, as given below:

During this time, he resided
In Jeselton in North Borneo
He became a great governor
Receiving his appointment from London

(Syair Tuan Hampris, pg. 27)

This letter is coming to an end
The tale of him who was transferred
From Terengganu to Kedah
And ending with his arrival in Borneo

(Syair Tuan Hampris, pg. 28)

From a very willing heart
That did not quite understand the rules
Memories have been created in the annals
His good deeds will not be forgotten

(Syair Tuan Hampris, pg. 29)

CONCLUSION

In reviewing STH, readers are invited into a unique spectrum of relationships between colonised communities, and their colonisers. In STH, the colonialists are no longer regarded as individuals who brought ruin and destruction to the community, but instead, every action of theirs is viewed as being honourable. Moreover, the poem was composed by a female writer who was able to perfectly describe their close relationship. The application of Swettenham's (1895) view to the behaviour of J. L. Humphreys, as depicted in the poem, proved that he fitted the personality of one who was able to win the hearts of the colonised community. Every colonial officer must have a solid knowledge, deep respect for the religion, customs and culture of the community, and the ability to assimilate every form of belief and way of life of the colonised community, if he is to be successful. That is why this poem is so special, even though its main focus is the 'colonialists' because there was harmony in that international relationship, which was not restricted by race, beliefs, and religion.



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