

WOMEN AND FAMILY LIFE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ARABIC AND MALAY FOLK TALES

Rahmah Binti Ahmad H. Osman¹, Nur Aini Binti Ariffin², Toyyib Abiodun Mustapha³,
Usman Jaffer⁴, Amany Suleiman⁵, Saleh Alzeheimi⁶

Abstract

Literary writers have divided Arabic literature mainly into two complementary areas –poetry and prose. This article attempts to offer a comparative analysis research focusing on the image of women in family life as mothers, wives, and sisters in both Arabic and Malay folk tales. It is based on selected stories from two famous books: *Hikayat Sha'biyyah* by Ahmad Ziyād Mahbak and *Himpunan 366 Cerita Rakyat Malaysia* by Othman Puteh and Aripin Said. This study adopts literary analysis and comparative methods. Therefore, through these methods the image of women in family life as a mother, wife, and sister in selected texts are introduced. The comparative method has also been used to do a comparative analysis between the image of women in Arabic and Malay folk tales. This study reveals that the image of women in both folk tales shares several common features, suggesting the universality of folk tales. There are also minor differences between the two genres of folk tales because of factors such as environmental and cultural differences and the tale-teller's inclinations and preferences.

Keywords: Malay Women/Arab folk tales, mother, wife, sister, *Hikayat Sha'biyyah*.

INTRODUCTION

Every country has a folk tale that sets it apart from others. If the English are famous for Robin Hood and Jack and The Beanstalk, the Malays have stories like Hang Tuah and Raja Bersiong that they have received from their forefathers. Arabs, for example, have their own unique and well-known stories, such as Juha. However, we believe a people's folk tale may be identical to another's, such as the Arabic tale of The Monkey and The Turtle and the Malay tale of Monyet dan Kura-kura; and the Malay tale of Bawang Putih Bawang Merah (Garlic and Onion) is comparable to Cinderella.

Folk tales offer individuals valuable lessons and pearls of wisdom by depicting people's cultures, traditions, and customs, as well as their daily lives. As a result, it is not surprising that there are so many folktales about women's lives, both happy and dreadful. These stories depict the significant roles that women play in family and society. Women play a variety of roles in

¹ Professor at the Dept. of Arabic Language and Literature, AHAS Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences; ISTAC, IIUM.

² Nur Aini Binti Ariffin, Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, UiTM Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau, 71300 Rembau, Negeri Sembilan Darul Khusus.

³ Toyyib Abiodun Mustapha, Dept. Arabic & Islamic Studies, Nigerian Islamic Association of Chicago, 932 W Sheridan rd, Chicago IL, 60613.

⁴ Correspondent Author- Assistant Professor at Dept. of Fundamental and Interdisciplinary Studies, AHAS Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences; ISTAC, IIUM.

⁵ Associate Professor University of Al-Azhar Alexandria, Egypt

⁶ Zakirat Oman, Sultanate of Oman.

their families, whether as a mother, wife, or daughter; in the educational context as a teacher or lecturer; and the cultural context as a critic or poet. These roles incite that many poets and authors tend to depict women in their writings. Hence, an array of images are found in poetry, proverbs, short stories, and folktales. It is through the lens of these images, this research will attempt to uncover the depiction of women and family life in Arabic and Malay folk tales.

There are many prior studies and research on folktales, however this research has yet to find studies that addresses the research area of the present study. This research has made substantial and ongoing efforts to locate resources like books, unpublished research, and studies that are directly or indirectly relevant. Rosni Samah (1997) studied the tales of Qamar al-Zaman in ancient Arabic literature and briefly discussed Malay literature in "The Folk Tales between Arabic and Malay Literature. This research is undoubtedly beneficial, but it does not address the comparison of the Arabic folk tale, Qamar al-Zaman with a focus on its legendary origin, and the biography of Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan, as well as an analysis of the tale of Prince Hamza Al-Bahluan with its heroic origin.

Likewise, a study was carried out by Rahmah (1997) to examine the many attitudes of women in life and their various images as represented in Jordanian and Malaysian short stories in Jordan and Malaysia between 1970 and 1995. The above study has since been a basis for numerous research.

Additionally, Maimanah Samsuri (2011) investigated the image of women and their views as mothers, wives, and girls in family life in "The Image of Women in Abdelhamid Jouada Al-Sahar's Novels: A Critical Analytical Study." Her findings were beneficial for the present study albeit, it lacked the depiction of women as sisters as well as the comparison between Arabic and Malay folk tales which is a novelty of this study.

Finally, in her book *The Image of Women in the Malay Novel*, Siti Khariah Mohd Zubir (2008) discussed the image of women in fifteen novels by Malay story tellers from a socio-political, socioeconomic, and sociocultural perspectives. Her approach and how the image of women in the novel is analysed, contributed to the methodology in this study.

METHODOLOGY

The present work uses a comparative analysis method to investigate the image of women in Arabic and Malay folk tales, determining the similarities and differences between them. It will focus on the image of women in family life as a mother, wife, and sister by analysing stories from two well-known books: Ahmad Ziyad Mahbak's *Hikayat Sha' biyyah* and Othman Puteh and Aripin Said's *Himpunan 366 Cerita Rakyat Malaysia*.

Results and Discussion

The Image of Women in The Arab and Malay Selected Folk Tales.

Image of Women in the Arab Folk Tales

The Mother's Image

If the house is the child's first school, the mother is the child's first teacher. A mother's job is one of the most challenging occupations in her children's destiny. As a result, the mother has

been shown in numerous forms by the writers in their varied works, in the appreciation of her noble role and sacrifice for the well-being and prosperity of her children. The mother's image in three selected Arab folk tales, *Ibnu Al-Harami* (The Son of a Thief), *Al-Lazi Yasriqu Bayd Yasriqu Jamalán* (Who Steals an Egg, Steals a Camel), and *Al-Sayf wa Al-Shita'* (The Summer and Winter) will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The Son of a Thief tells the tale of a mother's capacity and perseverance to raise her son and prepare him for a brighter future following the death of her husband, who was a thief who left her with nothing after his demise. Despite her suffering and poverty, this mother was patient and worked hard to manage her son's needs. She ensured that her son attended school while also caring for him and providing him with sound counsel. Over time, the boy excelled in literature and became known for his good behaviour and values and succeeded in completing his schooling (Mahbak. 1999. p. 747).

The mother's spirituality and steadfastness in her religious beliefs are evident in the way she taught her son about morality, honesty, and loyalty and in her constant and continuous advice, counsel and guidance to obey Allah's commands (Mahbak. 1999. p. 747).

Juxtaposition, the tale Who Steals an Egg Steals a Camel indulges on the danger and outcome of pampering children and the likelihood of wrong upbringing. The title of the tale does not refer to a specific "egg" or "camel". The moral of the tale deduces the prospect of a person who indulges in petty crime, to commit bigger crime is viable.

The tale narrates of a forlorn mother who over zealously pampered her son and allowed him to act and behave as he pleased. His upbringing led him to robbery and crime. It started off with the child stealing an egg. The mother did not reprimand him for his action. Instead, she condoned his behaviour. On the next occasion, he brought home a chicken from his second heist, followed by a honeypot from the third. Similar acts were repeated and were left unaddressed. Consequently, he became bolder and started to rob houses and business premises. Subsequently, he attempted the King's Palace. He was detained and sentenced to death by hanging. The tale ends with him begging for his mother's forgiveness and blessings, leaving the mother in remorse and desolation.

The tale Summer and Winter, describes the friction and animosity between a dreadful wife and her mother-in-law. The wife manipulated her husband into believing that his mother was evil and cruel to his wife and consequently manoeuvred her husband into abandoning his unconscious mother in the woods. Upon gaining consciousness, the mother was shocked to find herself alone at the riverbank. Refusing to believe that her son and his wife were capable of such cruelty, the mother consoled herself that her son had accidentally left her there to attend to his work and did not mean any harm to her. And so, she helplessly but patiently waited for his return until she fell asleep out of exhaustion. Later, she decided to attempt her journey home. On her journey home, she came across an old man and a youngster. They persuaded her to rest. They later asked her if she preferred winter or summer and allowed her to proceed home. When she finally arrived home, she was met and greeted by her son who was shocked but relief to see her. He broke down in tears and begged for her forgiveness. She hugged and consoled him and began to relate her experiences in the woods. As she was narrating, diamonds

came out of her mouth for every word spoken. The wife was dumbfounded by what transpired. Overcome by greed, she later urged her husband to repeat the experience with her own mother, hoping that the same good fortune will recur. Unwary, the imprudent husband obeyed his wife and left his mother-in-law at the same location he left his own mother. Quite the reverse, when the mother-in-law made her way back to her daughter's house, she instantaneously started cursing her daughter and husband. Snakes and scorpions sprang out of her mouth for every harsh word spoken.

The Wife's Image

A study on the following selected Arabic folklores: *Hikayat Al-Sadiq* (My Friend's Tale); *Qalb Al-Umm* (The Heart of a Mother); *Sadiq Al-'Umr* (Friend of a Lifetime); *Barakat Al-Zahab* (Blessing of Gold) and *Shaqqat Al-'Usfur* (The Bird's Cage) has revealed that Arabic folk tales have depicted multiple and different images of wives, encompassing images of the tolerant, kind-hearted, lazy, evil and unjust wife.

My Friend's Tale exhibits a neglectful wife who was not only disrespectful but also abusive towards her aged father and mother-in-law in the absence of the husband. The wife refused to tend to any housework. With abusive words, she forced the mother in-law to carry out all the housework herself. The mother knew how much her son loved and adored his wife and how happy the son was after marriage. Hence, the mother decided to withhold the truth from her son and continued to endure the wife's abuse. She forced herself to shoulder all the chores in the house despite her health condition and complications. The wife continued to act as the good, kind-hearted and affectionate daughter-in-law in the presence of her husband. As soon as her husband leaves for work every morning, she will resume her evil self, leave the mother-in-law to slog in the house while she stayed in her room the whole day, every day until just before the husband came home. After several failures to get the wife to change and make amends, the father out of frustration and disappointment, revealed what has transpired thus far to his son. The son was shocked and was in disbelief. Determined to uncover the truth, the next day, he decided to trick his wife into believing that he has left for work. He positioned himself in the house where he could observe the wife without her knowing so. He then witnessed the true side to his wife while she started to abuse his beloved aged sickly mother. The son was so upset and disgusted with what he witnessed. He instantaneously divorced his wife and ordered her to leave his house (Mahbak, 199, p. 199).

The tale of The Mother's Heart reveals the evil story of a wicked and obnoxious wife who had her husband sacrifice his own mother's life for hers. The story unfolds with a wife who despised her mother-in-law. She was jealous of the love, affection and dedication that the husband had for his mother. She wanted his love and attention all for herself. Consequently, she pretended to suffer from a strange ailment which required the heart of another human as a cure. The husband was stumped as to where he might get a human heart. The wife conspired with an unethical doctor to follow through with her plan. Bewitched by her beauty and charm, the husband began to obey all her commands and indulged in all her whims and fancies. She continued to coax the husband to follow through with her evil plan. She pretended to be near death. She convinced him to sacrifice his mother's heart to save her. In desperation, the husband resorted

to killing his own mother to save his wife. He murdered his mother in the orchard and cut out her heart. Upon returning to his house, he suddenly had a change of heart and realized what he had done. He was consumed by remorse and regret for murdering his own mother. Ashamed and mortified, he grabbed a knife and stabbed himself to death.

The *Sadiq Al-'Umr* tale on the other hand narrates depicts the actions of an immature wife. Unable to cope with the tribulations and challenges of married life, the wife decides to end her marriage and return to the comfort of her parent's.

The tale of the Blessing of Gold, on the other hand, describes the struggles and plight of a patient wife confronted by a chauvinist husband who constantly undermines and demoralizes her. The tale narrates the story of a woman recognised for her impeccable character and manners. Many begged for her hand in marriage but failed to deliver the exuberant dowry set by her father. One day, a very rich man presented himself to her father with the dowry requested. He even managed to fill the pool built by her father with gold. Customarily, the woman left her father's home and travelled with her husband to his house. The house was in the outskirts and in a remote and isolated area. Her husband was a merchant and trader. The nature of his work entailed frequent travelling and prolonged absence from his wife, who was left in solitude behind locked doors. She was prohibited visitors and from stepping out of her house. Consequently, she had to adapt and cope with her new lifestyle and the loneliness and solitude which entailed. She consoled herself with make believe friends and company to talk to. She even covered a chair with a white cloak and pretended that there was a person sitting on the chair keeping her company. It was to this make-belief person, that the wife shared her grievances, frustrations and aspirations (Mahbak, 1999, p. 424)."

Not long after, the woman became pregnant and gave birth to a lovely baby boy. Uncannily, her husband did not exhibit or express any form of joy or happiness to the birth of a son. In fact, he took the baby, passed it on to his servant and ordered the servant to kill the baby and cook his wife and himself a meal out of the baby. This preposterous occurrence continued and was repeated with the birth of each of his two other sons. The wife endured the torment of losing her children and remained patient and loyal to her husband. Twenty years later, her husband requested her to accompany him to the wedding of one of his relatives. When she attended the ceremony and witnessed the joy in the faces of the three grooms and their wives, she started reminiscing about her three sons, who, if alive, would be at the age of the grooms. She was consumed by despair and sadness and could no longer suppress her feelings. She broke down in tears. It was then when the husband confessed to her that her three sons were never actually killed and that the three grooms were her three sons. The woman ran towards her sons and hugged them. They stayed three days in the company of their three sons and family before they left for home. The woman continued to be the loving and faithful wife until she died.

The fifth tale narrates of a wise wife. The Bird's Cage exposes the reader to the wife's wisdom in handling her Scroogelike miserly husband. Her husband never refused an invite for food. However, he never invited anyone to his house. Hence, he has never reciprocated any invite. His friends were very annoyed and disheartened by his behaviour and decided to avoid his company. Frustrated by this situation, the wife wisely came up with a plan which will enable

her to prepare a scrumptious feast for her husband's friends, and simultaneously save her husband's honour. She ran through the idea with her husband and assured him that she will only utilise a few of the birds in the cage for the feast. Her husband pessimistically agreed to the idea. Accordingly, the husband went to the market the next day and bought a chicken. He later handed over the chicken to his wife for the feast. Afterwards, he went to invite his friends for supper at his house. Concurrently, the wife went to another market to sell items which she had gathered the day before from her house. She then used the money she obtained from the sale to prepare and purchase a scrumptious cuisine at a reasonable price. Subsequently, she diligently arranged everything according to her plan. She deliberately hung the bird's nest by the front door to appease her husband. When the husband arrived with the guests, both he and the guests were enthralled and speechless by the sight of the remarkable and delectable spread on the table. Needless to mention, everything went as planned. Everyone was happy and appeased. Not only did the wife managed to appease her husband and the guest, but also restore the honour and good name of her husband. Gratified, the husband began to amend his ways from that day onwards.

The Sister's Image

The eldest sister, in many cultures are regarded as the second mother in a family. Accordingly, many of the tasks and chores at home are assumed by her, especially in the absence of the mother. The image of the eldest sister is encapsulated in many Arabic folk tales. The tale of *Solehah* (The Devoted) and *Al-Ukht wa Al-Kanz* (The Sister and the Treasure) exemplify the above.

Solehah which is also the name of the main protagonist of the tale, narrates about a sister who dedicates her entire life to ensure the happiness of her brother. After their demise, *Solehah* naturally assumed the parental responsibilities of her parents. She sacrificed all her dreams and aspirations to ensure that her brother succeeded his studies, career, and life. The brother in return, respected and cherished his sister. She was his only family and life. A turn of events took place when the brother got married. A win of change gradually seeped in the relationship. *Solehah* genuinely adored her brother and wife. Unsurprisingly, she continued to manage all the housekeeping and wellbeing of her brother and his wife effortlessly. This arrangement lasted until the brother's wife gave birth to a son. *Solehah*'s innate and amicable ability and adeptness in handling and managing her husband, son, and the household, devoured the sister-in-law with envy, jealousy, and insecurity. Consumed with jealousy and unable to suppress her anguish, she, one day lost her mind, and slaughtered her own son. She manipulatively blamed her sister-in-law for the murder. Enraged, the brother severed his sister's two hands and abandoned her in a faraway orchard. *Solehah* was rescued by a gardener, who sheltered and cared for her in his tiny and obscure hut in an orchard. The orchard belonged to a King, who one day came across *Solehah* and instantaneously fell heads over heels in love with her and made her his Queen. The tale concludes with her meeting with her brother and sister-in-law and forgiving them.

The Sister and The Treasure revolves around an orphaned and poor sister and brother. One day while playing with her friends, the sister stumbles across a tiny jar full of gold coins. She

concealed her discovery and buried the jar in a corner of her patio, waiting for the opportune moment to share her discovery with her brother. Accordingly, she one day, asked her brother the following question, "What will you if you discovered money?". "I will purchase sweets," the brother responded (p. 255). The sister concluded from his response that her brother was still young, so she chose not to inform him about the wealth: "My brother is still too young, and I must not tell him about the treasure (Ibid)."

The above continued for years, while the sister patiently kept the truth hidden. She continued to live in discomfort until a time when she could ascertain that he had matured and was responsible enough to take ownership of the treasure. Her long wait ended when her brother finally one day gave her the following response to the same question: "I will buy a plot of land, build a house, and get married (Mahbak, p. 276)."

The previous folktales have showcased an array of portrayals of women in the Arab land, ranging from their roles as mothers, wives and sisters. The tales have uncovered their struggles and qualities. Juxtaposition provide invaluable insights of Arab women and lessons on life.

Analysis of the Image of Women in the Malay Folk Tales

The Mother's Image

Resuming the image of mothers in folk tales, this study will be uncovering the image of mothers in Malay folk tales in the following paragraphs. Three tales have been selected: *Si Tanggang Derhaka* (The Betrayal of Tanggang), *Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup* (The Enchanted Rock) and *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* (Garlic and Red Onions).

Si Tanggang Derhaka describes a mother's anguish over her wayward son. Tengang lived in a little isolated village with his father, Taling, and mother, Derma. A ship's captain arrested him one day and ordered him to work as his crew member. Tengang worked hard and was respected by the ship's captain, earning him the title "Captain Tengang." Tengang rose to prominence in the kingdom before marrying the Sultan's daughter. Tengang and his crew were hit by a terrible storm during a sea voyage. His wrecked ship was later discovered near to the riverbank. When his parents learned of the news, they rushed to the ship, but Tengang declined to meet with them. He was ashamed of them and their poverty and did not acknowledge them as his parents. Heart broken and devastated; his mother reached out to God to reveal the truth.

The tale of *Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup* focuses on a destitute widow with two little children: a daughter and her younger brother. Following her husband's death, the widow was forced to assume care for them. One day, the mother discovered a fish egg among the fish she caught. She fried the fish and requested her daughter to feed it to her younger brother. The mother then left to attend to some errands. Before departing, she left strict instructions to her daughter to save the fish eggs for her and not allow anyone to touch them. Unsatisfied with his share, the brother began to cry and pleaded for his sister to give him the mother's fish eggs. Frustrated with his cries and tantrums, the sister gave in to her brother's demand. Upon returning home, the mother who was exhausted and famished, requested the daughter to serve her the fish eggs. The famished and exhausted mother collapsed upon discovering what had happened. When she regained consciousness, she ran out of her house in anger and frustration. Overwhelmed with

emotions, she headed towards an enchanted rock. Hearing her cries, the enchanted rock opened and swallowed the mother, leaving her two orphaned children in disarray.

Bawang Putih dan Bawang Merah, on the other hand, mimics Cinderella's tale, with a slight twist. This tale narrates on the role of a stepmother and how she interacts with her stepdaughter. The plot focuses on the struggles of Bawang Merah, a little girl who accompanied her father who remarried after the death of his wife. Initially, the stepmother treated Bawang Merah with kindness. However, things changed immediately after she gave birth to a daughter, who was named Bawang Putih. She started abusing Bawang Merah and continuously treated her with cruelty and brutality. Bawang Merah's favorite possessions were confiscated and thrown away by the stepmother. Bawang Merah was a victim of continuous discrimination and cruelty by both the stepmother and her daughter. Her father was consumed by his business and trade and was oblivious to the occurrences in his own home. Furthermore, the deceitful stepmother succeeded in disguising her evil true self in the presence of her husband (Othman & Aripin, p. 174).

The Wife's Image

A wife is a significant figure in a man's life. A wife may be a close friend to her husband and an adversary at the same time. Given this, there are several representations of the wife in Malay folk stories. This research discovers that the image of a woman as a wife differs from her image as a mother or sister.

Untung Tidak Bertuah (Unlucky Winner) tells the tale of a destitute couple whose lives changed from poverty to riches when they set free a massive Grammy fish. The fish transformed the husband's modest cottage into a huge and exquisite villa, and the husband became king. However, the wife was unsatisfied, and begged her husband to request the fish to make her a deity. This preposterous and absurd yearning enraged the fish, and the graces bestowed upon them were destroyed. The tale narrates on the character of an avaricious woman, who was unthankful to Allah's Blessings and continued to covet more and more (Othman & Aripin, p. 257).

The Sister's Image

The study on the sister's image in Malay folk stories focuses on two selected tales: *Kasih Sejati* (True Love) and *Gadis Dua Beradik* (The Two Sisters).

True Love depicts a sister's love for her brother. The brother was placed in a box by their parents and dumped into a river. The infant was deformed; he had a horn on his head, and his parents were embarrassed of him. The sister earnestly followed the box as it swayed in the river. She ran along the river and sang to the brother every time she heard him weep until the water finally took the box to the riverbank. The narrative depicts the true and pure affection of a sister for her disfigured younger brother and how her affections blinded her to the brother's deficiency. The siblings engaged in rooster wrestling and fights and confronted life and its challenges together until they grew affluent and met their parents at the end of the tale.

Comparing The Images of Arab and Malay Women in the Selected Folk Tales

It has been stated that in both the selected Arab and Malay folk stories; the tale tellers presented an array of images of women; both good and bad. This research purports some parallels and some variances between Malay and Arab folk tales. These are presented in the following paragraphs which highlight the parallels and contrasts between the images.

Similarities

The representation of women in both Arab and Malay folk stories is straightforward, basic, and succinct. For example, similar simplicity and brevity are found in Mahbak (1999)'s presentation of the image of women in *The Son of a Thief*:

The husband died, leaving his wife and their son. He was a crook with little to leave behind for his family. The wife endured adversity and hardship, and she raised her child so that he did not become a thief like his father. (p. 747)

The selected Arab and Malay tales emphasised on the women's moral characteristics rather than their outward appearances. From the selected stories in this study it is noted that the narrators deliberately steer away from describing the external features of women, and perhaps the reason for this is that the tale tellers imagined that the subject of the tale is pivotal to women as mothers, wives and sisters, and thus did not feel the need to describe her physical features.

The third resemblance is that the language used relates to the function of women in the stories. Arab and Malay narrators depicted the woman conversing with people using everyday language, phrases, and concepts. Thus, in both Arab and Malay stories, the narrators utilised local language and dialect, to express the major characters and to comprehend the cultural image of the women.

Another parallel is that both the Arab tale, *Shaqqat Al-Usfur* (The Bird's Cage), and the Malay tale, *Isteri Yang Bijaksana* (The Wise Wife), exhibits the wife's wisdom. The resemblance between the two portrayals resides in the position of the women in dealing with their husbands' complicated nature and temperaments appropriately. It is mentioned in the narrative of *Shaqqat Al-Usfur* (The Bird's Cage), for example, the wife's discussion relating to her miser husband's dilemma. The woman in the Malay tale probably exhibits the wisdom and cunningness of the second wife who managed to subtly address the issues and avoid various conflicts that would ruin marital life.

Both Arab and Malay tales depict images of devoted, intellectual, and beautiful women. Malay and Arabic women interact in the same way with the people they live with, whether they are spouses, children or siblings. It is found that women's loyalty is a significant trait which is utilised in their interactions with their husbands, siblings, and relatives. The narrators of the Arab tale *Blessing of Gold* and the Malay tale *Rock of the Pregnant Virgin*, for example, depicted the wife's faithfulness to her husband in a variety of ways. The Malay folk tale depicts

a beautiful lady willing to sacrifice her life for her husband. While its Arab equivalent had a similar image.

Furthermore, in both tales, the images of the sister and her function in the family are depicted. Both Arab and Malay narrators have depicted the sisters as kind, selfless and relentless in their relationship with their brothers. Their pure and unconditional love is apparent in the Arabic tale, *Sister and Treasure*, and the Malay tale, *True Love*. In summary, the images of women in Arab and Malay folk tales are similar in many ways, and this similarity confirms, without a doubt, the universality of folk tales despite differences in cultures, customs, traditions, languages, and even religions.

The Differences

There are three major distinctions that separate the portrayal of women in Arab and Malay folk stories. These distinctions may reflect the narrator's method of presenting the tale, as well as the social and cultural traditions associated with the represented women. The differences will be emphasised in the ensuing paragraphs.

To begin with, unlike Arabic tales, Malay tales mentioned the names of their female characters. This might be attributed to the Arabs culture. It is disrespectful in Arab culture to address women by their first names in public. Accordingly, they will either be referred to as the daughter, mother or wife of so and so. The Malay narrators, on the other hand, named the women in their stories and gave them traditional Malay names. Some of which are derived from flower names like *Tanjung* and *Kenanga*. These names are undeniably suitable given the nature of folk tales, which portray people's traditions and ways of life.

Second, there is a significant contrast in the depictions of women. In addressing the societal concerns, both Arab and Malay folk tales highlighted the wife's image and views within her usual immediate home environment and life. For example, all the Arab stories, *Summer and Winter*, *The Friend*, and *The Mother's Heart* depicted the harsh relationship between daughters and mother-in-laws. Perhaps the explanation is related to social life in that region, where, traditionally, daughters and mother-in-laws live in the same house. The different characters evidently contributed to misunderstandings, disputes, and jealousy. These relationships have apparently improved considerably in current times owing to the growth of lifestyle and the couple's choice to live separately from their parents. In the Malay tales, the obsession for gold was highlighted as the major concern of the wife. The tales of the *Arrogant Wife*, *The Golden Necklace*, and *The Unlucky Winner* highlighted the above. Perhaps this indicated the high value and concern of gold in traditional Malay society where gold was used as a currency in commercial transactions and a symbol of wealth, greatness, and generosity in the past.

Finally, it was observed that in Malay literature, the narrators employed animals to assist in shaping and constructing the image of women. The narrator's reliance on animals, for example, played a key role in each of *Bawang Putih dan Bawang Merah*, *The Unlucky Winner*, and *The*

Two Sisters. The sudden appearance of animals or plants in the lives of the female characters seemed to play a role as the deciding factor in a decision making or as a symbol of good or otherwise. On the contrary, such was not observed in the Arabic folk tales.

Conclusion

Based on the analyses and comparisons of the selected tales, many significant findings were found. Folk tales are one of the most significant sources of cultural heritage, and they are analogous to our modern-day hard disc. While the hard drive has been defined by the lengthy storage of data and information in the computer, the folktale has stored a vast quantity of popular cultures and customs throughout the years.

Another finding is that folk tales provide a variety of women's functions in their families as mothers, wives or sisters. This may be an endorsement of women's comprehensiveness, which embraces all elements of life.

Furthermore, this study discovers that the flexibility of the folk tales leads to a global resemblance in the primary themes and event structure of the tales. Arab and Malay folk tales give a balance in portraying the image of women in their family lives since women are represented not only at their finest but also at their worst. The goal of presenting women positively appears to be to establish a good model and to set an example for readers to follow in their daily lives. While the negative portrayal seeks to educate readers about the dangers of following wicked paths and guidance on how to avoid them.

In addition, both Arab and Malay tales, were found to describe women with simplicity and flexibility. They also emphasised women's psychological and social qualities rather than their physical features. Both languages utilised in the two categories are local language and dialects associated with the women's everyday lives. The selected Arab and Malay tales also shared the ideals of the loyalty of wives for their husbands, mothers' love and dedication for their children as well as the image of a sisters' affection for her brothers.

Undeniably, women hold a distinct and particular position in both Arab and Malay folk tales. The remarkable resemblance between the image of women in Arab and Malay tales demonstrates the universality of folk tales despite differences in cultures, customs, traditions, languages, and even religions.

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