

Phenomenon of Islamic History Fiction Novel (IHFN) in Malaysia

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Abstract: Islamic history fiction novel is a field of Islamic creative writing in Malaysia. Its phenomenal development is due to the exceptional acceptance by the Malaysian society of novels of various titles written based on real Islamic historical events and personalities. This purpose of this study is to describe the phenomenon of Islamic history fiction novels in Malaysia in terms of chronological writing, publication and novelists. This research uses the methods of oral history and document analysis to prove society's acceptance of Islamic history fiction novels based on the quantity of novels written and printed and the emergence of novelists such as Abdul Latip Talib, Al-Ghazali and Zahiruddin Zabidi. Research results find that the development of this field is influenced by the society's exceptional acceptance which further stimulates publication and attracts the interest of novelists to write based on Islamic historical background.

Key words: Phenomenon, Islamic history fiction novel, Islamic creative, Islamic military history

INTRODUCTION

Islamic History Fiction Novel (IHFN) in Malaysia began to gain exceptional acceptance by readers in the year 2007. This phenomenon began with the appearance of the first novel entitled *Salahudin Al-Ayyubi Penakluk Jerusalem* written by Abdul Latip Talib. The novel *Putera Lembah Bakkah* by Zuraimi Ismail published before it was less known and even forgotten by the world of books (Zuraimi, 2004). The IHFN which triggered the phenomenal acceptance among the society was not just a best-seller in the market. It in fact attracted the reader's interest to research and study matters related to Islamic history. Meanwhile PTS Publications as one of the publishers involved in the IHFN industry, reaped profits millions of ringgit from sales proceeds. This situation is a positive development in the world of book publication. According to Hafizah (2011a, b) in his report entitled 'Novel Sejarah Lubuk Duit (Historical Novel Money Spinner)' in the study *Berita Harian*:

One of the best-sellers in the market is the historical fiction novel. Not only reprinted many times, the remuneration for writing historical novels has touched the hundreds of thousands ringgit value mark. However, this phenomenon is limited to only Islamic history novels whereas Malay history novels do not get the same response since there are not many writers of Malay historical novels

Studies on the phenomenon of historical novels in Europe have been done by scholars such as by Caruthers (1936), Auken (1948), Berthold (1978) and Christensen (1990). Most of their studies focus on historical novels based on religiosity whereas comparative studies of historical novels have been done by Manqoush *et al.* (2011). Clearly, this phenomenon greatly benefits the society, novelists and publishers. This study attempts to display that the indicator which shows the exceptional response of society towards IHFN covers the aspects of quantity of writings, publisher involvement and background of novelists. The purpose of this study is also to describe the phenomenon of IHFN in Malaysia in terms of writing chronology, publication and novelists.

This research uses the methods of oral history and document analysis to prove society's acceptance of IHFN based on the quantity of novels produced, printing and emergence of novelists such as Abdul Latip Talib, Al-Ghazali and Zahiruddin Zabidi.

Definition of phenomenon: The term phenomenon, according to the dictionary (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2005) is: an actuality or event which may be observed for example, natural phenomenon, historical phenomenon and an actuality or event which may be given and scientifically explained.

Immanuel Kant by Musa (2012) explained that a phenomenon is an experience which may be understood by studying the understanding process itself. Hence, the term phenomenon is clearly opposite to the term 'noumenon' which represents a condition that cannot be explained by facts or is an experience which appears without any reason or basis. In the field of science, the term phenomenon is synonymous with a series of observable signs before something happens such as a strong and swift wind movement is a sign of approaching hurricane or an earth tremor is a sign of an imminent volcano eruption.

In the context of IHFN, it can be concluded from these definitions submitted that the phenomenon of IHFN 'involves signs, actuality, events or environment such as wide publicity involving IHFN which can be felt, observed and analyzed because its influence has spread'. Simply put, IHFN as a phenomenon based on this understanding is dealt with in this research.

Definition of historical novel and islamic history fiction novel: Many views have been given in defining Islamic History Fiction Novel (IHFN). Among these is the view of Hamzah Hamdani from Yayasan Warisan Johor (Hafizah, 2011):

According to the guidelines of YWJ, a historical novel is the novelizing of historical facts. It may be fictionalized but must adhere to history. Writers are allowed to add other characters but it must not be so fictitious as to make insignificant the historical character. In addition, a historical novel is fiction based on historical facts with added fictional side characters

A writer of historical novels, Abdul Latip Talib was in accordance with the view that a historical novel is different from a historical fiction novel. As a widely experienced writer of 50 IHFN and Malay historical novels he did not deny that many are confused in understanding this fact and emphasized that (Hafizah, 2011):

Perhaps there are people who believe that a historical novel and historical fiction novel are similar but his view is that a historical novel is based on facts and its main character is a historical figure. However, there are those who view that a historical novel and its main historical character may be novelized by featuring other characters. For example, a character created as a narrator of known history. For him this is wrong and if it happens then it is historical fiction. Further, according by Abdul Latip, a historical novel needs to be driven by the historical figure for example if the writer writes about the Islamic figure Khalid Al-Walid, the main character must be Khalid Al-Walid and the story of Khalid Al-Walid cannot be highlighted from other fictional characters. Facts cannot be fabricated as history cannot be reversed on the ground of reform.

Further, Glosari Istilah Kesusasteraan (Glosary of Literary Terms) (Hussain, 1988) defines a historical novel as follows:

Even though a character in a novel may be created by reconstructing a certain renowned historical figure in a fiction through the author's or novelist's imagination, the historical facts manifested as background are usually preserved and adapted according to the story. Based on historical events, the author may draw from important stories of friction or conflict suitable as story materials for example about social or political unrest of a certain time

But however, Fleishman (1971) had a firmer view in saying that a novel with a historical background may be considered as a historical novel. Further, Fleishman explained that the plot of a historical novel is supported by historical events, particularly which touch on major social issues. These issues interrelate with the lives of the characters who comprise of historical figures. In order to reinforce Fleishman's statement, it is appropriate to refer to the following statement. "It is necessary to include at least one such figure in a novel if it's to qualify as historical. The historical novel has a specific link to history not merely a real building or real event but a real person among the fictitious ones".

Another statement by Fleishman (1971) which is important for a more definitive categorization of historical novels is "When life is seen in the context of history, we have a novel when the novel's characters live in the same world with a historical person we have a historical novel".

In this regard, it can be deduced from the definitions of IHFN that it is a novel which presents and displays: characters representing Islamic historical personalities who really existed and are found in historical

records. Events which actually happened in Islamic history and are recorded in history, places where certain events took place or individuals were involved in Islamic history, whether the names still exist or otherwise (Rahamad, 2005). It has to be remembered that Islam places great importance on knowledge. Hence, literature with Islamic historical elements is required to be the vehicle for knowledge transmission. The same is applied to IHFN in Malaysia. Until today, novelists still observe the ethics and guidelines in the writing of history not to mention Islamic history.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The emergence and development of islamic history fiction novel: IHFN was first printed, distributed and sold in the year 2007. This beginning rejuvenated the world of novels in Malaysia. Not only that, this development also gave a positive momentum to IHFN and Islamic literature novels. In Malaysia the first IHFN, Salahuddin Al-Ayuubi Penakluk Jurusalem was published in the year 2007. Its publication successfully boosted IHFN to a higher level.

The first publication of IHFN was an attempt for a new genre in novel writing. Clearly it was a success and best-seller in the market. This motivated the spirit of PTS Litera to publish more IHFN. In that same year, a few more were published, namely, Khalid Memburu Syahid, Ikramah Penentang Jadi Pembela and Tariq Menang atau Syahid. In addition to experimenting with IHFN, Abdul Latip Talib together with the publisher also, published local historical novel (Malaysian history), Si Bongkok Tanjung Puteri and Setelah Roboh Kota Melaka. The year 2007 also witnessed the writing of six books of IHFN and Malaysian history novel.

In the year 2008, Abdul Latip Talib continued to produce another eight IHFN and Malaysian history novels. Five are IHFN entitled Abu Bakar Sahabat Sejati, Sultan Muhamad Al-Fateh, Abu Ubaidah Al-Jarrah, Umar Al-Khattab Pembaharu Dunia Islam and the other three are local history novels, Laftenan Adnan Wira Bangsa, Hikayat Amir Hamzah volumes 1-3 and Randau Ruai. The division of publication between IHFN and Malaysian or local history novels will not be balanced due to the lack of history books as reference materials for local history on past Malay supremacy as a basis for historical fiction. According by Rahamad (2005), this is the main factor for the slow growth of local historical novels. An interesting thing which happened in the year 2008 was that a female writer named Rohayati Bakri followed in the footsteps of Abdul Latip Talib in the field of writing IHFN. This at once made her the first female writer of IHFN after Abdul

Latip Talib. Her novel is entitled Pengintip Kota Syam. This means that in the year 2008, six IHFN and three Malaysian historical novels were published.

The third year, 2009 witnessed Abdul Latip Talib once again leading the world of writing IHFN in Malaysia by accomplishing seven IHFN novels and local historical novels. Among these are Bilal bin Rabah Pengumandang Seruan Langit, Khalifah Uthman Affan, Ali bin Abi Talib and Hulagu Khan while the titles of his local historical novels are Lembing Awang Pulang ke Dayang, Dol Said Pahlawan Naning and Mat Kilau Pahlawan Pahang.

The fourth year, 2010 was the most vibrant in the world of writing IHFN. Novels with historical background were actively published and sold out. The year 2010 witnessed the publication of 15 IHFN. The highly talented writer, Zahiruddin Zabidi began to step in by accomplishing two IHFN entitled Rabiatul Adawiyah, Perindu Cinta Abadi and Aminah, Cinta Puteri Quraisy. In contrast to Abdul Latip Talib, Zahiruddin Zabidi attempted to make a difference by writing an IHFN which consisted of Islamic heroine characters. According by Zabidi, the idea of writing Islamic heroines historical novels such as the above struck him while he was researching and surveying in bookshops. It occurred to him then that most of the historical novels centred on male warriors.

Zabidi tried in his research to recount Muslim women of the past in continuing the legacy of Abdul Latip Talib, so that, these historical narratives may become the inspiration of today's and future generations and not merely relics of the past. Reference books and translations of books on these women were adapted until the appearance of his first novel written in the year 2009 and published in the year 2010, Rabiatul Adawiyah, Perindu Cinta Abadi. But however, Abdul Latip Talib did not miss out in writing IHFN in the year 2010. Efforts to produce IHFN were intensified and increased to the extent that 13 titles of IHFN were accomplished by Abdul Latip Talib, including bargain edition novels and compilation novels. The year 2010 was the year he wrote the most novels. It is undeniable that several novels were made into compilations and reprinted many times with different presentations. Among these were Imam Syafie Pejuang Kebenaran, Imam Hanafi Pendebat Kebenaran, Imam Maliki Pengarang Kebenaran, Imam Hanbali Pejuang Kebenaran, Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz, Perang Badar Perang Penentuan and Hijrah Permulaan Sebuah Kegemilangan. And his local historical novels were Istana Menanti (KOMSAS) and Pendekar Siamang Gagap Pahlawan Negeri Sembilan.

In the year 2011, writing of IHFN became the focus of local novelists. They wrote as many as possible novels of

this genre. In that year, 13 novels were published in Malaysia. Not only did the quantity of novels shoot up suddenly, the number of novelists engaged in writing IHFN also increased with the birth of nine novelists. This positive development was the result of influence brought about by the leading IHFN writer, Abdul Latip Talib. The attraction of increased sales proceeds as well as his success in producing many novels each year inspired many new novelists to look up to writing IHFN. Based on this development, the year 2011 undoubtedly witnessed the level of excellence achieved by IHFN in Malaysia.

Of the 13 titles written, Abdul Latip Talib's research was leading in terms of number when he accomplished five novels including the compilation novel, *Imam-imam yang Benar*. The other titles were *Perang Khaibar*, *Penaklukan Kota Khaibar*, *Perang Khandaq*, *Mustafa Kamal Atartuk* and *Saad Abu Waqas, Kesateria Islam*. Then appeared young new writers such as Al-Ghazali Sulaiman with his first IHFN, *Abu Zhar Al-Ghifari*, *Pembela Golongan Miskin*, *Azzah AR* with her novel *Shamsiah Fakeh*, *Hayati Ridhwan* and her novel *Tok Kenali*, *Pembangunan Pemikiran Umat Islam Nusantara*, *Nurasyikin Ahmad* who wrote *Siti Hajar*, *Citra Cinta dan Pengorbanan* and *Salleh De Ran* with the novel *Perang Kelang*, *Sengketa Anakanak Raja*. *Muhammad SAW Putera Lembah Bakkah* written by *Zuraimi Ismail* was also published in 2011 as well as *Laksamana Cheng Ho* by *Imran Yusuf*. In the year 2012, the number of IHFN written declined compared to the years 2010 and 2011. Only 11 titles were published, five of which were authored by Abdul Latip Talib, namely *Abu Ayub Al-Ansari*, *Syahid Kota Konstantinople*, *Badiuzzaman Said Nursi*, *Tokoh Pembaharu Islam*, *Perjanjian Hudaibiyah*, *Kiyai Salleh dan Hassan Al-Banna*. Other authors who wrote four novels in that year were Al-Ghazali Sulaiman who wrote *Zubair bin Awwam*, *Pengiring Nabi*, *Talhah bin Ubaidillah*, *Syahid yang Hidup amru Al-As*, *Pembuka Mesir* and *Hamzah bin Abdul Mutalib*. He was followed by *Zaini Rejab* who wrote the novel *Perang Arab-Israel 1973*, *Operasi Badar* as well as *Zuraimi Ismail* once again with the title *Putera Lembah Bakkah 3*. A total of eleven IHFN were published in the year 2012.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Completion of novels, publication and printing: The earliest publisher of IHFN was PTS Litera Sendirian Berhad a subsidiary of PTS Sendirian Berhad which was founded by Puan Ainon Mohd and Professor Emeritus Dr. Abdullah Hassan. The primary purpose of PTS in venturing into the book industry is the mission of educating the people. PTS was established in the year

1988 by the registered name of PTS Consultants Sdn. Bhd. In its the early stage, PTS offered publishing consulting services, training in text editing and typesetting/page layout. PTS is the acronym of Professional Training Service. In the year 2000, PTS began actively to publish and distribute books for general readership in Malay language. The advantage PTS has over other publishers is the image of good quality in terms training writers, writing technique, writers, kaver/cover page, contents, grammar, book sales and marketing/promotion of researcher. To date, PTS publishing activities are being managed by eight publishing subsidiaries which publish a variety of genre.

The year 2012 witnessed an important event when PTS Consultants Sdn. Bhd changed its name to PTS Media Group Sdn. Bhd. This name was officially used on 4th January 2012 in order to expand investment and business opportunities in publishing, marketing, media and production. PTS today is an affiliation of several publishing and distribution companies known as PTS Group. PTS is famous as an expert IT publisher because it uses the internet as the main medium to promote its publications.

The question arising is how do some novelists manage to write many IHFN in a year. In order to write many quality novels, a novelist needs to have a deep interest in writing and a strong determination. In addition, novelists need to research materials to write about the main character. Novelists also have to practise discipline in managing time to ensure good and prolific writing. Without these criteria, it is quite impossible to accomplish a novel as hoped for.

According by Samat (2009), Abdul Latip Talib's undisputed flair or talent in writing both IHFN and local historical novels cannot be dismissed just like that. After all his appearance and talent as a Islamic history novelist has made a distinctive impact on the development of writing IHFN which had been lethargic and ignored by publishers. Abdul Latip Talib through the publications of PTS Publications and Distributors Sdn. Bhd. produced at least one IHFN or a local historical novel every two months in this country's market. Further, according to Samat, Abdul Latip Talib is really fortunate and serious in writing IHFN due to lack of competition and the trust placed by the publisher in his ability to accomplish an IHFN, benefitting both the publisher and the writer. Today, the country's major bookstores such as MPH, popular and Kinokuniya place Malay books on the front shelves and space for easy viewing when before this English books monopolized the bookstores.

This phenomenon may be seen clearly in the publication of Abdul Latip Talib's IHFN such as

Salahudin Penakluk Jerusalem and Sultan Muhammad Al-Fateh Penakluk Konstantinopel which were categorized as best sellers and reprinted many times to fulfill the market's increasing demand. In addition what has made IHFN a phenomenon is its combination of facts, fiction and Islamic moral values for emulation by the readers who crave something different from novels in the market.

Malaysian IHFN novelists: The leading IHFN novelist in Malaysia is Abdul Latip Talib or better known as 'Pak Latip'. He was born in Kampung Ulu Seperi, Rembau, Negeri Sembilan on the 2nd of June 1954 and today resides in Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan. After retirement, he started to write full-time including poems, short stories, study and television drama scripts. The 20 of his novels for children, adolescent and adults were published. Since the year 2007, he focused on writing historical novels with PTS and has to date produced more than 50 historical novels. He has received several awards among them Sayembara Cerpen Berunsur Islam, Sayembara Cerpen Perpaduan, Hadiah Sastera Utusan and Sayembara Cerpen dan Puisi Negeri Sembilan, Sayembara Menulis Novel Sarawak 2005, Hadiah Sayembara Menulis novel Sejarah Johor 2007, Anugerah Sastera Negeri Sembilan 2005 and Pingat Khidmat Cemerlang Masyarakat (PMC) by the State Government of Negeri Sembilan in the year 2007.

The second novelist not less famous is Zahiruddin Zabidi or by his full name Ahmad Zahiruddin bin Mohd Zabidi. His superiority lies in his versatility or not focusing on a particular genre of writing. He is able to produce various genres of writing such as Islamic novel, IHFN, motivation books and Islamic books. His educational background began early in life at Yuk Tse National Lower School (Chinese type) in Tumpat, Kelantan and then later at Maahad Tahfiz Darul Qur'an Wal-Qiraat, Repek at Pasir Mas for a year to memorize the Holy Quran and study venerated religious books. He continued at some religious secondary schools (Arabic) of Yayasan Islam Kelantan (YIK) completing his school days at Maahad Muhammadi Tumpat in the year 2002. He was later accepted into the Foundation Centre of International Islamic University (IIUM) in Petaling Jaya in the field of Economics and Management Science. However due to conflict, he was forced to postpone his studies and worked temporarily at Zone 4 Administration Centre of Usamah bin Zaid Mosque, Wangsa Maju, under the Qariah Management Section of the Islamic Religious Department of Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory (JAWI). At the same time he furthered his studies reading for an Honours degree in Public Administration through distance learning as well as an Executive Diploma in

Usuluddin (Islamic Jurisprudence) at Universiti of Malaya (UM). After completing both courses, he read for a Master's degree in Usuluddin (History and Islamic Civilization) at the Academy of Islamic Studies. Among his research are Rabiatal Adawiyah, Kembara Lima Putera, Mencari Pohon Emas, Nian Hati Salsabila aminah, Cinta Puteri Quraisy, Fatimah Srikandi-Srikandi yang Benar, 70 HADIS, Mudah Hafal Mudah Amal and Surat untuk Carolyn.

The third novelist who wrote many IHFN in Malaysia is Al-Ghazali Sulaiman. During the years 2011 and 2012, he wrote five IHFN. He was born in Tangkak, Johore on the 17th December 1988 and received secondary education at Kluang Science Secondary School, Johore. He then continued education at MARA University of Technology (UiTM), Shah Alam in the field of Applied Science. He first began to familiarize himself with writing IHFN after listening to a religious lecture regarding Hayatus Sahabah by Ustaz Nazmi Abdul Karim. Besides that he was also impressed and influenced by the personality and writings of Abdul Latip Talib. Al-Ghazali began to write IHFN at the end of the year 2010 and in early 2011 he sent the manuscript of his first novel which was published in August 2011 by the title Abu Zhar Al-Ghifari. The technique he used in writing IHFN was the Surah Yusuf Technique.

Phenomenon of Islamic history fiction novel: This IHFN phenomenon continued to develop with focus on great personalities in Islamic history written in simple, artistic and communicative language style yet, retaining the literary element so that today's readers may understand and know these prominent historical figures through literary research in an effective, lively and somewhat engaging manner which touches the heart and soul of the reader. It is indeed different from reading history books which are stiff, static and lack the humanizing touch (Tahir, 1989). Here lies the importance and need for IHFN and local historical novels which Abdul Latip Talib and other novelists have diligently, committedly and firmly worked on.

Abdul Latip Talib accomplishments in producing IHFN have clearly been emulated by other IHFN writers. As explained above, 12 talented novelists have followed in the footsteps of Abdul Latip Talib, namely, Al-Ghazali Sulaiman, Zahiruddin Zabidi, Rohayati Bakri, A.R, Azzah Hayati Ridhwan, Mu'min Jami, Nurasyikin Ahmad, Salleh De Ran, Zuraimi Ismail, Zaimi Rejab and the latest talents are Web Sutera with his novel Panji-Panji Al-Fateh and Nakhoda Agung as well as Shafie Abd Rahman with his novel Khairuddin Barbarossa Admiral Islam yang digeruni Angkatan Laut Eropah.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, IHN have a great potential for further exploration in Malaysia. This is evident by the current phenomenon. The market for IHFN promises millions of ringgit worth. Readers and the society constantly await the appearance of new IHFN in the market. In fact, there are schools and learning centres in Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore which have made reading IHFN compulsory reading at school, whilst parents are willing to spend generously on buying books such as IHFN and actively encourage their children to read them at home.

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