



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**THE TREATMENT OF MEN TOWARDS WOMEN IN THE WORKS OF
CHE HUSNA AZHARI**

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By

NENNY DJUHARA BINTI JOHARI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia in
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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Chairperson: Dr. Wan Roselezam Binti Wan Yahya

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

This thesis centers on the treatment of men towards women in the Malay society as a document of reality. Through the analysis, the research will portray the works of Che Husna Azhari whereby the women's characters accept male subjugation and domination. This presents the reality in the society that the author mirrors in her works.

The analysis is done through two perceptions. The first part is the perception of Women as Erotic *la femme objet* where the primary discussion is on women's sexuality. Another perception is the Women's Identity. It focuses mostly on the Malay society and Malay women. It is centered on the struggle of the Malay women in finding the balance of her sexuality against social biasness and religious obligation in a patriarchal society.



This is because the social condition and where these women lived and interact with the society are unique.

The analysis will show that the women in Che Husna Azhari's work lost their will to emancipate themselves because their sacrifices will ensure a better place in heaven and the society. The willingness to be the sacrificial lamb in the altar of marriage is also highlighted. They surrendered their bodies and souls to fulfill the expectations of the society. This is because they have a distorted understanding of women's role in a true Islamic family and society.

In the case of the Malay women, they are also entrapped socially as a result of a misreading of religion and culture. They are also caught in the power struggle to define themselves in a society who places obedience and submission in fulfilling their duty as daughters, wives and mothers. Che Husna's women show they faced difficulty in finding a balance when dealing with women's sexuality and identity struggle. The women characters accept the men's treatment towards them because the men and society expected them to behave as such.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera.

**LAYANAN LELAKI TERHADAP WANITA DI DALAM KARYA
CHE HUSNA AZHARI**

Oleh

NENNY DJUHARA BINTI JOHARI

Oktober 2007

Pengerusi: Wan Roselezam Binti Wan Yahya, PhD

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Tesis ini memberi tumpuan kepada layanan lelaki terhadap wanita sebagai satu dokumentasi realiti. Melalui analisis teks, penyelidik akan menunjukkan bahawa karya Che Husna Azhari menggambarkan watak-watak wanita yang menerima penindasan dominasi kaum lelaki. Ini akan mewakili realiti yang penulis gambarkan dalam karya beliau. Analisis ini di buat dalam dua persepsi. Pertama, persepsi Wanita sebagai Objek Erotik Femina dimana ia membincangkan seksualiti wanita. Kedua, ialah persepsi Identiti Wanita. Ia memfokuskan kepada masyarakat Melayu dan wanitanya. Ia menumpukan kepada pencarian wanita Melayu dalam mencari keseimbangan seksualiti, pandangan masyarakat yang bias dan tuntutan agama di dalam masyarakat patriaki. Ini kerana keadaan sosial dan tempat wanita ini tinggal dan berinteraksi dengan masyarakat adalah unik.



Melalui analisis teks, kita akan dapat melihat bagaimana wanita hilang keupayaan untuk melepaskan diri dari cengkaman ini kerana mereka percaya yang mereka di janjikan tempat terbaik di syurga dan di dalam masyarakat. Keinginan untuk menjadi korban di dalam perkhawinan akan di tunjukkan dalam karya Che Husna. Mereka menyerahkan tubuh badan dan jiwa untuk memenuhi tuntutan masyarakat. Ini kerana mereka mempunyai pandangan yang berbeza terhadap peranan wanita yang sebenar di dalam keluarga Islam dan masyarakat. Di dalam kes wanita melayu, mereka terperangkap dalam keadaan sosial yang disebabkan penterjemahan yang bais dalam agama dan budaya yang cenderung kepada kekuasaan lelaki. Ianya lebih lagi bila wanita terperangkap dalam kepayahan untuk mendefiniasikan diri mereka dalam masyarakat yang mementingkan kepatuhan dan penyerahan diri sepenuhnya untuk menjalankan tugas sebagai anak, isteri dan ibu. Wanita wanita dalam karya Che Husna menunjukkan yang mereka menghadapi masalah dalam mencapai keseimbangan dalam menghadapi seksualiti sendiri dan pencarian identiti. Watak wanita dalam karya Che Husna menerima layanan kaum lelaki terhadap mereka kerana kaum lelaki dan masyarakat menuntut mereka berkelakuan seperti itu.

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As for me, *Carpe Diem!*



I certify that an examination committee met on **8th October 2007** to conduct the final examination of **Nenny Djuhara Johari** on her **Master of Arts (English Literature)** thesis entitled “**The Treatment of Men Towards Women in the Works of Che Husna Azhari**” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination committee are as follows:

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This thesis submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts (English Literature). The members of the Supervisory Committee are as follows:

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been dully acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) or at any other institutions.

NENNY DJUHARA BINTI JOHARI

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This research is to analyze the treatment of men towards women in works of Che Husna Azhari. The texts that are selected are short stories entitled *Mariah*, *Mek Teh*, *Mother Andam* and *Ustazah Inayah* all published in 1993. The major analyses on the three texts are women's sexuality and identity. The researcher will put forward the treatment of men towards women in society. The treatment the women characters in the stories received is perceived as a documentation of the reality in the society. The women are also treated in the form of manipulative interpretation of the Qur'an in order to subjugate them.

Nawal El Saadawi (1980), a noted Mid-eastern feminist highlighted the nature of women and the treatment of women by the men in their lives. The women in general are expected to acknowledge the domination of men and the stifling culture that dehumanize them to be the non entities so as to make them dependable to the men in the formation of their own identities. El Saadawi fought for the emancipation of women's identity and role in the public space in society by acknowledging them as an integral part of the society. She observed that women are willing to sacrifice their own happiness for men until they became non-entities and to blindly submit to men in their lives (*The Hidden*, 88). In short, women are easy targets for physical, sexual and spiritual abuse by men in their lives.

All the women characters in Che Husna's selected short stories show how men subjugate women in the name of religion and society for their personal needs. The works of Che Husna also presented the treatment that these women go through so as to sensitize the reader on the degradation that they had to go through so that they could claim to be obedient and true to their husbands and fathers, God and society.

In the analysis of the texts, one can see how the women lost their will to emancipate themselves because their sacrifices ensured a better place in heaven and society. Their willingness to be the sacrificial lamb in the altar of marriage would be highlighted in Che Husna's works. They surrendered their bodies and souls to fulfill the expectation of society. The society portrayed in the selected texts had a hand in distorting the understanding of women's role in a true Islamic family and society.

The quest to attain the higher good and self sacrifice is discussed by two Western feminists, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that exemplified this blind devotion by women towards men. The women were rendered helpless and hopeless when they are perceived as an *objet d'art*:

Whether she becomes an *objet d'art* or a saint, however, it is the surrender of her self – of her personal comfort, her personal desires, or both – that is the beautiful angel-women's key act while it is precisely this sacrifice which dooms her both to death and heaven. For to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead. (602)

However, the Qur'an held the responsibility of attaining goodness for both men and women equally. The noble Qur'an as the major reference in this research advocated the balance between men, women and God. As balance is needed to ensure peace in the

universe, Allah the Most Merciful has created balance in his creation by holding both men and women to be accountable in their deeds for a better place in the world or hereafter as stated in the *Al-Ahzab* verse 33-35.

1.1 Background of the Study

The treatment of men towards women as presented in the selected texts is believed to reflect the present reality of society's culture. Women were often made to believe that they are inferior to men. Fatima Mernissi, an Islamic feminist and sociologist, recalled the contributions of the early Muslim women made to build an ideal Islamic society such as Khatija Bint Khuwaylid, the first wife of Prophet Muhammad who became his most adherent supporter in both material and spiritual ways. The prophet's youngest and most beloved wife, Aisya Abu Bakar became the major transmitter of the Qur'an verses when it was revealed to the prophet (27, 77).

Khatija Bint Khuwaylid and Aisya Abu Bakar were the pillars of their society and the major role models for women and men. Mernissi stated that they established the true connection between men, women, society and God (79). Leila Ahmad, another Islamic feminist also took both women mentioned above as the perfect role models for the contemporary Muslim women as they exemplified the ideal Muslim women (47). Miriam Cooke, an Islamic sociologist agreed with both Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmad when she too idealized the contributions of Aisya Abu Bakar. Aisya Abu Bakar perfected the teachings of Islam. Her role as the unbiased transmitter was different unlike some men who were also transmitters of the Qur'an. Because of men's greed to maintain their

patriarchal power, some of the translations and the teaching of the verses are done with misogynistic intentions that led to misreading of the verses (69).

However, it was stated that, “Men are the protectors and the maintainers of women, because Allah had made one to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their mean” (*An-Nisa*, 4:34). Lamy al Faruqi, another feminist researcher on Muslim women in the Muslim worlds, lashed back. She stated that it was only from economical and physical needs of the women that they could be protected and cared for by the men in their families. She insisted that domination and subjugation are not the rights of men to do upon the women (44, 45). This is the concern of the researcher as the selected works by Che Husna highlighted such abuses where women were treated as mere domestic and sex slaves to their families.

Che Husna’s works comprised of three major published texts. The first was *Kelantan Tales: An Anthropology of Short Stories* in 1992, *Melor in Perspective* (1993) and *The Rambutan Orchard* (1993). The selected short stories are from her collection of short stories entitled *Melor in Perspective*. The author’s works reflected the Malay society, especially the Malay women who were often perceived as being submissive and passive when dealing with the men in their families. Therefore, the works mirrored the psyche of the women and their connections in their society. Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf, emphasized on the perception of Malay society towards women in being submissive. Female sexuality is almost a taboo subject in Malay society that centralized the domination of patriarchal powers (147). Thus, it is important for the researcher to look into the works

that reflected the treatment the women received in Malay society. This is further elaborated in Chapter Two in this research.

Through extensive text analysis, women's sexuality and identity became the criteria of judgment for society assesses 'good' women. The men in the selected texts justify the treatment of women by misreading of the Qur'an to suit their own needs. The women would not be able to contribute anything to the building of the society. This is because they blindly believed men and give total commitment in their marriages.

1.2 Statement of Problem

It is believed that the treatment of men towards women usually led to the loss of sexuality and identity. This is the reality that the researcher hopes to present from Che Husna's literary works. Leila Ahmed, a Muslim sociologist found out women's mistreatment is evidenced in religious texts such as the Bible and enforced by theologians such as Augustine, Origen and Tertullian who condemned women as evil because they are the source of sexual temptation to men (36).

In the case of the Malay women in Che Husna's texts, they are also victimized by the misinterpretation of religion and society's negative perception. This is clearly evident when they are caught in the power struggle to define themselves in a society. The treatment of men towards women in the society placed the women's obedience and submission as the most important issue. This is because the women were brought up to fulfill their duty as a daughter, wife and mother (Nor Faridah, 27). This is what the

researcher will highlight in the research analysis. Faisal Haji Othman, a Malay anthropologist and sociologist highlighted the fact that Malay women were made to believe and comply with the idea that decision making is the husband's or a father's right. As a wife, she must accept any of the husband's wish including divorcing her and she was to be blamed for it. She would later suffered social prejudices as a divorcee and her chance to remarry was slim. Faisal was concerned as it reflected the deteriorating state of the Malay Muslim society (106).

Raihanah Mohd Mydin, a Malay researcher on Malay feminism explained that the tug-of-war between women's personal needs, religion and culture began with responsibility to God. Thus, it is an aspiration for the Muslims to balance their responsibilities to God, society and selves (8). Che Husna's works mirrored the reality of men's treatment towards women. In this analysis, the researcher will show that women in Che Husna's works were made to believe that they had no choice but to be subjugated by the men in their lives because of the misinterpretation of the Islamic teachings. However, according to Murtada Mutahhari, a Muslim sociologist who did an extensive research on feminism stated:

Islam did great service to the female sex, and not only by depriving fathers of their absolute authority. It gave complete freedom; it gave individuality, an independence of thought and opinion, and formally acknowledged their natural right. (65)

The true teaching of Islam provided the absolute choice for women. The fear of sexual abandonment and embracing female sexuality enhanced the need to overpower these forces by men. The Malay male seemed to believe that women's sexuality must be

contained so that women would not be able to entice them with it. Thus, Aihwa Ong, stated that "...control over female sexuality has been made a focus of the resulting efforts to strengthen male authority, reinforce group boundaries, and ensure the cultural survival of the Malay community undergoing 'modernization'" (166-167). Through the strengthened male authority, the women are subjugated and dominated so the male could control the women's sexuality with the approval of the society (Mutahhari, 88).

Through the selected works of Che Husna, the analysis will show that the men's treatment towards women turn them to leave everything to fate and God. Michael Haralambos and Robin Heald, a noted sociologist discussed the work of American sociologist, Jessie Bernard in her work entitled *The Future of the Family*. They brought forwards Bernard's term of 'Pygmalion effect' that suggested that the wife consciously wanted to fulfill the husband's perfect image of a wife that she risked losing her identity in order to be his Pygmalion (qtd in Haralambos and Heald, 387).

It is interesting to look into the possibility of this effect in Malay society especially Malay women. The willingness to be treated as such is because they strive to become their father's and husbands perfect Pygmalion. As stated in the Qur'an, "Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedience (to Allah and to their husbands), and guard in the husband's absence what Allah orders them to guard (e.g. their chastity, their husband's property)" (*An-Nisa*, 4:34). The treatment of women in society could reflect the civility and religiosity of a community as the Qur'an stated that, "O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you nations, and tribes, that you

may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who had *Al-Tawqa* [i.e. he is one of the *Muttaqun* (the pious).” (*Al-Hujurat*, 49:13)

The researcher wishes to look into the impact of mistreatment of men towards women. This is because women are bounded by culture and religious duty more than the men. Raja Rohana Raja Mamat, highlighted the fact that Malay women are made to believe in male dominance in both their private and social space. They must acknowledge the male’s dominant role in their lives. They did not have any choice but to submit more to the societal treatment upon them (21-22). This is in relation to the role and position of women in the Qur’an that stated, “Men are “the protectors and the maintainers of women, because Allah had made one to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means” (*An-Nisa*, 4:34).

Thus, the treatment of men towards women in Che Husna’s works will show that Malay Muslim men impose their superiority upon women. The men believed that they had the right to treat their women folk in the form of mental and physical subjugation and domination. Jane Ussher stated the men’s phallic sexuality was a myth but the men forced upon the women to acknowledge their superiority so they would be dominant in their phallogocentric reality (5). Therefore, the researcher believes it is important to reveal the mistreatment of women by the men in the works of Che Husna. The women characters in the story represented the hidden side of the Malay society. Bias custom and short-sightedness in understanding Islamic teaching had the tendency to confine women in their own worlds. Zeenath Kausar, highlighted this aspect. She warned that if men did not strike a balance in developing a sincere and pure relationship with all Allah’s

creations including his family, his society and all beings, he would destroy the foundation of Allah's creation and in the process of destroying himself too. Narrow mindedness, prejudice or any self-centred motivation are some of the causes of the destruction to mankind when he did not maintain a positive relationship with his own family as the family is the centre of a Muslim society (180).

1.3 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The research focuses on the treatment of men towards women in the area of women's sexuality and identity. The analysis will be done using the sociological concept based on Alan Swingewood, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren's model of literature as a socio-cultural document. Under this approach, the two perceptions of Women as *Le Femme Objet* and Women's Identity will be used extensively in the text analysis. Women as *Le Femme Objet* will be further discussed under *The Harlot*, *The Witch* and *The Good Wife*. Under Women's Identity, the analysis will be done under *The Madu*, *The Janda* and *The Reformer*.

The research is only going to focus on the treatment of men towards women as presented in the works of Che Husna Azhari. It is also limited to only one Malay Muslim writer, Che Husna Azhari. Firstly, Che Husna's three selected works are part of her collection of short stories in the 1993 *Melor in Perspective*. The selected short stories are *Mariah*, *Mek Teh*, *Mother Andam* and *Ustazah Inayah*. These short stories are only concerned with the treatment of women received from the men in their lives. The researcher will only analyze the interaction between the protagonists, the men in their lives and the local

society as a whole. Che Husna's work mainly focused on the Muslim Malay Kelantanese women who were considered more independent in the public realm than their sisters in other states in peninsular Malaysia. Hazidi Abdul Hamid commented that, "The main source of problems in reading *Melor in Perspectives* are the text itself and the social context it portrays, particularly in relation to searching for a Kelantanese mind (17).

In reading Che Husna's work, the emphasis is only on the Kelantanese women's social and psychological treatment by the men and society they were in. No other reference to other Malay women in other state would be used. However, the researcher believes that the treatment these women received by the men and the society mirrored closely the lives of women in other parts of Malaysia. The impact would include the influence of religious values, custom practices and restrictions imposed on the women that might lead to the subjugation and oppression of women in the selected text. The impact is analyzed only through treatment presented by the men towards the women characters in the texts. The major reference will be the Qur'an with English translation, specifically *An-Nisa* verses and other related verses that discuss man-woman relationship such as the *Al-Baqarah* verses. The Qur'an is the major reference because it was the only authentic and undisputed reference for the Muslim: stated in this verse: "And this is a blessed Book (the Qur'an) which We have sent down, so follow it and fear Allah (i.e. do not disobey His Orders), that you may receive mercy (i.e. be saved from the torment of Hell)." (*Al-An'am*, 6:155)



This analysis centers on the perception of the transforming women as erotic objects and the struggle to find their own identity. The researcher chose Che Husna's texts because they showed the women characters as being manipulated by the men using the means above. The other elements in the text such as the plot development, secondary characters' analysis or literary elements are not discussed in this research. Therefore, this research is limited to the analysis of the treatment of the women characters by the men.

The researcher highlights the treatment these women faced in order to fulfill the men's expectation of a wife or daughter. The research would also aim at the social biasness that victimizes women especially, the widow and the divorcee because of their alleged sexual awakening. El Saadawi presented the reality of the treatment of women by the men folks as equivalent to domestic slavery when children are taught to discriminate between a boy and a girl since infancy. The boy must be masculine and dominant and the girl is expected to be submissive and obedient. The girl must be prepared mentally and physically to accept the domination of men in all parts of life (*The Hidden*, 81).

The research is only focused on the women protagonists like Mariah, Mek Teh and Inayah who were mostly forced to submit to the mistreatment of men. The social biasness of the widow and the divorcee is touched to highlight the treatment of women by men and the society as a whole. The aim is also to focus on the women's blind devotion on the men who misinterpreted the Qur'an verses for their own needs. Though women's oppression are universal but the research is centered on Malaysian social setting especially the Malay and oppression of the Malay women by men and through religious



manipulation. The social condition that surrounded these women characters also will also be examined.

1.4 Methodology

This research uses the sociological approach as expounded in Alan Swingewood, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren's model of literature as a socio-cultural document. The Qur'an is also used as a major reference because it complements the model and gives an Islamic connection to the model. The Qur'an verses focused are mostly concerned with polygamy and the status of women in the society and religion. The researcher believes it is the most suitable framework to discuss the selected works by Che Husna. It is closely related to the psyche of Malay society and the treatment the Malay women received from the men in their immediate surrounding. In the works of Che Husna, the researcher will present how men and society treated the women as erotic *le femme objet* and having the identity struggle. Faisal Haji Othman, a Malay social anthropologist affirmed that women are vital members in the society. The evolution of the Muslim society actually depended on the women as they are the one would help the men to bare the social obligation for their community (10). This would be further discussed in Chapter Three of this research.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

This research is to build a continuing academic research paper on local Malaysian writers. The main objectives of this research are firstly, to analyze the treatment of men towards Malay women in dealing with their sexuality and identity. Secondly, it is to identify and analyze the impact of misinterpretation of the Qur'anic verses and Islamic teaching by