

Aisya Sofea : A Cult Novelist Reinforcing the Patriarchal System through the Romance Genre

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Abstract

Malaysia's popular cult novelist Aisya Sofea is discussed vis-à-vis this essay. It defines the cult novel and the popular novel and the differences between them. The novelist is one of Malaysia's leading popular and cult novelist. She is a household name and her followers can be found on the internet. This essay will look into the aspects present in three of her novels which have helped her to become a cult novelist. Mainly it will focus on the gender question that is portrayed by the writer that has managed to attract her readers. The methodology used in writing this essay is textual analysis focusing on the gender question.

Key words: cult, patriarchy, romance, Aisya Sofea, gender

Introduction

Aisya Sofea or as her real name is Hanizura Jamaludin is a very talented Malaysian young novelist. She was born in Kelang, Selangor and her name appeared in the Malaysian literary scene with her first novel *Jauh* (1997), which was received well by the public especially the female readers. She became famous with the success of her second novel *Jendela Hati* (2000). Her popularity was proven when the novel was printed 15 times since its publication 2000 until 2009. Her third novel is *Kau Untukku* (2003). This novel too brought fame and fortune to her and turned her into a household name in Malaysia. To date Aisya Sofea has produced twelve novels with the Malaysian publishing house Alaf 21. Her fans too have also grown in number and space. She is a cult writer who is engaged with the

cult readers. The development of social media has made this engagement more vivid and growing. This essay will concentrate on three of her novels, *Jendela Hati* (2000), *Sehangat Asmara* (2003) and *Selagi Ada Dia* (2008) which will discuss the question of gender.

The art of the novel started in the 17th century England. A novel unlike other genres of literature has more commercial value, is widely read and is educational. The novel that appeals to a certain group of people is called coterie, intellectual or elitist. It is read by a certain group of people and it develops into a cult novel. The encyclopedia Britannica states that:

The novel that achieves commercial publication but whose limited appeal precludes large financial success can frequently become the object of cult adulation. In the period since World War II, especially in the United States, such cults can have large memberships.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/146117/cult-novel>

Generally the cultists are normally students, or peripheral youths sharing the student ethos, and the novels that are turned into cult fiction with loyal followers are most of the time connected to the social, psychological and philosophical needs of the readers. A cult novel has fans that are loyal but they are minute in size. Most of the time it escapes fame other than being revered to by its faithful fans.

Feminism is myriad in form. It emerged to fight for the rights of women in the United States of America and Europe. However, it can be traced back to Ancient Greece. There are many definitions of the term feminism, however it is contested by many people. It began as a movement in the 19th century and is still relevant today. There have been three phases to feminism. It is stated that,

On the wave model, the struggle to achieve basic political rights during the period from the mid-19th century until the passage of the

Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 counts as “First Wave” feminism. Feminism waned between the two world wars, to be “revived” in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s as “Second Wave” feminism. In this second wave, feminists pushed beyond the early quest for political rights to fight for greater equality across the board, e.g., in education, the workplace, and at home. More recent transformations of feminism have resulted in a “Third Wave”. Third Wave feminists often critique Second Wave feminism for its lack of attention to the differences among women due to race, ethnicity, class, nationality, religion...

(<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-topics/>)

Feminism does not only talk about issues that deal with women. It also discusses the body., class and work, disability, the family, globalization, human rights, popular culture, race and racism, reproduction, science, the self, sex work, human trafficking, and sexuality.

There are theories that discuss feminism and identify it. One of the theorists is Mary Wollstonecraft who uses liberalism and individualism to determine the traits of women. She argues that women are naturally rational and gender-neutral. Thus, femininity can be seen as artificial and it subordinates women within the patriarchal system (Jason L. Powell, 2013: 1).

The patriarchal system can be traced back to ancient Greece. It had a system which governed people. It was a system that had patriarchal values which have come down to the modern age. The patriarchal system advocates the idea that fathers are dominant, and have absolute authority over the family and these values are then extended to the society (http://www.allfreeessays.com/essays/Patriarchal-System-And-Before/89408.html). Patriarchy can also be traced in the ancient Hindu text Manu Smriti (The Law of Man) where it advocate the rules and regulation of how men and women should behave in society. It regulates the behaviour and duties of a woman towards her husband and society at large.

It is argued that, “Within the private and public relationship in the structure of patriarchy, patriarchy does use different strategies to maintain gender inequality and these strategies have achieved that status of women’s subordination. Household strategy is considered to be the strategy of exclusionary and inequality” (<http://www.studymode.com/essay/Patriarchy-And-The-System-711751.html>). However, Steven Goldberg (1973), in his book titled *The inevitability of Patriarchy* argues that the male and female relationship complements each other. Men are good in certain domains of life while women are good at others. Men use their expertise and God given skills to achieve their goals in life as do women. Therefore, the male-female relationship complements each other. It can be deduced from Goldberg’s arguments that no gender is superior to the other. He wrote at the height of the feminist movement, thus his work insinuates the idea of ‘equality’ between men and women. He uses biological facts to argue his case. Thus, his work shows his scepticism of the notion of who is superior - the male or the female.

A later research on patriarchy carried out by Gerda Lerner (1986) titled *The Creation of Patriarchy*, argues that “patriarchy as a system is historical” (6). She argues that patriarchy is not biological since it can be historically traced. If it were biological then it would be difficult to change it since it would mean changing the nature of man. The changes that has happened to the male gender throughout history cannot be accorded to biology argues Lerner (1986: 6). While Goldberg propounds the idea that male and female differences are God given, i.e. insinuating that they can traced back to biological differences, Lerner argues otherwise. Therefore, it can be concluded that history has played a part in the advancement of men compared to women, and biology is secondary to history. If the nature of man is not controlled by biology then female nature is also free of biological domination.

However, according to the Al Quran, the Muslim holy book, the roles of men and women have been determined by God and each are special in their own way. In the verse titled An-Nisa, God decrees that men and women will be judged equally for their deeds in this world regardless of their gender.” And whoever does righteous good deeds, male or female, and is a true believer in the Oneness of Allah (Muslim), such will enter Paradise and not the least injustice, even to the size of a *Naqira*(speck on the back of a date-stone), will be done to them” (4:124). There is another verse in the Al Quran, Surah al- Hujurat that states,“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted” (49:13). It can be deciphered from this verse that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God, except those that prostrate to him the most. Though the Al-Quran states that men are born as care takers of women, because they are physically superior, both men and women are judged on an identical basis since God has given both free will and intellect to differentiate between good and bad.

Background

Sohaimi Abdul Aziz in his essay “The Development of the Popular Malay Cult Novel” (2010) discusses the popular cult novel and popular culture. He says that “Writers of popular cult fiction base their writings on their readers’ taste and their readers not only become avid fans but also extremely loyal to them even to the extent of creating home pages and blogs to communicate directly with the authors and with other fans” (Aziz 2010: 61). The new media has had a great impact on contemporary writers all over the world and in Malaysia as well. Aziz concludes that the popular cult novel is formed by the interaction between the reader, author and publisher (66). These three parties work hand in hand and with the intervention

of the new media all the parties gain and are satisfied with the results produced. However, Aziz does not discuss the genre of the popular fiction which is crucial in understanding the acceptance of the audience and the writing of the texts. This is the research gap that will be explored and related to the issue of gender.

The gender issue that prevails in Malay novels written by women is discussed by Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir (1994) in her essay “Perceptions of the Ideal Malay Woman in the Works of Selected Malaysian Women Novelists”. She states that novels by Malaysian women writers depict the ideal woman. She discusses five serious novels *Badai Semalam* (1968), *Bila dan Di Mana* (1987), *Sebelum Berhujungnya Musim Bunga* (1972), *Jalur Sinar Di Celah Daun* (1981), *Seroja Masih di Kolam* (1968). Although Tahir discusses serious Malay novels of the 20th century her arguments are important to the current day novels including Aisya Sofea’s popular novels because the perimeters have not changed much. The Malay women in Aisya Sofea’s novels are still drawn as ideal Malay women, though these women ‘live’ in the 21 century.

Cult Fiction Genre, The Romance Genre and Gender Issues

This section will discuss the theories of cult fiction as well as gender issues which will be analyzed in the three novels selected for research. The primary texts used are Aisya Sofea’s three novels *Jendela Hati* (2000), *Sehangat Asmara* (2003) and *Selagi Ada Dia* (2008). The secondary texts define and place the primary texts within a conceptual frame. The concepts discussed are cult fiction, patriarchy and feminism as well as psychology.

The novel was produced in the eighteenth century. The writers that were free of patronage of the elite classes started to write for the masses using everyday language. It was not cheap to produce novels. To make them accessible to the public they were published in serial form, such as the works of Charles Dickens. The novel went through an evolution where

language is concerned, its language “became descriptive rather than conceptual or abstract” (Stan Le Roy Wilson 1995: 27). The influence of this characteristic of the modern novel can be detected in Aisya Sofea’s texts. The language that she uses is everyday Malay language that runs away from abstraction or conceptualization. It is easy to understand, and this fact pulls her readers to read her novels.

The issue discussed in this essay is how cult fiction or rather the cult novelist’s project of planting and emphasizing a way of thinking on the society or masses. First we have to understand what cult means. The word cult has two meanings to it. According to the Oxford dictionary it is,

1. a system of religious veneration and devotion directed towards a particular figure or object: *the cult of St Olaf*.
 - a relatively small group of people having religious beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or as imposing excessive control over members: *a network of Satan-worshipping cults*
 - a misplaced or excessive admiration for a particular thing: *the cult of the pursuit of money as an end in itself*
2. a person or thing that is popular or fashionable among a particular group or section of society: *the series has become a bit of a cult in the UK*

(<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/cult>)

Wilson (1995) argues, “Cults...do not necessarily have to be bizarre or fanatical” (37). He states that “Many cults are interrelated with the mass media. Some develop as a result of media attention given to a “person, idea or thing” while others are catered by the specialized media publications that help perpetuate the interest in the cult or activity” (Wilson 1995: 37). This essay concentrates on the second meaning of cult as defined by the Oxford dictionary. It shall discuss how Aisya Sofea has become a cult novelist with the support of the media, especially the new media i.e. Internet and the way she propagates the idea of patriarchy through her novels.

In order to understand Aisya Sofea's works we have to know why a novel turns into cult fiction. A book is a powerful tool of expression especially the novel which normally portrays everyday scenes and normal people going on with their daily lives sometimes exactly like what the reader experiences or yearns and dreams to experience. According to Wilson (1995: 67) a book "...can change our lives or shape our culture. It can expand our knowledge or provide us with a comfortable escape from reality". Thus, a novel becomes cult fiction as people turn towards it for answers to their daily woes. The written word is brought into their lives and the obsession that the cult of the authors have for their works and the writers make them breathe and live the texts that they read. They emulate the events, characters and culture that is presented in the texts.

Cult fiction sprouted out of the popular novel. A novel earns popularity, has avid followers and then becomes a cult novel. Clive Bloom in his book *Cult Fiction* (1996) postulates that "Cult Fiction is an exploration of pulp literature and pulp mentalities: an investigation into the nature and theory of the contemporary mind in art and in life" (3). He concentrates on American novels, however his framework of research and discussion can be applied in order to delve into the intricacies of Aisya Sofea's novels. Research shows that Aisya Sofea has avid followers. There are web pages that have been dedicated to her. Her books are sold via the internet. Later in this essay we will discuss how Aisya Sofea's fiction portrays the mind and art, as well as the culture of the Malay society in Malaysia. Though her texts are works of fiction, they expose to an extent, the Malay way of life.

Aisya Sofea's fiction are romances. In order to understand her work we have to define the romance genre. A romance is a novel that revolves around a love story. The plot focuses on individuals that fall in love with each other. The elements that are present in a romance are conflicts, struggle to attain love and much more. A romance has sub-plots that make

the main plot more interesting. The events in a romance captivates the readers' emotions. When a romance ends the readers go through catharsis.

Romances feed the emotional needs of their readers. Amal Treacher in her essay *What is Life Without My Love?: Desire and Romantic Fiction* (1988) that love has obsessed men and women over other things. She argues (75-76),

The longing for love, nagging doubts, and intellectual and emotional questions pervade us all, and touch us all at what appears to be the center of our being. To explore our longings, sexual desires and needs, together with the concept of love itself, is difficult and painful because it brings into question so much of what we experience as our very self. But love and sexual desire are not pure, ahistoric, asocial and untainted forces; they are shot through with a variety of emotional needs and wishes: to obtain approval, lessen anxiety, be able to depend upon another, and to repair psychic hurts that have arisen from the experience of being rejected, disappointed and humiliated. It is to this love-absorbed core of self that romantic fiction appeals: romantic fiction positively worships and is totally preoccupied with love.

Thus, Aisya Sofea's fiction fits the mould that has been created by romantic fiction world-wide. She feeds her readers' emotions and gives them catharsis. Like other romances that are preoccupied with love and worship Aisya Sofea's novels too present to us such preoccupation. Romances put forth gender issues, and Aisya Sofea depicts the differences between men and women vis-à-vis her novels as shall be discussed in the analysis section.

Aisya Sofea's texts present the idea of difference between man and woman. This concept can be read vis-à-vis Linda Brannon's book *Gender: Psychological Perspectives* (2011). She discusses ideas that state men and women are different biologically since birth, and these differences determine for their different traits and behavior (2).

Brannon further states that there are two views with regards to the differences between men and women. They are the minimalist view and the maximalist view. According to her, “The minimalist perceive few important differences between women and men, whereas the maximalists believe that the two have large, fundamental differences” (Brannon 2011: 2). What Brannon means by the minimalist view is that they not a lot of crucial differences between men and women. On the other hand, the maximalist view states that there are major differences between the males and females in society. However, the minimalist and the maximalist point of views will not be emphasized in this essay. It suffices to mention that there are different ways of thoughts in gender studies as well that are used to consider the male and female differences other than patriarchy and feminism.

Other than discussing the minimalist and maximalist views, Brannon also states that the category of psychologists that are labeled as the functionalist psychologists, who have been influenced by Darwin and the theory of evolution looked for “biologically determined differences, including biological basis for sex differences...The studies and writings of functionalists of this era tended to demonstrate that women were less intelligent than men, benefited less from education, had strong maternal instincts, and were unlikely to produce examples of success or eminence” (2011: 4). These group of psychologists studied the personality of women and concluded that women were inferior to men and would not succeed in life. Though Aisya Sofea writes in the 21st century, her female characters’ traits are sometimes similar to those that have been described by functionalist psychologists. This indicates that women in Malaysia have not really divorced themselves from out-of-date ideas about themselves..

From Brannon we move to local issues about women that are discussed in the text titled *The Progress of Malaysian Women Since Independence 1957-2000* (2003) published by the Ministry of Women and

Family Development, Malaysia. It is stated in the book that since Malaysia became independent in 1953 efforts have been made “to forge greater gender equality” and women have gained success in key socioeconomic areas (*The Progress of Malaysian Women Since Independence 1957-2000*. 2003: vii). As we can observe women in Malaysia have become successful in a myriad of fields. Previously they were only homemakers, clerks or teachers, but now we can find many professional women such as engineers, lawyers, doctors and so on. Our 7th Bank Negara (Malaysia’s central bank) Governor, Tan Sri Dato’ Zeti Akhtar Aziz is a woman. She has lead the bank for more than twelve years since May 2000. This gender equality is not portrayed in the novels under research as shall be shown in the analysis section. Aisya Sofea’s heroines are well educated, and if they wanted to could pursue life on their own. However, they succumb to roles set by the patriarchal systems, and sacrifice their freedom for the man that they love.

Is Aisya Sofea telling the truth about Malaysian women? According to the text *The Progress of Malaysian Women Since Independence 1957-2000*: Although Malaysian women have through the years demonstrated considerable leadership abilities in public office as well as in community and informal organization at the grassroots, they still remain far behind the men in terms of access to high level-positions and participation in decision making. The majority of women remain very much within the confines and demands of their family life, while men pursue their career aspirations, enabling them to have access and control in the power structure and decision making processes. More concerted efforts should be made to close the gender gap and increase the participation of women in decision-making positions (93). From the excerpt above, and Aisya Sofea’s representation of women in her novels, it can be gleaned that the majority of women in Malaysia hold true to the gender roles that have been passed down to them for centuries.

The modern Malaysian woman exists, but is a shadow of the man or men in her life.

This essay will look at how Aisya Sofea uses the differences between men and women to emphasize either intentionally or subconsciously the gap that exists between them and reinforce the patriarchal system. In her novels men and women are given gender roles that have been approved by the patriarchal system. Very few traits in men and women differ from those that have been postulated by functionalist psychologists or those that advocate the patriarchal system.

Synopsis

Jendela Hati (2000) is the first novel by Aisya Sofea that will be read in this essay. It is a story about a man LukmanHafizi who has lost his wife, Sarah, in a motor accident. He becomes lonely and mourns her death. Then her twin sister Farah returns from her studies in London. She is the exact replica of Sarah in her looks. Her presence makes Lukman revivehis memories with his wife. Unknown to Farah's family, and Lukman, when her sister was alive Farah received a letter from Sarah asking her to take her sister's place in Lukman's life if anything happens to her in the future.

Both Farah and Lukman are confused about their feelings for each other. However, Lukman's family thinks Farah is the right choice of a wife for Lukman. They ask for her hand in marriage, and Farah accepts the proposal. However, Lukman is hesitant to marry her.

After marriage they drift apart due to misconceptions. Farah decides to go to United Kingdom to further her studies and forget Lukman. Unknown to her husband she is pregnant with his child.

After Farah leaves, Lukman realizes his mistake. He travels to the United Kingdom to apologize to her, and right the wrong that he has been done to her. However, Farah does not want to accept Lukman again in her life.

A tragedy befalls Farah when the child that she is carrying dies in her womb. She accepts her fate but at the same time blames Lukman for the catastrophe. Farah returns to Malaysia, and realizes that she still loves Lukman. In the end they decide to build a life together.

Sehangat Asmara (2003) is another novel that will be analyzed in this essay. Love at first sight that blooms between Kamilia Najwa and Zainal Arief leads them to marry each other. However, the marriage is not blessed by Kamilia's parents due to the fact that Zainal Arief is equal to them insocial class.

Soon after the marriage Zainal Arief leaves Kamelia, and returns to Malaysia. Kamelia is heart broken when he does not come back to her. She is pregnant with his child. So her parents come, and take her back to Malaysia. Kamelia gives birth to a baby girl named Misya. Although her husband is not near her, Azman her childhood friend is loyal to her, and is ever willing to help her. He assists to cure her from her depression.

Nine years later Zainal Arief enters Kamilia's life again. She knows that he wants to know the truth about Misya, whom she has kept a secret from him. When Kamilia enquires about the reason why he left her, he does not want to tell her. Although it is against her will Kamelia reunites Misya with her father, Zainal Arief. The love that Misya shows to Zainal touches Kamelia's heart. The child does not hold a grudge against her father who deserted her before she was even born, but Kamelia does. However, she feels that Zainal is holding a secret. Zainal proposes to her for the second time and although she is confused and has mixed feelings she accepts him for Misya's sake.

Although they are married Kamelia still does not trust Zainal. She tries to find out the reason behind Zainal's desertion of her when they were first married. Nevertheless, their feelings for each other grow stronger and they become close to each other. Zainal apologizes to Kamelia and promises

her that he will not repeat his past mistake. In the end the truth is revealed to Kamelia. Her father played a trump card. He black mailed Zainal, and told him to leave Kamelia. If he refused to do so he threatened to destroy Zainal's family. Kamelia is disappointed by her father's attitude though he has repented, and played a role in bringing Zainal back into Kamelia's life.

When Kamelia shows her anger towards her father Zainal does not like it. He wants the past to be forgotten and says that as a daughter Kamelia should respect her father. Kamelia is hurt by Zainal's attitude, and runs away to her in-law's village.

Her mother-in-law realizes that Kamelia is pregnant and informs Zainal. He comes back to coax her. He explains to her in detail the events that happened nine years ago in the hope that no more problems will arise. Kamelia who is greatly affected by her husband's sacrifice feels blessed to have such a man as her husband. She believes her love for her husband is still strong and prays that the happiness that she has a glimpse of now will always shine in their lives.

Selagi Ada Dia (2008) is the last novel to be analyzed in this essay. The novel portrays the love story of Arianni that is colorful as well as happy and sad. The first encounter that is charged with arguments and hatred, evolves into a love relationship between Arianni and Haris. However, her first love is also the love of her sister. All through their relationship Arianni swallows in sorrow, and has to bear the frustration of Haris being dishonest with her about their relationship.

Their secret love affair is eventually known by her family members who then become angry towards her, this is true especially of her sister and father. She is accused of being the other woman who plays a role in upsetting her sister's relationship with her boyfriend. Due to the fact that she is ostracized by her family and Haris's attitude that does not want to defend their love she goes away broken hearted to London to be by herself and cure her wounded heart.

After three years of living in self-exile in a foreign land she returns home to take care of her sick father and also to rectify her past mistakes. While on the flight home she meets a widower named Idris. Their relationship begins as a friendship and later blossoms into love. Ariani is surprised to find that she is in love for the second time in her life.

This second love affair brings doubts to Arianni's mind because she is not sure of Idris's feelings towards her. She is afraid that he might still be holding a torch for his late wife Zulaikha. Arianni does not want to be a mere shadow to Zulaikha. She wants to be accepted, and loved by Idris as herself.

Other than having to compete with a deceased woman she also has to face the facts of a relationship that is developing between her sister Malini and Idris. She does not want the past to repeat itself. She is on the threshold where she thinks of giving up her relationship with Idris in order to give way to her sister. Haris also comes into her life at this time and becomes another problem that she has to deal with. She also feels pressured by her father's attitude. He is always angry and sometimes does not recognize her as the daughter he once loved. Unknowingly she gives the right of choosing a husband for her to her parents. She is willing to accept who ever her parents decide to marry her to.

One cannot turn away from fate. Arianni's destiny is Idris. Without her knowledge her family, unanimously choose Idris as her husband. They come together in the end after keeping their feelings a secret from each other. In the end they are portrayed to live happily ever after like in most love stories.

Analysis

The question of gender prevails in Aisya Sofea's novels. The male protagonist is depicted as the protector, handsome, rich, perfect, brilliant, educated, religious, successful and sensitive to a woman's needs. Whereas the female protagonist is portrayed as weak compared to her male

counterpart, beautiful, soft spoken, a little confused sometimes, gentle, brilliant and religious as well. In her novels men and women are juxtaposed to create a perfect couple. Nevertheless, the male-female relationship in the novels is based on traditional doctrines. The patriarchal tradition is extended through Aisya Sofea's novels. Patriarchy a social system that gives the man authority over women is portrayed in her novels. The system as explained above has been around for centuries. It can be traced up till ancient Greece.

A Jendela Hati

1. The female characters in the novels fall into traditional female roles. They are depicted as caregivers. As the plot develops the female protagonists decides to postpone their careers and plan to further their studies. This is illustrated in *Jendela Hati* (2000). Farah who comes back from the United Kingdom after she completes her studies falls into the routine of taking care of her nephew, the son of her deceased twin sister Sarah. When questioned by her brother-in-law as to why she has not started work she gives the reason that she wants to take care of her nephew and give him a mother's love (Aisya Sofea 2000: 25). Farah takes up the gender role that has been given to her by a patriarchal society. She becomes a 'mother' to her nephew Zahin although she is not married yet. In a patriarchal society the woman has a set role. She has to adhere to the mould that has been set by the patriarchal society for her. According to the Malay patriarchal society no matter how high a woman is educated her place is still in the kitchen, which means a woman is a homemaker although she is educated.
2. The patriarchal system that is portrayed in the novel is further enhanced when Lukman Hafizi, Zahin's father leaves the responsibility of taking care of his son to his mother- in-law in the

beginning and later to Farah as she comes home from her studies. Lukman only comes to visit his son once in a while, sometimes once a week. The idea that fathers go out to work and mothers stay at home to take care of the children is emphasized here. In a patriarchal society the father is the breadwinner.

3. The confused woman is also portrayed via Farah. Another patriarchal bias towards the woman. Women under the patriarchal system are believed to be weaker than men and less intelligent. Farah faces internal conflicts throughout the story, which show that she is emotionally obscure, one of the labels that patriarchy puts on a woman. One of the major conflicts that she faces is related to her relationship with Lukman. Farah does not want Lukman's love for her to be controlled by her late sister's wish that she become Lukman's wife and a mother to Zahin. This conflict can be seen in the excerpt below:

Aku nak dia terima aku kerana kasih sayang pada aku, bukan kerana permintaan terakhir arwah Sarah. Aku nak dia terima aku kerana aku. Kalaupun dia nak membenci aku biarlah. Aku tak kisah. Selagi dia tak dapat menerima aku dengan seikhlas hatinya, selagi itu aku tak akan tunjukkan surat ini pada dia. (Aisya Sofea, 2009:170)

(I want him to accept me because he loves me, not because of Sarah's last wish. I want him to accept me for who I am. Even if he wants to hate me, be it. As long as he cannot accept me with a true heart, I will not show him this letter [My translation])

Farah's internal conflict controls this novel, and is portrayed from the beginning till the end. The writer tries to portray the internal conflict that is faced by a woman but in fact is too large for her to handle alone. Her decision to leave her husband, and continue with her Masters in the United Kingdom,

the loss of the child that she conceives are other facts that lend to Farah's internal conflicts. However, like all romances this novel solves its conflicts with a happy ending, where Farah decides to stay married to her husband after she returns to Malaysia.

A Sehangat Asmara

1. We are introduced to the regal man who sacrifices his love for a woman for the benefit of his family in Aisya Sofea's other novel *Sehangat Asmara* (2003). Zainal Arief, though married to Kamilia leaves her when her father threatens to destroy his family if he stays married to her. It is stated in the text:

Abang Nal tak ada pilihan lain. Dia berkorban untuk kami. Biarpun rumah tangganya sendiri runtuh. Dia terpaksa meninggalkan akak supaya hidup kami tenteram semula. Akhirnya, kami semua dapat meneruskan pengajian dengan tenang (Aisya Sofea 2003: 448)

(Elder brother Nal had no choice. He sacrificed for us, although his marriage collapsed. He had to leave you so that we could live a peaceful life again. In the end, we could continue with our studies peacefully [My translation]).

The man is shown as a hero who sacrifices his marital happiness for the peace and calmness that it will give his family. i.e. brothers and sisters and their education.

2. However, the gender role of the woman in this novel is not typical. Kamilia does not swallow in grief after she is left by her husband. She lives on, and brings up her daughter Misha on her own, without the support of a husband. When Zainal comes back into her life she sacrifices for her daughter. She remarries Zainal to give her daughter the love of a father. Though in the beginning, the woman is portrayed

as atypical, as the story goes on she succumbs to the tenets set by the patriarchal system. The patriarchy system has certain laws with regards to children as well. According to the unwritten laws of patriarchy, a child needs a father while growing up, thus Kamilia submits to the system's rules and marries Zainal.

3. Man as the savior is also depicted in this novel. It is stated that when Kamilia was in England she was a very social woman. She used to frequent night clubs and change partners often. She also wore revealing clothes. Her personality was not of a good Muslim woman. It is said that Zainal came into her life and changed all this. They fall in love at first sight and marry each other. He gently, through the good advice that he gives her, changes her attitude towards life generally.
4. The love of a man that leads towards the greater good for the woman is shown as another gender issue via this text. This is another dogma that patriarchy has postulated throughout the centuries. As stated above man is portrayed as a savior. Zainal with his love succeeds to bring good into Kamelia's life who has been practicing Western culture thus far. Kamilia wears Western clothes which are revealing, and moves around with a fun loving crowd, a mixture of men and women. However, Zainal sees beyond this sociable woman. He persuades Kamilia to leave her lively lifestyle:

"I tak mahu you tersilap langkah. You aje yang fikir you macam mereka, tapi sebenarnya you bukan mereka. You are not like them, Kay. Trust me. Kalau you tak mahu terima apa yang I cakap, tak apalah. Tapi satu hari nanti, you pasti faham apa yang I katakan ini. Lagipun apa salahnya kalau baju kurung? Kalau you fikir baju kurung itu teruk, tapi janganlah sampai mendedah sana sini pulak. I tak suka begitu." katanya.

(Aisya Sofea, 2003:31)

(“I don’t want you to make the wrong decision. Only you think you are like them, but in fact you are not them. You are not like them, Kay. Trust me. It is o.k. if you don’t want to accept what I say. But one day you will definitely understand what I am saying. What is wrong with the baju kurung? If you think the baju kurung is not your style it does not matter, but please don’t reveal your flesh. I don’t like it”, he said [My translation].)

Zainal wants Kamelia to change for the better, and does not want her to be overwhelmed by worldly trappings. Zainal always advises Kamelia to be a good Muslim woman. Kameliabegins to change her way of thinking, and wears the baju kurung as is requested by Zainal. Love that pulls a woman towards righteousness is always yearned by her, because according to the patriarchal laws the man is the leader and protector in a society and of women.

A Selagi Ada Dia

1. *Selagi Ada Dia* (2008) is another of Aisya Sofea’s novels that is discussed in this paper. This is another love story that is filled with gender issues. We are presented with a genteel female character, named Ariani. She comes back from London after she receives the news that her father is sick. She comes back to nurse him. She is very patient with her father although sometimes he does not recognize her and is testy. According to the patriarchal system a daughter has to adhere to the rules set by her family. These rules are formed by the head of the family, the father, and he controls his wife and children.
2. This novel provides a difference from Aisya Sofea’s other novels as it also depicts the love of an elderly couple, Ariani’s parents. The gender issue that prevails here is about the woman who is loyal to her husband although he is aggressive; i.e. he scolds her while he is in his sick bed. Ariani’s mother’s love for her husband does not change although she

has to face difficulties while nursing him. Unlike feminism that gives the woman agency to retaliate against subordination, patriarchy controls a woman. A woman who has been under the influence of patriarchy as depicted via this novel does not use her agency to escape the aggression that she faces from her husband. However, it has been argued that the woman stays with her husband not only because she is controlled by patriarchy, but because she loves him. Given modern day knowledge, a woman can escape the evils of patriarchy, however she remains constant towards her husband due to the fact that she loves him.

3. The gender issue regarding the love relationship between a widower and a single woman is also portrayed in this novel. However, the widower that is presented does not have the typical characteristics of male characters that are similar to like him, which have been depicted through most Malay novels. This widower does not take advantage of Ariani, who is a virgin. Idris, the widower, has the character traits that are dreamt of by many women. He, through his gentleness and considerate behavior wins Ariani's heart. He is always there to guide her through her turbulent relationship with her ailing father:

“Dia sakit, Ari. You kena faham keadaan dia.”...You kena ingat, dia tak sedar apa yang dia buat. Ingatan dia lemah. You tak boleh expect dia macam dulu lagi.” Kata-katanya saling tidak tumpah seperti kata-kata emak. Sama nada, sama mesejnya. Mesti sabar dan terus sabar!

(Aisya Sofea, 2009:211)

(“He is sick Ari. You have to understand his situation.”...You have to remember, he is not conscious of what she does. His memory is weak. You can't expect him to be like before.” His words were like mother's words. The same tone, and similar message. Have to be patient and continue to be patient! [My translation])

The patriarchy system is at work here again. This novel depicts that a woman needs a man in order to show her the correct path. It enhances the patriarchal bias that men are the protectors of women and women need them to survive. Thus it can be deduced that this novel has not run away from the formula that Aisya Sofea uses to write her fiction. She advocates patriarchy and creates docile female characters who adhere to patriarchal rules and males that are dominant, but gentle and kind.

Conclusion

In conclusion Aisya Sofea's novels present the issues of patriarchy and gender. They offer the intricacies of love. However, true love triumphs in the end. This is typical in most romances. The author manages to attract her readers through these issues that prevail in Malaysian everyday life. Her novels are an escapism for readers who want to run away from the realities of their daily lives. They present to the public perfection in the form of the perfect man who meets the perfect woman, and they fall in love. The love stories are like fairy tales that have happily ever after endings. The issue of gender and patriarchy that are present in her novels, pull her audience to buy her books and read them. It can be concluded that no matter in which language a romance is written it still has an impact on readers and satisfies their emotions. Aisya Sofea's novels prove this to be true.

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