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## Fitrah Criticism: an Islamic Psychological Approach

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### Abstract

Islamic psychology is the psychology of Self (*al-Nafs*) and specifically, it is the psychology of spirituality. The significance of Islamic psychology in literary criticism and its contribution to textual analysis haven't been given their due right. This article is concerned with the implementation of Islamic psychology in Islamic literary criticism which is known as 'fitrah literary criticism'. *Fitrah* literary criticism is originally based on *fitrah* (*al-Fithrat*) (according to Islam, *fitrah* is a natural state – the original state in which humans are created by Allah, i.e., God). The theoretical and conceptual framework of *fitrah* criticism can be understood in the light of four principles. First, the meanings of *fitrah* which are derived from the verses of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. Second, the meanings of *fitrah* form the pattern of *fitrah* which consists of three elements; '*aqidah*' (faith and belief in Islam), '*ibadah*' (an act of worship and submission to Allah based upon the law of Allah, i.e., *shari'ah*) and '*akhlaq*' (disposition, ethics of a person). Third, as a system, *fitrah* consists of some related psychological elements, namely, Self (*nafs*), heart (*qalb*), intellect ('*aql*) and spirit (*ruh*). Finally, the principle of aesthetic the appropriate literary techniques which literary texts employ to portray the *fitrah* in an aesthetic manner. This article also explicates the possibility of applying the *fitrah* literary criticism to literary texts.

**Keywords:** *fitrah*, Islamic psychology, *fitrah* literary criticism, *fitrah* theatre

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### Introduction

Today, behaviorism has become a dominant trend in Western psychology, which deprived the spiritual psychology. Islamic psychology on the other hand, gives a special attention to spiritual psychology based on Islamic teaching. In other words, the meaning of psychology has been changed over the years and various kinds of psychology emerged. One of the fundamental developments in psychology is the emergence of Islamic psychology. Psychology was regarded as the study on the mind – thought, perception and memory (Richard, 1992). In a later development, psychology was defined as the psychological science of human behavior in the environment (Carlson, 1997; Antaki, 1981). Actually, this definition has been very little to do with the mind and has absolutely nothing to do with the soul or spirit; consequently, it has managed to separate the meaning of psychology from philosophy. As a result, the spiritual dimension of psychology has been neglected. For example, in behaviorism, the simulation of social and physical environment into the Self who produces reactions to the form of behaviors, and reactions become the main focus of this psychology.

### Islamic Psychology

Islamic psychology stresses the idea of spiritual psychology as being the foundation to the development of human personality. In Islamic psychology, the Self conforms to its *fitrah* and it is consistent with the teachings of the *Qur'an* (the primary religious or sacred text of Islam) and *Hadith* (s) (statement/saying or action/act of the Islamic prophet Muhammad which is considered to be essential supplement to and clarification of the *Qur'an*). The Self which is understood

as being based upon the teachings of Islam is different from the meaning to the term in Western psychology. The Self of the Western psychology does not bring the spiritual dimension. In Islam, the understanding of the Self covers not only the physical but also the spiritual dimension and in Islamic Psychology, the Self (*al-Nafs*) is given a great space for the understanding of Man. More importantly, the human Self is discussed and understood based on the verses from the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*.

### Fitrah in Islamic Psychology

One of the fundamental elements in Islamic psychology is *fitrah* (*al-fitrah*) (natural state – the original state in which humans are created by Allah (God)), which is seen as a very important characteristic in understanding Man's life, behavior and actions. According to the Islamic teachings, the understanding of the true meaning of *fitrah* is a guide to recognizing the character and nature of the human personality of true Muslim.

According to Islam, Man is born into a state of *fitrah*. So, what is *fitrah*? There is only one *surah* (chapter) in the *Qur'an* that specifically mentions about *fitrah*. i.e., *surah ar-Rum*. But there are many other *surah*(s), which indirectly mentioned about *fitrah*, they are, *al-An'am*, *ash-Shura*, *Hood*, *Yasin*, *Zukhruf*, *Isra*, *al-Anbiya*, *Maryam*, *al-Infithar*, *Ibrahim*, *Fathir*, *Yusuf*, *az-Zumar* *al-Mulk* and *al-Muzammil*. In *Surah ar-Rum* the word *fitrah* has been mentioned twice in the verse and as follows:

Therefore, stand firm in your devotion to the upright faith – *the nature (fitrah)* made by Allah, the one on which mankind is created – *the law of Nature* ordained by Allah

cannot be changed (*al-Qur'an*, *surah ar-Rum*, verse 30).

This verse from *surah Ar-Rum* explicates that Man is created by their *fitrah*. *Fitrah* is something that cannot be changed or altered as it has existed since the birth of each Man and Man is created based on the *fitrah* created by Allah.

### **The Theory of *Fitrah* Criticism**

*Fitrah* criticism is a criticism that is based on an Islamic approach in psychology. It is a type of literary criticism which focuses on Islamic literary works which have the elements of *fitrah* based on the Islamic teachings. The function of *fitrah* criticism is to study and evaluate the *fitrah* of Man as explicated in the literary works based upon the teaching of Islam. To unveil such literary criticism, the indulgent of the theoretical framework and the conceptual framework of the *fitrah* criticism is pertinent:

#### **i) The Theoretical Framework**

The meanings of *fitrah* are the fundamental aspects of the theoretical framework of *fitrah* criticism. The meanings of *fitrah* are derived from the teachings of Islam, which can be extracted from the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. There is a few meanings of *fitrah*, such as holiness (*surah an-Nahl*, verse 78 and a *Hadith* from *Abu Hurairah*, which has been narrated by *al-Bukahri* and *Muslim*, saying that: "A person is born only in a state of *fitrah* (holy). But both his parents turn him into the Jews, Christians, and Polytheists *Majusi*."); the potentiality to accept Islam (*a Hadith* narrated by *Abu Hurairah*, the meaning of *fitrah* is 'Muslim'; the recognition of the oneness of Allah (*surah al-A'raf*, verse 172), sustainability of security, sincerity, the willingness to accept the truth (*surah Yunus*, verse 90), and the potential to worship and know God (*surah Yasin*, verse 22).

A range of meanings of *fitrah*, as stated in the verses of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*, may be understood in the form of a pattern. Each and every one of the Muslims has the same pattern of *fitrah* regardless of race and gender. *Fitrah* is a law according to the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*, and it must be fulfilled and the failure to do so would affect the well-being of Man. *Fitrah* has been created by Allah for the human spirit since the time of the creation of Man. Each *fitrah* is a faculty and as a faculty, it is awarded with the potential to be actualized by Man. The actualization is a state, where it can be observed through behaviors and actions. In other words, *fitrah* is tangible in nature due to its being observable.

According to Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, Man is created by Allah depending on a pattern that had already been identified. Syed Naguib writes:

*Fitrah* is the pattern according to which God has created all things. It is God's manner of creating, *Sunnat Allah*, and everything fits into its pattern each created for it and set in its proper place. It is the Law of God. Submission to it brings harmony, for it means realization of what is inherent in one's true nature; opposition to it brings discord, for it means realization of what is extraneous to one's true nature (Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, 1993: 61-62).

Syed Naguib stipulates that each one of God's creation comply with the pattern already created by Him. *Fitrah* is something that exists since Man's creation. Besides, *fitrah* is intendance of the law. The Man who follows his *fitrah* will be in harmony with the law and with himself and the one who goes against it will go

against the law, and consequently, he will be in a state of uncertainty.

Though the description of the pattern is not elaborated by Naquib, it can be further explored and elaborated. Basically, the pattern of *fitrah* can be identified by looking at the three aspects of the Islamic teaching; '*aqidah*' (Islamic faith, belief), '*ibadah*' (obedience, submission, devotion and ultimate love for Allah based on the Islamic law or *shari'ah*), and '*akhlaq*' (Islamic behavior, ethics, practice of virtue, morality and good manners) (Kamarul, 2011; Zakaria, 1999; Muhammad Shahid, 1997; Mohammad 'Uthman, 1984; al-Qardhawi, 1978). These three aspects would be the framework of identifying the existence and the exploration of the *fitrah* in the Islamic literary texts.

## ii) The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of *fitrah* criticism can be understood in terms of the system of *fitrah*, the faculty of *fitrah*, the pattern of *fitrah* and the aesthetics of writing the *fitrah*.

### The System of Fitrah

According to Abdul Mujib and Yusof Mudzakir (2002: 84-85), *fitrah* is defined as a system of human psychophysics, which is built by the psychic elements such as spirit (*ruh*), heart (*qalb*), Self (*nafs*) and intellect ('*aqal*) and to understand how this system operates; we need to examine all the aspects of the system: physical, Self and spiritual which reflects its multi-dimensionality. This reflection of multi-dimensionality of *fitrah* forms the human psychic of Man.

The system of *fitrah*, underlying the creation of Man by Allah, is a dimension of psychophysics, which has been started beginning with the creation

through the spirit (*ruh*). The system was designed based upon a structure which has been developed by the three aspects, the physical, selfness and spiritual. *Fitrah* has the potential to bind the structure of the human psychic who contains the Self, intellect, heart and the spirit into one connected entity. *Fitrah* is a string that connects the Self, intellect, heart and spirit into a strong entity. It also bridges the soul and the spirit. If Man is out of his *fitrah*, he will be out of the range of his Self, intellect, heart and spirit. As a result, the Man will enter within the circle of Satan, which makes it hard to escape. In other words, *fitrah* is a system consisting of three aspects, the physical, self and spiritual. *Fitrah* becomes a circle which connects the Self, intellect, heart and spirit into a strong entity, consequently; Man can actualize his *fitrah*.

### The Faculty of *Fitrah*

*Fitrah* is a faculty which has been prepared by God for Man since his soul was in the world of spirit. According to Yasien Mohamed (1994:16), *fitrah* is a faculty or a mechanism created by Allah in Man to enable him to recognize his Creator and accept Islam as the religion of truth. When *fitrah* is accepted as a faculty, it has the potentiality to be actualized by Man. The actualization of the potential of the *fitrah* depends on the efforts (*al-kasb*, *al-sa 'a*) of the Man himself (Abdul Mujib, 1999: 5). *Fitrah*, as a faculty, can be actualized and reflected in the behavior and actions which are themselves influenced by the environment. Man is aware of the potential of the *fitrah* and realizing the *fitrah* will lead to a life blessed by Islam. *Fitrah* is a law to follow, and this law cannot be changed. If Man changes or disregards his *fitrah*, he has violated the law and will survive without any harmony within himself.

*Fitrah* is a faculty and it has the potential to be actualized by Man. Each meaning of *fitrah* is also a faculty, i.e.; the meaning of *fitrah* has the potential to grow and to be fulfilled on the condition that the system is built in accordance with the teachings of Islam. *Fitrah* is a law; Man should follow and the failure to do so will turn his inner harmony into discord and acrimony. The realization or the actualization of *fitrah* can be seen as a pattern consisting of three aspects; '*aqidah*', '*ibadah*' and '*akhlaq*'. Although these three aspects are undividable, there are instances where one aspect out of the three is more vivid in the personality of a Man.

### The Aesthetic Principle

The aesthetic principle of *fitrah* criticism focuses on the literary devices used by the author(s) of the Islamic literary works to concretize the actualization of the *fitrah*. Therefore, it is important to study both the character and characterization and its relationship with the system and the pattern of *fitrah as embedded in the literary works*. Thus, the aesthetic principle of *fitrah* criticism stresses on the content of the literary work and its presentation. The literary texts which are appropriate with *fitrah* criticism come from Islamic literature or literature with the elements of Islam, which emphasize clarity, unity and diversity in the enrichment of the representation. The telling technique which is quite common in propaganda literary works is not recommended or accepted in the context of the aesthetic principle of *fitrah* criticism. In short, *fitrah* criticism propagates the integration of content and technique, and this integration should translate the dynamic of *fitrah* in Man as depicted in Islamic teachings.

### *Fitrah* Criticism and Its Applications

At this stage of introducing the *fitrah* criticism, it is pertinent to show how this literary criticism can be applied to the particular literary text. A play text by a Malaysian author by the name Noordin Hassan has been chosen to showcase the applicability of the *fitrah* criticism. Noordin's play text entitled "Intan Yang Tercanai" (The Drudged Diamond) (Dewan Sastera, March 2008) is considered as an Islamic play text.

Noordin has been trying to link the concept of *fitrah* and theater which he calls it '*fitrah theater*'. According to Noordin, "*fitrah theater*" is a theater consisting of certain principles of Islam. Firstly, the author that has written any "*fitrah theater*," must have done it because of Allah and with the intention to take Man into the path of Islam. Secondly, the material used to produce a theater can be anything, and it must include the values of Islam. Thirdly, the function of "*fitrah theater*" is to bring the audience to know the spiritual dimensions (Noordin, 1983: 4). Noordin has considered not only "Intan Yang Tercanai", but also his other play texts such as "1400" as *fitrah* play text or '*fitrah theater*' (a theatre is a performance based on the particular play text). In an article entitled "Theatre *Fitrah*" (magazine *Dewan Sastera*, Sept. 1983) Noordin says:

... the "*fitrah*" of a Man is to have faith in Allah. It is the key to one of the principles of life, from Allah, we come and to Allah, we return. The purpose of life in Islam is to have the blessing of Allah and Men "*fitrah*" is to have faith in Allah (trans. Noordin Hassan, 1983: 4).

The concept of *fitrah* given by Noordin is not sufficiently and systematically discussed in his only writing on the concept. Thus, the concept

of '*fitrah* theatre' needs a better analytical tool to bring about a better explanation and discussion on the subject. To give a better understanding of the '*fitrah* theatre' especially the play text, the play text should be studied within the domain of a *fitrah* criticism which can give a strong theoretical and conceptual frameworks to this kind of genre. In short, this article further explores the new concept of "*fitrah* theater" with the application of *fitrah* criticism to the play text.

"Intan Yang Tercanai" is a play text by Noordin who was inspired by a tragedy in Muassin, Mecca in 1990 that killed thousands of pilgrims. The tragedy in Muassin acts as the background of the important characters such as Danial Sundaram and Ungku Intan Anis. Ungku Anis is one of the victims of the tragedy. Danial Sundaram is born in an educated Hindu family. However, Danial is not a Hindu, and he is still searching for a religion which accords with his soul. Ungku Anis is his best friend and according to Danial, Ungku Anis is a mysterious woman, and it is her personality who attracted him to her. It seems that, there is a good relationship between Danial and Ungku Anis, which makes him look for Ungku Anis who is wounded in the Muassin tragedy.

In "Intan Yang Tercanai", the meanings of *fitrah* that can be detected are; the potential to be a Muslim, seek and accept the truth and sincerity. These meanings of *fitrah* as reflected throughout the play text, form a pattern which is known as '*ibadah*' which deals with the submission to Allah. The meaning of *fitrah* which refers to the potentiality of human beings to be born Muslims and accept Islam as a way of life can be depicted in Danial Sundaram; a man who was born into a Hindu family which practices Hinduism such as carrying the kavadi

(Hindu spiritual sacrifices). He has been persuaded by his mother to carry the kavadi on behalf of her (Noordin, 2008: 83). Though Danial does take the kavadi, he does it just to please his mother's heart. In fact, Danial does not have any religion, and he is still searching for the right religion. For Ungku Anis, Danial is looking for a religion that can make him believe in it wholeheartedly.

Daniel actualizes the potential of *fitrah*; that is, to be Muslim when he embraces Islam and picks up a new name, Danial Abdullah Mubarak, this event shows that Danial fulfills his *fitrah* as stated in Islamic teaching. Danial not only becomes a Muslim, but he fulfills another meaning of *fitrah* which is sincerity of action. He has no intention to marry Ungku Anis when he has converted to Islam.

Ungku Anis is a woman who provides space to Danial to know about Islam. he converts to Islam not to marry her. For Danial, if Ungku Anis were to be his wife, it would be God's will. Whatever it is, Ungku Anis is not the reason for his conversion to Islam as he has turned to his new religion sincerely. Looking at his educational background, Danial has majored in Comparative Studies of other religions: "Comparative Religion" and "Psychology of Religion" were among the courses that contributed to his better and deeper understanding and feeling of Islam. Through his comparative studies, Danial can clearly see the strengths of Islam and seek to find the truth in its light. Therefore, he has fulfilled his *fitrah*, first by being a Muslim and then by doing things sincerely.

In analyzing the play text, it is crucial to note what Noordin says in this play text. According to Noordin, "If impossible to seek what is written, look for

what is implied. *Subhanallah!*’ (Jika mustahil apa yang tersurat, carilah pula apa yang tersirat. *Subhanallah!*’ ) (Noordin, 2008: 86). So in order to indulge the aesthetic principle of the play text, one should look beyond the literal content of the text and in this context, there is a symbolic element in Danial. He exhibits another quality to fulfill his *fitrah*, he strives for the truth, the truth in religion. He is a Muslim in pursuit of the truth and this pursuit is done in a symbolic way whereby, a symbolical journey has been taken by Danial. The symbolic element is the journey taken by Daniel to meet Ungku Anis. The journey is a symbol of Danial taken to meet his inner Self. Physically, he travels to Mecca to look for Ungku Anis who already injured in a tragedy of Muassin tunnel. Symbolically, this physical journey is a journey of a spiritual quest. During the journey, Danial’s ihram cloth is torn and worn out, a symbol of struggling and seeking the blessings of the al-Mighty. This is the pain he has to undertake in his spiritual journey. He is assisted by FADZIL (capital letters). Who is FADZIL? They went to the Cave of Hira’, and as they are approaching the entrance, he sees the injured Ungku Anis.

This is a symbolic event in which Danial in the quest for truth finally finds himself in the Cave of Hira’. Historically, this cave is a sacred place for Muslims. In the history of Islam, the Cave of Hira, is the cave where Muhammad (PBUH) was appointed as a Prophet of Allah. Assisted by FADZIL whose presence resembles that of an angel, Danial meets the truth. UNGKU ANIS is someone more than a mere learner of *tasawwuf* (a traditional Islamic way of seeking one’s relationship with the God), she is a symbol of truth, which has been sought by Danial. And the capital letter of DANIAL is the big SELF in him, which discovers the truth. In other words, Danial actualizes the potential of

the meaning of *fitrah* which is seeking and receiving the truth.

The symbolic meeting of Danial and Ungku Anis in the Cave of Hira’ can also be interpreted as another revelation of *fitrah* as to seek and discover the eternal truth. The Self, intellect, heart and spirit are the drudged diamonds - “Intan yang Tercanai” which make the system and structure of *fitrah* strong, and this brings physicality and spirit to the definite truth. *Fitrah* as a system can be detailed here, by looking at two important aspects: Self (*nafsiah*) and spirituality. the highest self (*mutmainnah*), the intellect, the uncontaminated heart and the fine spirit all form a system that relates to a strong unification. This amalgamation is unified or gelled by the *fitrah*. The spirit which has the spiritual force is capable of bringing body and soul to the truth of God, and this process is sustained by Danial. Danial’s system of *fitrah* is very strong. The four elements, the Self, intellect, heart and spirit are in a stable condition where each element is functioning to bring the body and soul to God. This soul searching is the *ibadah* which forms the pattern of *fitrah* in this play text. In this context, the play text entitled “Intan Yang Tercanai” also clearly shows a balance of content and form. If one finds difficulties to see and receive a symbolic event that happen to Danial, so it would be difficult to understand the *fitrah* that has been actualized by him. This difficulty occurs when we think in a logical way. *Fitrah* criticism takes into consideration the world before birth, after birth and after death. This is a fact of life and human nature in Islam. In terms of assessment, this play text shows the balance between content and narrative techniques or the aesthetic strategies. with these strategies, the play text leads the reader to go beyond his physical aspect and recognize the fact of his *fitrah*.

*Fitrah* has its own system, which is developed by the two important aspects, namely the Self and spirit. The violation of this system will cause people to fail to actualize the potential of the meanings of *fitrah*. In other words, violating the system means going against the law and slipping down from the platform of *fitrah* into a world of havoc. This has been the case with Mak Cik Yong Sutinah, a popular bangsawan (Malay traditional theater) actress, that has violated the system. Ultimately, she has desecrated the law and failed to fulfill her *fitrah*.

During her career as an actress, she always wants to attract the attention to the audience not only to her acting, but also to her beauty. To maintain the beauty, Mak Cik Yong Sutinah implants a “susuk”, a golden needle inserted (planted) into the skin on her face to become like a talisman. The usage of “susuk” is against the teaching of Islam because the person who uses “susuk” believes the talisman is more powerful than God. Mak Cik Yong’s, ‘*aqidah*’ has been shattered because she no longer believes in God. The usage of the implant is contrary to Islam because it is an envious act, as Allah says in the *Quran*, *surah Al-Nisa*, verse 119: “Therefore, whoever takes Satan as a guardian instead of Allah, has indeed become a clear-cut loser.

Mak Cik Yong Sutinah implants three golden needles as “susuk” and it is discovered when a bomoh (shaman) is called to heal her when her health becomes so deteriorated. However, something stops her death. According to the shaman, the needles should be removed before Mak Cik Yong dies. This news about the “susuk” is conveyed to Ungku Anis, her sister, and she quickly returns home. Mak Cik Yong cannot distinguish between lawful and unlawful. She has been out of her *fitrah* and so she is thrown into internal

disharmony. This situation is shown when she, though very sick and humiliated, cannot die gracefully and peacefully.

In Mak Cik Yong, Self, spirit, intellect and heart have all been spoiled. The sick heart has rejected the ultimate truth. The lowest degree of Self, the ‘*amarah*,’ has dominated Mak Cik Yong, thus, she has rejected the authority of God. Temptation by Satan has driven her to implant the “susuk.” She will use anything, including a “susuk” to achieve what she wants. As a result, her life is no longer safe and when moribund, one can vividly witness her *fitrah* in ruination. Her heart and intellect fail to work in a spiritual way. The darkness replaces the light within the heart and so it becomes black and could not receive light of God. There is no “*zikir*” done to clean or polish her heart. Mak Cik Yong sells her soul to the devil. Therefore, even until the last moments, her soul could not leave her body easily, and she dies a difficult death. Again, this points to the fact that her system of *fitrah* has been paralyzed and made her suffer a lot.

To conclude, *fitrah* criticism is a literary criticism that is derived from an Islamic approach to psychology that focuses on the spiritual aspect which can be examined by looking for the meaning, pattern, system and faculty of *fitrah*. These elements form the theoretical and conceptual framework of the *fitrah* criticism, i.e., the meaning, system, pattern and the aesthetic *fitrah*. These frame works have been applied to the play text of Noordin Hassan - “Intan Yang Tercanai”. There are two meanings of *fitrah* in this play text; that is, the potentiality of human beings to be born Muslims and to accept Islam as a way of life. Daniel actualizes the potential of this *fitrah*; that is, to be Muslim when he embraces Islam and Ungku Anis actualizes Islam as the way of life. Both of the characters reveal, ‘*aqidah*’ and ‘*ibadah*’ which are the patterns within

the system of *fitrah*. In the context of its aesthetic principle, the content of this play text has been crafted symbolically, in which Noordin elaborates how Ungku Anis and Danial have actualized their *fitrah* and how they practice the system of *fitrah* which encompasses the elements of Self, heart, intellect and spirit. The failure to up-hold the system of *fitrah* has affected

Mak Cik Yong Sutinah. She fails to actualize the potential of *fitrah* in her. Her failure to practice the system of *fitrah* is depicted when her ‘*aqidah*’ ignores the supremacy of Allah. The pattern of the *fitrah* in this play text consists of ‘*aqidah*,’ ‘*ibadah*’ and ‘*akhlaq*.’ Nevertheless, ‘*aqidah*’ is the main element that builds the pattern of *fitrah* in this play text.

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