

The Rambutan Orchard: Ecocritical Reading of the Kelantanese Malay Identity in Fiction

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Abstract

The paper presents an ecocritical exploration of the representation of the Kelantanese Malay identity and connectivity to the land in *The Rambutan Orchard*, an anthology of short stories by Che Husna Azhari. Although ecocriticism is a well-established theory, its use to study the female Kelantanese Malay storyteller's portrayal of the environment in the Malaysian state of Kelantan is under-explored. Applying the pastoral approach in analysing the stories, the researchers uncover the representations of rural life, the characters' interactions with their surroundings and the consequences thereof with regards to the construction of identity. The ecocritical reading of the orchard in *The Rambutan Orchard* illustrates Che Husna's authorial-defined social reality as she narrates the multiple significations of the orchard in the lives of this fictional Kelantanese village. Subsequently, the anthology is framed within the quintessential Kelantanese Malay psyche and connectivity to their land of birth. The study finds that the orchard provides distinctiveness in the narrator's identity, symbolises her yearning for her place of origin and teaches her lessons on social hierarchy and personal worth. Finally, the orchard nurtures her self-efficacy by becoming a place of solace in her memories, consolidating her identity as a Kelantanese Malay in the world at large.

Keywords: Kelantanese Malay, Malaysian Fiction, Che Husna Azhari, Authorial-Defined Social Reality, Pastoral Identity.

Introduction

A human being has many ways of identifying with elements that shape who they are, place being one of them. Our home can be the space we are most comfortable in and have emotional attachments to. It is pertinent for us to also be aware of how places such as home impact the formation of our identity. Place identity features strongly in the works of the Malay Malaysian Che Husna Azhari. Born and raised in the northern state of Kelantan, Che Husna grew up in the towns of Melor, Pasir Puteh and Kota Bharu. The inclusion of such a northern Malaysian aspect in her writings enriches and accentuates her distinctness as a storyteller. These places influence 'her scope of writing as she opts to record stories' of the Kelantanese society with their traditions and way of life (Abdillah et al., 2010: 5).

The Rambutan Orchard is a compilation of short stories written by Che Husna Azhari, published in 1993. It consists of tales of her childhood spent in the north-eastern state of Kelantan. Growing up in the land of her birth provided her with a rich source of cultural references and a unique perspective as a writer. Furthermore, her narrative has been considered to have introduced 'issues and concerns rarely addressed by critics and scholars' in the context of Malaysian Literature in English (Abdillah et al., 2011: 2). Her position in the field of Malaysian literature is monumental as she provides the necessary female voice amid the 'male-dominated Anglophone literary world' (Abdillah et al., 2011: 2). Always societal in how she views the world, her tales offer refreshing takes on how life is like for Malaysian women (Abdillah et al., 2011). The intersection of storytelling and environment plays a big role in *The Rambutan Orchard* anthology. Using the ecocritical lens, this paper explores the interactions between the characters and their physical surroundings in *The Rambutan Orchard* to ascertain the extent the environment is instrumental to the construction of the Kelantanese Malay identity as reflected in the writings of Che Husna.

Literature Review

The environment has always played a vital role in literature, particularly in the context of Malay culture. A Malay is 'closely linked' to their 'landscapes' which entails aspects of nature, culture, traditions and customs (Hussain et al., 2020: 2155). There is an emphasis on 'the relationship between God, humans, and nature' in 'the Malay lifestyle' (Hussain et al., 2020: 2166). Therefore, there is an extricable connection between a person of Malay ethnicity and their surroundings, particularly one that connotes land.

A) Locality in Che Husna Azhari's Works

Che Husna Azhari, a prominent Malay writer from Kelantan, has also included her environment and surroundings in her writings, especially *The Rambutan Orchard*. However, there is a dearth of research on her 1993 anthology. In contrast, there are past studies on her other works which discuss a variety of issues such as identity, ethnicity, language and gender. The emphasis on locality in her stories is prominent and stark (Abdillah, 2011). The locality is important in her writings as 'her literature reflects her self-identification with her birthplace', solidifying her connection with the place she was raised in (Abdillah et al., 2011: 10). As a result, her take on rural life in Kelantan provides the reader with an insider's view as to how life really was back then. The formative years that moulded an author's life influence their 'individualised literary explorations' (Abdillah et al., 2011: 10). Consequently, writers such as Che Husna 'present us with a rigorously honest depiction of women and the naked truths of life' (Abdillah et al., 2011: 10).

B) Kelantanese Identity

Che Husna Azhari has utilised her identity as a Kelantanese in her stories 'through her choice of local setting, characters, language and various literary forms' (Baharum, 2012: 7). As such, her narrative voice is distinctive and contains 'particularity' (Baharum, 2012: 7), expanding the breadth of Malaysian literary output. By focusing on contemporary Kelantanese women in her tales, she has de-centred the notions of a Malay woman which are often 'homogenised by the mainstream literature in favour of Western feminist thoughts of universality and sameness' (Baharum, 2012: 7). Her Kelantanese identity is manifested in the presentation of her stories and expands the idea of being a Malay in 'the Third World' (Baharum, 2012: 7).

Therefore, her voice offers an alternative to the mainstream perception of Malayness in Malaysian literature in English (Warde, 2002). In discussing her choice to write in English, Warde (2002: 221) opines that she has had to 'abandon the Kelantan dialect', her true mother tongue and language of her childhood. It matters not if she writes in English or the standard Bahasa Malaysia, which is the official and national language of the county, as both options are not her first language. Furthermore, the values influenced by religion, a fundamental aspect of her childhood, mould the 'unstable alliance' between Islam and modernity in her stories (Ng, 2009: 130). The Malays in her narratives 'opt for emotional suppression as a means to tolerate situations that otherwise jeopardize harmony' (Ismail & Al-Subaihi 2020: 230). Her representations of the Kelantanese Malayness are complex and layered with dimensions of culture, power and religion.

C) Lived Reality of an Author

This is very much in line with the notion of "authorial-defined social reality" in literature (Raihanah, 2009: 56). Narratives by Malaysian writers are much influenced by their perception of 'self, ethnicity and the nation' due to the multiple layers of their identity revolving around the three aspects (Raihanah, 2009: 45). Due to the National Language Policy and the National Culture Policy in the 1970s that placed literature written in Bahasa Malaysia as central, Malaysian literature written in English was relegated as 'sectional' or vernacular, affecting many of the non-Malay authors who predominantly wrote in English (Raihanah, 2009: 47). Inevitably, representations of ethnicity rose to be of vital importance 'among writers and critics' (Raihanah, 2009: 50). Che Husna Azhari, in telling stories of Kelantanese Malay characters in English, has carved a space for discourse regarding the heterogeneity of the Malay identity and its attachment to the land they call home.

Nonetheless, there has not been any study focusing on the theme of locality or place in the formation of identity in Che Husna's narratives. Her depiction of rural Kelantanese is nuanced and enriched by her figurative language. The lens of ecocriticism, specifically the pastoral approach, will allow for the function of place to be examined in a detailed manner, revealing insights into how humans are inherently shaped by their surroundings.

Methodology

In analysing Che Husna Azhari's stories in *The Rambutan Orchard*, the lens of ecocriticism would be applied due to the heavy features of place and identity in the text. Ecocritical lens allows the reader to examine 'the relationship between literature and the physical environment', taking an 'earth-centred approach to literary studies' (Glotfelty, 1996: xix). Ecocriticism situates humans within an 'interdependent', 'integrated' ecosystem which includes our surroundings and the environment (Glotfelty, 1996: xx).

A noted approach in ecocriticism is pastoral which can be defined as 'an expression of longing for an idealized country life, a place of abundant nature' (Sangkhaphanthanon, 2018: 157). There are three aspects of the pastoral approach which warrant attention (Sangkhaphanthanon, 2018). The first aspect can be linked to Western literature that depicts the idealised rural lifestyle, the second aspect consists of 'writings that associate the beauty of nature with the Edenic garden in contrast to the urban as the foil of heavenly inspiration' and the third aspect deals with the exaggerated images of country life that are improbable (Sangkhaphanthanon, 2018: 157). There is an element of enlarging the romantic image of the country life that is deemed as 'triumphant' despite the possible 'ambivalent attitude toward the idyllic moment and the speaker who gives voice to it' (Lindenberger, 1972: 338).

In literature, place has played a strong role in creating 'the atmosphere for the characters and events of a story, ...[including] both built and natural environments' (Sangkaphanthanon, 2018: 157). The 'sense of place' also influences the process of identity formation whereby a person may gain clarity with regards to their role in a specific environment as they come to 'understand places and develop emotional connections to them' (Sangkaphanthanon, 2018: 157). Therefore, it would be fruitful to understand how place and surroundings shape the identity that is posited within a certain society in a detailed manner.

According to Breakwell's identity process theory, 'identity should be conceptualised in terms of a biological organism moving through time which develops through the accommodation, assimilation and evaluation of the social world' (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996: 206). The factors of identity formation are four, namely 'continuity, distinctiveness and self-esteem' with 'efficacy' added later (Breakwell 2014: 30). Being distinct is vital for individuals to feel as if they hold unique identities (Breakwell 1986). The notion of 'continuity' should be seen 'across time and situation' and self-esteem entails 'a feeling of personal worth or social value' (Breakwell, 1986: 24).

In applying Breakwell's theory within the context of pastoral ecocriticism, the relationship between the characters and place in *The Rambutan Orchard* can be brought forth to reveal the processes of identity as constructed in the narrative of Che Husna.

Analysis

One of the 'unsaid' as readers explore the anthology is the importance placed on the theme of differentiation. In *The Rambutan Orchard*, the society is manifested in the form of a Kelantanese village and the rambutan orchard is the marker of distinction for the villagers to affirm their positions. Asserting one's distinctiveness can be a 'potent and continuous force in our society' (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980: 3). In the context of Malaysia, the Kelantanese Malays have always been perceived to be unique for their dialect, strong cultural roots and Islamic influence in comparison with Malays from other states (Philip, 2018). Furthermore, land and surroundings play a big role in the collective Malay lifestyle, impacting their perception of themselves and others (Hussain et al., 2020). Mirroring social norms, the various descriptions of the trees and plants in the orchard are also located on a social hierarchy. An example can be seen in the story 'The Garden Green' where the narrator describes in detail the list of trees grown by her neighbour – 'coconut, mengseta and huge, dark, sombre rambai trees' (Azhari, 1993: 14). These fruits according to her can never be compared with her 'aristocratic rambutans'. As she describes it,

'There were no rambutan trees in his orchard, only coconut, mengseta and huge, dark, sombre rambai trees. Rambai trees were not in the same genre as the aristocratic rambutans, rambais were village trees. Hardly anybody ate their fruits except perhaps children, women and squirrels. The rambais were too coarse to be presented in a proper receptacle to guests.'

In her words, 'Rambais were' merely 'village trees' and not desirable. The anthropomorphic qualities of the trees – 'sombre' versus 'aristocratic' – give the land they are attached to a sense of inferiority or superiority.

However, the narrator's construction of identity in the short story is grounded on the quality of the fruits produced in the orchard, imagined as blue-blooded in the feudal sense. This is consistent with how entrenched a feudal viewpoint is in Malay society, categorising individuals based on hierarchy and social status (Maaruf, 2022). There is glorification in the

narrator's tone albeit delivered in a tongue-in-cheek style. Resultantly, the inhabitants of the orchards also deem themselves in such a manner. When it comes to personal worth in Malay society, the element of nama or reputation holds a far bigger value than meritocracy (Milner, 2002). This is not the first time Che Husna has commented upon the trait of Malay society. She has also criticised 'the snobbery and feudal mentality of upper-class Kelantanese Malay society' in another short story, 'Ustazah Inayah', detailing how her characters hold bloodlines of noble origin in high esteem (Manan, 2010). Hence, Che Husna subverts the Eurocentric notion of personal worth by infusing her authorial-defined social reality as a Kelantanese Malay, linking it to social hierarchy in her anthology.

Similarly, the orchard itself is given a description that set it aside from the other parts of the village, as illustrated in 'The Garden Green.'

'The rambutan orchard lay on an acre of land, planted with twenty or so rambutan trees. The rambutan trees had attained maturity by then, large, spreading. The spreading foliage was a natural canopy that kept out rain and intense sun. If one were to sit on one of the tree's spreading boughs, low on the ground one could see slivers of sunlight spreading through, zigzagging through leaves, fruits-in-season and branches (Azhari, 1993: 7)

Such a socially prominent space also embodies the elements of tranquillity as seen in the excerpt above. Traits such as the 'spreading foliage' and the 'natural canopy' with 'slivers of sunlight' imagine the orchard as a place of serenity and security. Hence the orchard is given a role in this fictional Kelantanese community. It is more than just an orchard with rambutan trees, it is also a place where one can 'sit' and shield oneself from the 'rain and intense sun'. In the same context, the orchard is also described as 'paradise' (p. 7) as the same story illustrates its other functions, namely providing play for the younger members of the community: "Where children had nothing better to do except dangle from the shady canopy of rambutan trees and play at being agile monkeys' (Azhari, 1993: 7) It is important to note these imageries are depicted in a generalised sense and not subject to any particular character in the village. Hence, the rambutan orchard is a communal symbol for the greater good of the Kelantanese Malay in the village of Melor.

The inclusivity in the use of the orchard space is another important idea represented in the anthology. For the younger generation, the orchard provides an outdoor comfort zone as they navigate their younger years. The orchard provides a space for them to be themselves, not bound by the instructions and expectations of those older than them. In the story 'The Village Wali', the narrator captures how tenacious the children are as they play in the orchard.

'... when the Penggawa's wife shouted at us, we would then climb the guava tree, just to spite her, or tear a sapling for our perbets; we would pretend we wanted the water-guavas. The best part was jumping straight down from one of the branches and escaping from the old lady.

Then we compared notes.

"Who jumped the highest?" (Azhari, 1993: 29-30)

While figuring out and asserting who they are, the orchard remains the centre-stage of their innocent play-world, a place carved for them to grow and develop away from adults' prying eyes. When individuals establish and maintain 'a sense of differentiation from others', the principle of distinctiveness impacts their perception in a profound manner (Vignoles et al.,

2000: 337). Che Husna through her authorial-defined social reality narrates how the orchard opens up for the children of this Kelantanese village a competitive spirit as they manoeuvre through a variety of games. The orchard also appears to create space for the children to exercise their persistence and unswerving need to roam the trees despite the scolding of the grownup. The children feel safe to be themselves within the confines of the orchard, a metaphor for the Kelantanese people who seek comfort in their cultural homeland in Kelantan.

Place can also serve as a platform on which identity can continuously exist across time and situation (Ujang, 2012). The narrator in the tales of *The Rambutan Orchard* preserves the orchard as she remembers it in her memory, linking it to the process of growing up and identity searching as she narrates the orchard 'grew to lose its innocence' in her 'process of growing up (Azhari, 1993: 5). The loss of innocence, however, does not entail the reduction in importance of the orchard. Instead, the narrator returns in her mind as an adult, as illustrated in the story entitled 'The Garden Green' –

'My subconscious continuously returns to this haven-paradise. It is as if my umbilical cord has never been severed, only grown longer to accommodate a child never weaned. I dream of this paradise constantly, although in reality I have grown up and am physically distant. The orchard is now part of another person's consciousness. I am talking of that orchard in a certain time, in relation to time, which was mine.' (Azhari 1993: 18)

The metaphor of her 'umbilical cord' which 'has never been severed' indicates the continuous attachment of the narrator to the place. When she returns to the orchard in her imagination, she is also returning to the Kelantanese village she was born and raised in, surrounded by her family and childhood friends and, most importantly, her culture. Besides that, geography plays an important factor in the categorisation of Kelantanese Malays – they are deemed to belong to the state only if they were born and raised within the confines of their region and ideals, symbolising an entrenched devotion to their origin (Pawanteh & Kuake, 2016). Describing herself as a 'child' that 'has never weaned', the orchard remains intact in her mind despite the physical distance that keeps them apart. People have the tendency to give 'meanings and perceptions' to the place they are at (Ujang, 2012: 156). This is linked to their effort in 'maintaining self-identity' by centralising 'the significance of place' in their life (Ujang, 2012: 158). Therefore, 'to secure identity is to ensure continuity in the physical, social together with meanings and attachment held by the people' (Ujang, 2012: 158). Therefore, the narrator retains her identity by attaching it to the orchard, a place she spent most of her childhood at.

Furthermore, the orchard is part of the village land, a vital connective force in the fictional Kelantanese Malay of *The Rambutan Orchard*. This echoes conclusions by social scientists that among the Malays, land symbolises their effort in cultivating and sustaining their livelihood and consequently, their sense of belonging (Lazim, 2014). In the anthology, the orchard would remind the villagers and the narrator, of the abundance of resources in their homeland.

A form of loyalty to one's place is unmistakable, particularly for those hailing from a Kelantanese society with 'strong sense of provincialism' or 'semangat kenegerian' (Pawanteh & Kuake, 2016: 187). As the narrator moved away from her village, she would be required to converse in standard Malay and English for her education and work – her dialect could only be used when she met with fellow Kelantanese – as she evolved from a child in Kelantan to a grownup navigating Malaysian society. The orchard of her mind allows her to proceed with

the identity she formed as a little girl and carry the memories attached to that identity akin to a keepsake to be cherished in her later years. Hence in the story, the narrator transfers the orchard from its physical reality to her 'consciousness' and 'dream', a platform existing only in her mind. Inadvertently, this is her way of maintaining her identity across time, for she has no choice but to outgrow her village-centred childhood in Kelantan, and space, for she had left the land of her birth.

However, the identity that the narrator seeks to maintain is one that is dependent on an unreliable stream of recollections of where the orchard is located. She often returns to the orchard by revisiting her memories, which she has admitted to being 'personalised and historically incorrect' (Azhari, 1993: 77). It can be interpreted that she is yearning for the idealised Kelantan in her childhood, a place she belonged to before venturing to the world outside as a grownup. She dreams of a ghost 'rolling about in pain and torment in the nipah palms' near the unsafe 'pond' (Azhari, 1993: 77). Some of her memories, which house the orchard of her youth, are 'retrieved from recesses of much battered brains' (Azhari, 1993: 77). Like her parents, the orchard provides her with psychological safety – a space to play – and material needs – fruits to be consumed. Such is the potent force of land that is present in Malay society which considers land to be a provider – they would toil the land and their hard work would be rewarded (Lazim, 2014). Linking it to the imageries in the previous section, the reluctance to cut the metaphorical umbilical cord can be traced back to how the orchard represents a protective force in her childhood which has always kept her safe, secure and special, magnifying her pastoral outlook.

The final principle in Breakwell's identity process is self-efficacy, which entails 'the motivation to maintain feelings of competence and control' (Vignoles et al., 2000: 204). The sense of control has a strong core in Malay emotions. The Arabic notion of *redha* or 'pious surrender to God's will' requires an individual to overcome challenges calmly and sincerely (Izharuddin, 2021: 2). A person who exercises *redha* in his or her life practises 'patience' and 'sincerity' in order to emerge victorious in their 'personal struggles', embodying the Islamic values of 'endurance, perseverance and purity' (Izharuddin, 2021: 8). In *The Rambutan Orchard*, it is not sufficient for the narrator to evaluate herself and the people around her as being distinct and worthy – those traits must also be accompanied by the ability to exert control in an efficient manner and prevent recklessness to take over in dealing with the orchard. In a way, to exert control is a sign of wanting to overcome struggles in a restrained manner which is encouraged in Islam. The narrator in the anthology illustrates the position of the father as having control over the orchard that is being made accessible to the villagers. In the story 'The Garden Green' –

We also owned another tract of land, another rambutan orchard way inwards into the interior following the laterite road. It was planted with rambutan because the sandy soil would not tolerate anything else. It was bequeathed to my father by one of the villages so that my father would be moved to stay and teach the unlettered in the district. Since the land was a bequeathed land, the populace could also pass by and help themselves to whatever they fancied in the orchards. (Azhari 1993: 12)

The orchard here has a trait of providing fruits for the villagers, seemingly at any time of day. The land is 'bequeathed' yet recognized to belong to the narrator's father in a transactional relationship – so long as her father teaches in the district, the land is his. The granting of access to the orchard paints the narrator's father as the one exercising control over the land, providing the family with a sort of efficacy in their life. The father holds the role

of a provider in the family. Gaining control over the orchard is a sign that he can manage the challenges of being the family's breadwinner – not only can he provide them with shelter, but he is also able to make the villagers feel welcome there, enhancing his standing in society, connected to the previously-mentioned notion of personal worth.

Besides that, other parts of the orchard also instil a sense of self-efficacy in the narrator's childhood. The following paragraph in 'The Boy Who Spoke Sparingly' reads – 'Our Doone Valley had steep banks on both sides, way, way above our heads. We could stay happily in the valley and nobody would know we were in there. In the middle of the valley ran a tiny stream, it came up only to our shins. On each side of this stream, a rivulet almost, were white sandy banks with sands as soft as foam mattresses. On our particular site, an old rubber tree trunk lay astride the promontory into the valley, hiding it further from prying eyes. It was the right place for our Doone Valley (Azhari, 1993: 70)

The paragraph above depicts how children find comfort in a place where they are allowed to do almost anything they want and need nothing else for entertainment. Humans grapple with the imaginings of 'efficacy' by deeming 'situations of chance' as 'situations of skill', leading to 'greater subjective well-being' and 'better physical health and increased life-span' (Vignoles et al., 2000: 204). The narrator finds many things in the 'Doone Valley' – happiness, safe hiding, adventure and privacy from 'prying eyes'. The child in her wishes to not be disturbed by other people who would have been concerned. In a way, hiding in the orchard heightens the narrator's sense of control over her identity. She can do what she wants without the disapproval of her parents. She can explore the nooks and corners around her. Her self-efficacy in existing in the orchard without the supervision of grownups enables her to feel free in moulding her identity, which is then manifested in her usage of the term 'Doone Valley', a fictional place found in a 19th-century novel set in the United Kingdom titled *Lorna Doone* by RD Blackmore. In her reminiscing about her past, she does not emotionally limit herself to the confines of the village. Instead, she includes what she has learnt later in life outside of the orchard and begins to view the orchard in a new light.

The physicality of the beloved rambutan orchard would inevitably cease. Still, the memory of it remains imprinted in the narrator's mind, as shown in the following passage in *Epilogue* –

'We thought the orchard destroyed.

I avoided the orchard in its burnt-down state. No ugly images will tarnish my garden.

No ugly blackened-out spectre will haunt my dreaming.

Always green, green, a glowing green.'

The blackened-out spectre shed its scarred branches and cleansed itself.

Then those branches leaved themselves in their original green.

A twentieth-century phenomenon, self-cleansing and self-regenerating.'

(Azhari, 1993: 78)

Since the narrator has already gained a sense of self-efficacy, she no longer needs the rambutan orchard in its physical form to shape her identity. She exhibits the trait of being *redha* and accepting that the orchard is no longer. It exists, still, but merely in her mind. By evading the reality of the situation – the orchard is no longer a safe haven of her childhood – she successfully maintains control over her identity, preventing it from being fractured by the loss of the place she treasures the most. The last line indicates how she copes with the physical loss of the orchard. In her dreams, she gives the orchard two traits familiar in material science - 'self-cleansing' and 'self-regenerating'. In short, the orchard can rid itself of

unwanted elements and can heal itself from any wounds. It must be noted that the author is an engineer-by-training (Manaf, 1996). In such a context, the narrator, as written by the author using her authorial-defined reality, makes use of the knowledge she has learnt as an adult to preserve the orchard in her imaginative realm. The identity formation of the narrator is complete for she is able to find her footing without being able to physically step into the orchard ever again. The orchard has now given her the trait of self-efficacy, shaping her identity well into adulthood despite losing its physicality.

Conclusion

Across time and space, humans have always maintained their attachment to land – be it place of origin or place of residence. Based on the discussion, it can be surmised that Malaysians, particularly Malays in Kelantanese society described in Che Husna's tales, are people whose lives and worldviews are much influenced by the land they feel an emotional and sentimental connection to. This paper asserts that Che Husna Azhari through her authorial-defined social reality portrays the Kelantanese Malays' attachment to their land as key to their self-perception and standing in the world.

Her anthology, *The Rambutan Orchard* provides fascinating insights into the relationship between humans and their environment. The nostalgia in the anthology is both pronounced and profound. By centralising the orchard in her stories, Che Husna Azhari succinctly weaves a collection of stories that glorify the beauty of her past yet acknowledge the unpleasant parts of rural Kelantanese life. By applying ecocritical lens, the interactions between land and people can be unpacked in a meaningful manner. The pastoral approach shows the narrator to be longing for her orchard but with a realistic touch – she is aware that the orchard exists only in her mind and serves as a mental linkage to her romanticised childhood.

Aside from being her childhood paradise, the orchard also gave her a sense of pride and fulfilment as a Kelantanese. It enriches the distinctiveness of her identity in a space she holds dear. In a way, her narrative symbolises the place of a Kelantanese Malay in Malaysia whose sense of belonging is rooted in his or her state. The orchard also symbolises her attachment to her place of origin, a connection she perceived to be an invisible umbilical cord. Moreover, the orchard serves as a platform on which the narrator learns the ups and downs of life and how to manage relationships around her, imbued by the inherent social hierarchy in her village. Once she moved away from her homeland in Kelantan, she had to make do with whatever remained in her memory, transferring the feature of self-efficacy unto herself. The orchard now loses its physical attributes but plays a role now in maintaining how the narrator sees herself. The narrator's tales centralise the position of a Kelantanese Malay in the world-at-large, moving between the past and the present, in and out of his or her homeland. Therefore, place, in Che Husna's tales, plays a role that is pertinent and substantial in moulding the identity of the characters from an angle that is rooted in her authorial-defined social reality.

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