

NATIONAL IDEOLOGY IN MALAYSIAN CHILDREN'S NOVELS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL *ANAK DIN BIOLA*

Misran Rokimin

*Pusat Pengajian Bahasa, Kesusasteraan dan Kebudayaan Melayu
Fakulti Sains Sosial dan Kemanusiaan
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600 Bangi, Selangor*

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk membincangkan penerapan prinsip Rukunegara yang merupakan ideologi negara dalam novel remaja *Anak Din Biola*. Novel ini dipilih kerana ia telah dijadikan teks KOMSAS (Komponen Sastera dalam Bahasa Melayu) untuk Tingkatan Satu. Penulis menganalisis kandungan novel ini menerusi watak-watak dan plot yang terdapat di dalamnya. Bagi analisis watak, tumpuan diberikan kepada watak utama novel ini iaitu Budiman dan watak antagonis. Melalui watak-watak tersebut, penulis hanya mengambil dua prinsip Rukunegara iaitu 'kedaulatan undang-undang' dan 'kesopanan dan kesusilaan' sebagai landasan bagi menganalisis novel ini. Analisis yang dilakukan menunjukkan kedua-dua prinsip Rukunegara tersebut telah diangkat oleh pengarangnya menerusi watak dan plot cerita.

Kata Kunci: Dasar Pendidikan Negara, Tragedi 13 Mei 1969, Rukunegara, KOMSAS (Komponen Sastera dalam B. Melayu), Novel Keluarga

ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the connection between the government's national ideology, Rukunegara, and the novel *Anak Din Biola (The Fiddler's Son)*. This novel is selected as the focus of discussion in this article as it has been chosen to be the official text for the Bahasa Melayu subject (KOMSAS) for Form One. Analysis of the novel will be based on two elements, that is, character and plot of the novel, with special attention on the main character of the novel. Content analysis of the novel will be carried out using two principles of the Rukunegara, that is, "Rule of Law" and "Good Behaviour and Morality" as tools of reference. The results of the content analysis illustrate the ways in which the author projects the Rukunegara values through the characters and plot of his novel.

Keywords: National Educational Policy, May 13th 1969 Tragedy, Rukunegara, KOMSAS, Family Novel

INTRODUCTION

Traditional literature was oral literature, with the storyteller assuming the role of entertainer. This tradition, however, radically changed following British colonialization, which started in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Modern Malay literature began with the introduction of printing in Malaysia around 1860's. One of the steps taken to provide reading materials of Malay literature was the collection of Malay folk literature compiled by several colonial officers such as R.J. Wilkinson, and R.O. Winstedt (Roff 1980). These compilation works were published and read by the Malayan public, adults and children alike.

The need for literary textbooks increased when Malaya gained her independence from the British in 1957. It became especially acute when the government chose to replace English with the Malay language as the medium of instruction in schools beginning early 1960s. As a result of this policy shift, reading materials including stories and novels written in Malay were desperately needed. To encourage the writing and publication of reading material in Malay, the Malayan government initiated and sponsored a writing competition for children's novels, and at the same time, promote the translation of books written by western writers into Malay.

The development of children's novels reached a new phase in the early 1970s, with the complete implementation of the National Educational Policy by the Malaysian Government. This National Educational Policy emphasised the use of Malay as the main medium of instruction in all Malaysian schools, starting from Standard One. The implementation of the new National Educational Policy programme meant an even greater demand for books in Malay.

To further encourage writers to write more books in Malay especially in creative works, the government, with the cooperation of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Malaysian Council of Language and Literature), and private organisations, once again sponsored a children's novel writing competition in 1978. Since then, this competition has become an annual event. Meanwhile, many authors have begun to commit themselves to writing children's novels in Malay. Publishers too have contributed to the cause by encouraging writers to translate books written by western authors into Malay.

The National Educational Policy undoubtedly led to a plethora of reading materials written in Malay or translated from their original language into Malay. Unfortunately, this substantial increase did not encourage publishers to examine the quality of the novels or their content, especially in relation to the question whether the novels conveyed the government's National Ideology, commonly known as Rukunegara, to their readers. All that is known is that, since 1970s the government has putting in an effort to reconstruct the Malaysian society, especially after the bitter experience of the May 13th 1969 tragedy.

The purpose of this article is therefore to examine how Malaysian writers of children's novels help to promote the government's Rukunegara through their writings especially the 4th and 5th Principles of the Rukunegara, that is, Rule of Law and Good Behaviour and Morality respectively. In addition, this article will also examine the extent to which these two principles of the Rukunegara have been incorporated into Malaysian children's novels.

I have chosen one specific novel, entitled *Anak Din Biola* (A Fiddler's Son) (1985) written by Maaruf Mahmud, to be the focus of analysis in this article as the novel has been selected as a compulsory text for the subject Bahasa Melayu (Malay Language) or (KOMSAS – Komponen Sastera dalam bahasa Melayu) for Form One students. Beginning January 2000, Malay literature has been included as a component of the Bahasa Melayu subject. In this novel, I will focus on two aspects: first, on the central characters and second, on the main themes. Both aspects need to be analysed in detail in order to interpret the ideological implications of the novel. For the analysis on the characters, I will focus on two important characters that play a significant role in the development of the novel's plot. This will enable us to evaluate the extent to which the novel succeeds in channelling the messages of the writer to the readers.

This same approach will be also be used to analyse the novel's theme. Here, the discussion focuses on the suitability of certain themes for children. From these two levels of analysis, we will able to determine whether the writer has succeeded to inculcate the two principles of the Rukunegara in his novel.

Before proceeding further, I would like to provide a description on the responsibility of children's writers in the context of the country's National Ideology, the Rukunegara or Pillars of the Nation.

RESPONSIBILITY OF WRITERS FOR CHILDREN'S NOVELS

Creative writing plays an important role in the education of children. Educationists, psychologists and writers who, through their professions, are closely involved with children are unanimously agreed on the importance of books in the education of children. One well-known children's writer, Rosemary Sutcliff (1973, 306) has this to say:

The reading child is liable to absorb ideas from books, which may remain with him for the rest of his life, and even play some part in determining the kind of person that he is going to become

Sutcliff lays emphasis on the fact that the contents of books are related to the process of children's development and contribute to their general moral education. Her view parallels that of Sheila Egoff (1966, 421) who strongly argues that "children's books have become tools for the educational process". In order to produce books that meet children's needs, the role of writers is crucial. Writers must ensure that their writings fall within generally accepted notions of what is appropriate for children. In this respect, it is pertinent to note Anthony Storr's (1966, 92) view:

Firstly, that the child shall not be made frightened or unhappy. Secondly, that it shall not be prematurely sexually aroused and thirdly, that it shall not be encouraged to behave in aggressive or delinquent ways.

The gist of the Storr's proposition is that writers should avoid stories, which may deprive the children who are relatively innocent and who have not yet developed a refined sense of moral discrimination. An example of the importance of children's novels in inculcating the government's ideology could, for instance, be seen in practice in the Soviet Union (before the collapse of Soviet Union regime 1989). The government provided the writers with specific guidelines to help inculcate the communist ideology

into the children's minds. The writers should not fail to include the six main virtues of the communist moral code grouped under the following categories: collectivism, discipline, love of work, patriotism, proletarian internationalism and atheism (O'Dell 1978). Writers who ignore or refuse to include and project these elements into their creative writings were advised not to write for children. The emphasis on these important and essential elements in the Soviet children's literature was based on the grounds that communist ideology should be introduced to the country's citizens at an early age so as to foster in them a spirit of undivided attention, responsibility and love of their motherland. With respect to this strong notion of patriotism, O'Dell (1978) noted, "being a Soviet citizen is likewise presented to the child as being an ideal; it implies loyalty and willing duty to all the central institutions of Soviet life".

To all writers, however, be they Soviet, Westerners or Malaysian, the imposition of guidelines or rules may be seen as tough restrictions to adhere. This is because restrictions limit their scope of freedom in writing. Consequently, aesthetic literary values will be dry and predictable. Under a policy of formal guidelines, ideas have to be moulded within certain rigid frameworks. Whatever the government's justification for such a policy may be, the writers seem to be left with no choice but to adhere to their guidelines, especially so when their main target audience is children. The writers therefore find themselves obeying not only the government but also the more conservative elements in society, in particular, parents who do not want their children exposed to 'dangerous' new ideas.

There are scores of examples of parents who opposed innovative writing, which they considered as morally dangerous. In Greenville, Tennessee, for example, a federal judge once ruled in favour of seven families who claimed that a series of textbooks offended their religious beliefs. The judge finally gave permission for the children involved to be removed from the school's reading classes and be taught at home (*The Times Education Supplement* 1986).

Another example was in Great Britain where some parents expressed their disquiet towards a controversial book which they considered harmful to their children. The parents asked for the book to be withdrawn from the library. This book was called *Jenny Lives With Eric and Martin*. It included drawings of a five-year-old girl in bed with

her father and his male lover. Parents protested on the grounds that the book was an overt manoeuvre to teach children to have a “positive” image towards gays and lesbians (*Daily Express* 1986). Many other books, which contained sexual scenes, homosexuals and violence as part of the children’s reading materials, were also condemned by the parents.

It is the concern of this article to focus on children’s novels as a tool to help propagate or spread the government’s ideology, as will be discussed below.

PRINCIPLES OF RUKUNEGARA (PILLARS OF THE NATION) AS THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT’S NATIONAL IDEOLOGY

The tragedy of May 1969 indicated the government’s weakness in its administration, especially in creating a spirit of unity and mutual respect among the country’s multi-ethnic population. The late Tun Haji Abdul Razak bin Hussein, who was the Prime Minister after Tunku Abd. Rahman (*Asas Kebudayaan Kebangsaan* 1973:5), had this to say after the bitter tragedy:

The tragedy of May 13 gave us a better opportunity to look deeply into our society and nation, to think and make a proper judgement on how to bring our plural society onto the right path.

Before the tragedy of May 13, there had indeed been no national ‘guidelines’ for the people. After independence in 1957, the British Government let the Malaysian people solve their own problems without suggesting any blueprint to attend to the question of national unity. To build a peaceful, strong and stable country, however, people need proper guidelines or code of ethics to live in plural society where there is a great diversity of customs and ways of life.

In Russia, as mentioned above, the communist regime formulated six moral codes as their guideline for literary writing in order to cultivate the communist ideology among the people. The same thing happened in Indonesia during Sukarno’s Presidency when *Pantja Sila* was proclaimed (Polomka 1971, 43). *Pantja Sila* consisted of five pillars to unite the whole Indonesia population, made up of a variety of ethnic groups, living separately in the many islands of Indonesia. In China after he had led a successful

revolution against the Ching Dynasty in 1911, Sun Yet Sun devised, under the Kuomintang Party, three national principles as his guide to rule the nation (Chew Hock Thye 1979, 58). Each of the above examples illustrates an awareness of the importance of a national ideology as a method of achieving national integration.

In the case of Malaysia, after experiencing several ethnic riots, and following the May 13 tragedy in particular, political leaders were faced with the task of restructuring the country. Two major areas needed attention: economy and ideology. In the economic sphere the government introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971. On the ideological front, it is worth bearing in mind that Malaysia had no previous written set of guidelines for the people. So, after discussing ideas and suggestions from many different quarters, the government agreed to create a national ideology, which contained five principles, which was named 'Rukunegara' (the pillars of the nation). In 1970, the Yang Di Pertuan Agong proclaimed the national ideology. It was intended to provide a basis for social order and national unity and serve as a guiding principle for national and individual endeavour (Puteh Mohammad and Malik Munip 1985). It was hoped that this ideology could build a strong nation and bring unity to the people.

The aim of Rukunegara is to create national integration and form a united society without racial prejudice. As mentioned above, Rukunegara was formed from the ideas of many distinguished people from various fields. As a guideline it did not give any specific details as to how to create social integration. This is partly because the government saw such an endeavour as not only its responsibility but also that of the Malaysian people at large. The five principles of Rukunegara cover universal values. They are:

- a. Belief in God
- b. Loyalty to king and country
- c. Upholding the constitution
- d. Rule of law
- e. Good behaviour and morality.

In essence, it can be said that these five principles urge the people to abide by the National Constitution and have respect for each other. The principles, as Ghazali Shafie (1985, 44) has stated, were established in conformity with the spirit and needs of the

people who live in Malaysia. It is not created by a single person, or a particular political party, or religious group, or the government, but is the result of the peoples' and scholars' ideas (Mohd. Nur Ali 1977, 271). By virtue of that characteristic, Rukunegara is meant to benefit the country and to become the ideology of every individual who loves Malaysia.

ANAK DIN BIOLA: AN ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS AND THEMES

In this section, I will analyse the novel *Anak Din Biola* in accordance with the aspects mentioned above. I will first provide a summary of the story, followed by a presentation and discussion of the important characters and themes. This discussion will indicate the extent to which the writer has incorporated the principles of the national ideology in his novel *Anak Din Biola*.

I consider this novel *Anak Din Biola*, as a family novel. Family novels, according to Fisher (1964, 327):

“... must be about people. The people in the family stories they read shall be reasonably like the people they meet in their own lives, the scenes and events not too far from those of everyday.”

The stories of family novels, in other words, revolve around the realities of everyday life. Problems commonly face by families become the focus of these stories. Within these stories, in addition, we will often encounter some notion of intra-family conflict. In many ways the characters of children's novels written by Malaysian writers resemble the characters depicted in children's novels written by English writers in the Victorian era. These Victorian characters were presented as profoundly thoughtful and devoutly religious. They were also as described by Avery (1965, 75) as devoted to their mothers and their brothers and sisters, obedient to their fathers, well educated, serious of purpose, and submissive to whatever heaven might choose to send (Avery 1965).

Thus in the early development of children's novels in England, the characters were always portrayed as having good morals in their behaviour. This corresponded with the situation of the time: morality and religion being the major concerns of the western society. Literature was regarded as one of the important ways to cultivate these two

values in the children. As Sylvia W. Patterson (1971, 40)) noted, the main purpose of children's stories of the late 18th century was to teach. We can see a similar emphasis on moral and religious values in children's novels written in Malaysia, even though such novels are still in the early stages of development.

The novel *Anak Din Biola* focuses on the hero, Budiman. Budiman aged fourteen was an orphan. His father was a well-known fiddler in the city. He had also written many Malay songs. Shortly after his mother's death, Budiman's father breathed his last breath, apparently of a broken heart. With the passing of both parents, and no relatives on hand to care of him, Budiman went to live in an orphanage called 'Rumah Bonda' (The Mother's House).

Budiman's favourite hobby was music and his ambition was to become a famous fiddler like his father. Unfortunately he did not have a violin. His two friends, Cong and Candra helped him to earn some money by doing odd jobs to enable him to buy a violin, but their efforts failed. Before he died, Budiman's father had asked Pak Mat who was the cook at Rumah Bonda, to look after his 'precious' violin and to give the violin to Budiman when he was old enough. Pak Mat, however, had other intentions. He decides to sell the violin and keep the money for himself. One evening while attempting to smuggle the violin out of the orphanage, Budiman spotted him. Pak Mat was very embarrassed. On another occasion, at nightfall, Budiman and his friends saw two figures loading food from the kitchen store into a waiting van. These two incidents prompted Budiman to investigate what was happening at the orphanage.

Meanwhile, Budiman's desire to play the violin kept on burning. One day, he heard someone playing such lovely music on a violin. He followed the sounds of the music till he came to a house located at the foothill. He later discovered that the violinist playing such melodious music was Pak Wan Busu, who was blind. From that night on, Budiman learnt how to play the violin with Pak Wan Busu. At the same time Budiman tried to investigate the background of Pak Mat, the cook at Rumah Bonda, and his secret dealings. After many investigations, Budiman discovered that Pak Mat was a dishonest man. The violin, which Budiman saw Pak Mat trying to smuggle out from the orphanage, actually belonged to Budiman's father. Budiman also found out that Pak Mat had been stealing food from the orphanage and selling them, keeping the money to himself. When

the orphanage's authorities knew about this, they sacked Pak Mat. Budiman also found out that Pak Mat was an active drug courier. He reported this to the police and the police arrested Pak Mat.

Later, Pak Wan Busu realised that Budiman was the son of his former violin teacher. From then on, they became close friends. Knowing Budiman's interest in music, Pak Jais, the Principal of Rumah Bonda, decided to send Budiman to Bayu Music School for proper music lessons. The school belonged to Datin Siti Nor Bayu. Budiman's talent and determination to learn music led Datin Siti Norbayu to believe that Budiman had great potential. She therefore decided to register Budiman's name in the City Youth Violin Competition, which would be held soon. In the competition Budiman won the first place. With this achievement, Budiman obtained a scholarship, which enabled him to further his music studies in Japan. His success made him the pride of Rumah Bonda and his music school Bayu. Budiman's ambition to become a professional musician, like his father, was almost fulfilled.

The novel contained several characters, which could roughly be divided into characters whose actions the writer clearly approved of, and characters whose actions the writer strongly condemned. For the first category, we have the hero of the novel, Budiman. Budiman's characterization in the novel may be looked at from two points of view: physically and spiritually. From the physical point of view, it is obvious that from the beginning the writer was trying to arouse the reader's sympathy by depicting the fate of orphans who live in Rumah Bonda. The following quotation illustrates this point:

Semua orang tahu Rumah Bonda ini. Rumah Bonda menjadi tempat tinggal anak-anak yatim di kota raya. Tembaga papan nama ini bercahaya bila digilap, tetapi akan pudar semula beberapa hari kemudian. Digilap bercahaya, tidak digilap pudar. Begitulah seterusnya, digilap dan digilap. Kami perlu dipelihara dan diasuh di Rumah Bonda ini. Jika tidak, tidak akan menjadi remaja yang berguna (p.2).

(Everybody knows about Rumah Bonda. Rumah Bonda is a place of residence for the orphans in the city. The bronze signboard shines when it is polished, but becomes dull again a few days later. To prevent the signboard from losing its shine, it needs to be brightly polished

everyday. We as orphans are like the signboard. We need to be taken care of, if we are to become useful adolescents).

From the outset the writer attempted to play on the reader's sympathies by making orphans his central characters. In the natural course of things, orphans were considered unfortunate human beings, even though, as in this novel, they were sometimes looked after very well and given a chance in life. In order to show that they received good treatment, the writer described Budiman's well-built body belying his fourteen years of age (p.4). Undoubtedly, Budiman was fortunate in some respects, but his status as an orphan still invited sympathy from the readers.

The writer portrayed Budiman as a grateful child, who was aware of the goodness of the Principal, Pak Jais, in the orphanage. This element of gratitude was emphasised by the writer since the main character's name, Budiman also meant 'gratitude'. He was described as having all the good characteristics such as honesty, good behaviour and determination to succeed. These characteristics provided a strong foundation for his personality. By describing him in this way, the author once again invited sympathy from the readers. Conscious of his origin, Budiman was always very careful in his behaviour, avoided upsetting people in particular the staff at the orphanage and his roommate. As a result, he maintained a good relationship with Pak Jais, Pak Mat the cook, Pak Man the tailor and his two good friends, Candra and Cong. On the other hand, he was prepared to fight if anybody tried to make him look like a fool or bullied him. For example, when Pak Mat the cook found out that Budiman knew his secret, he threatened Budiman. Budiman however was not frightened. He informed Pak Mat that he would, despite Pak Mat's threats, report him (p.37).

Budiman was not someone who begged for other people's sympathy. He wanted to be treated as equal to children who had parents. He did not use the title 'an orphan' as a licence to solicit sympathy. He also refused to accept money from others. He did not want people's charity and constantly remembered his parents' instructions that he should not become a beggar. He would only accept money for work he had done. Thus he worked as a car cleaner at the petrol station with his friends, Candra and Cong, in order to show that he was capable of earning money, and preferred to do this rather than beg. In

thinking about the future, too, Budiman had presented himself as a sensible boy, capable of accurately assessing his own abilities.

Turning to the second category of characters, the main villain would be Pak Mat the Cook. In this novel Pak Mat held two posts, first as chief cook and second as security guard in the Rumah Bonda (p.46). The students identified him as Pak Mat the cook. Pak Mat did not hesitate to threaten both his workmates and pupils. Pak Mat's bark however, was louder than his bite. He was in reality, a coward. He quickly became fearful when threatened by others, as in the case when Budiman challenged him after he thought that Pak Mat was being unfair to him.

Another negative dimension of Pak Mat the cook was his dishonesty. He abused his position as chief cook and security guard. Instead of protecting the Home, Pak Mat used the opportunity to fill his own pockets (p.39) by secretly stealing food and selling it. As a result of his action the orphans did not get enough food. In the end, Pak Mat received what he deserved: he was punished. First, he was sacked from his job and second, he was sentenced to jail because of his activities as drug pusher. The writer made it clear to readers that bad deeds did not escape punishment and the antagonists duly received the punishment they deserved.

The plot of this novel was conventional and predictable, but skilfully constructed. For example, in the violin competition, the readers knew full well that Budiman would win first place because of his status as the central character and the simple plotting of the novel. On the other hand, however, the author emphasised that Budiman has had to work hard to achieve his ambition.

In this novel, the writer tried to didactically to put across a very clear, but also a very bland message. This conventional style of writing, due to the author's underlying intention to teach, brings out the weakness of the novel. This shortcoming notwithstanding, the writer was nevertheless able to create characters that looked lively and realistic. For example, the way the writer projected Budiman as a hero was clearly shown through his behaviour and actions, which were completely in tandem with his determination and industriousness. Budiman conveyed a dynamic personality and played an active role in the plot.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis, it is clear that Maarof Mahmud has played his role as a writer of children's novel well. As indirect agent of the government, he has succeeded in his task of cultivating and spreading the government's national ideology, Rukunegara, through his novel especially with regards to the two principles of Rule of Law and Good Behaviour and Morality.

It cannot be denied that the writer has put a great deal of effort in trying to channel the elements of Rukunegara in his novel in order to educate the readers, notably through the agency of the main character. For that purpose, the latter is for example cast as having good moral values such as obedience, loyalty to God, bravery and goodwill regardless of ethnic background as shown in his relationship with Candra and Cong.

Critics have agreed that the themes and the characters in children's novels should provide examples and models for the reader. Therefore the characters in novels should have distinctive personality features such as dynamism, determination, hard work and so on. On the other hand, the writer should be able to create and portray such characters realistically if he wishes to convince the reader.

Based on the above discussion, *Anak Din Biola* can be considered to be a good children's novel. This is despite the explicit didacticism detected in the novel, as it is compensated for by the realistic portrayal of the central character and the skillful construction of the novel's plot. The writer tries to show that optimism in life is possible, however humble one's background may be. Moreover, *Anak Din Biola* projects a theme, which is suitable to the young reader, advocating a positive attitude to life in order to be successful and have a well-integrated personality.

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