

METAPHOR ANALYSIS IN THE HIKAYAT SI MISKIN: CULTURAL AND MORAL REFLECTIONS IN CLASSICAL MALAY LITERATURE

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Abstract: Hikayat Si Miskin is a classical Malay literary masterpiece imbued with profound cultural and moral values. This study explores the metaphors embedded within the narrative using a semiotic approach and classical literary analysis. Key findings reveal that metaphors in this text symbolize social struggles, religiosity, and the dynamic life journey of the protagonist. For instance, the metaphor of "poverty" transcends material deprivation, symbolizing a spiritual quest toward self-awareness and devotion to God. Natural elements like the "sea" and "mountain" metaphorically represent life's challenges and the resilience required to overcome them. This study underscores how Hikayat Si Miskin encapsulates not only narrative richness but also the worldview of classical Malay society, reflecting universal values and cultural philosophies. The findings offer significant insights into Malay literary traditions, contributing to a deeper understanding of the role of metaphors in the literary heritage of the Nusantara.

Keywords: *Hikayat Si Miskin; metaphor; classical Malay literature; semiotics; cultural values*

INTRODUCTION

Hikayat Si Miskin is a significant work in the canon of classical Malay literature and holds an essential place in Indonesia's literary heritage. Also known as Hikayat Maharaja Marakarma, this work was written around 1844 or 1848 (Hamadun et al., 2021; Osman, 2020; Suharjo & Pudjiastuti, 2020; van der Putten, 2017). It represents the development of the Malay literary tradition, serving not only as entertainment but also as a medium for imparting moral, religious, and cultural values (Amalia et al., 2024; Hussain et al., 2020a; Youpika et al., 2024).

The story narrates the journey of a protagonist who overcomes numerous challenges, from poverty to eventual success. Through patience, wisdom, and divine intervention, the character manages to change his fate. This narrative reflects the worldview of classical Malay society, where concepts of wealth, poverty, and destiny are closely tied to divine will and human relationships. Additionally, figurative language, particularly metaphors, plays a crucial role in reinforcing the moral and aesthetic messages of this text (Rahman et al., 2020).

Studying Hikayat Si Miskin is vital for understanding the perspectives of classical Malay society regarding life, social structures, and

spiritual values. Analyzing literary elements such as metaphors not only reveals the text's aesthetic richness but also provides insight into the values shaping Malay culture. For example, the concept of "poverty" in this tale symbolizes not only material deprivation but also a spiritual journey toward enlightenment.

In this context, this study aims to analyze the metaphors in Hikayat Si Miskin as a critical element in conveying the moral and religious messages embedded in its narrative. Through metaphor analysis, this research seeks to uncover the symbolic meanings of the metaphors used, which not only enhance the text's aesthetic quality but also offer a deeper understanding of the moral, cultural, and religious values of classical Malay society (Hussain et al., 2020b; Mu'ammam & Affandy, 2020; Rajeg & Rajeg, 2023; Salehuddin, 2018).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative analysis method incorporating a semiotic approach and classical literary studies. The semiotic approach is used to analyze the meaning of signs, including metaphors (Akhtar, 2020; Churilova, 2020; Foote & Azaryahu, 2019; Lee, 2024; Nugrahaa, 2019; Wen & Taylor, 2021), contained in *Hikayat Si*

Miskin. Metaphors are interpreted as signs representing moral, religious, or social ideas within the literary text. Semiotics allows researchers to explore the relationship between these signs (metaphors) and their hidden meanings (Lavender, 2020). This approach is particularly relevant because classical Malay texts are rich in symbolism and allusions, which demand in-depth interpretation (Abdullah & Abdillah, 2021).

Classical literary studies involve analyzing literary works based on their cultural, social, and historical contexts (Jauss, 2022; Kholodniak, 2023; Nashef, 2023; Romanovska, 2020; Xiao, 2021). In this study, *Hikayat Si Miskin* is examined as part of the classical Malay literary tradition, characterized by its use of figurative language, a linear narrative structure, and the transmission of traditional values. The application of classical literary studies is vital to understanding how the metaphors in the text reflect the worldview, cultural dynamics, and values of 19th-century Malay society. To ensure the relevance and validity of this approach, the analysis was contextualized within the historical and cultural framework of the period when the text was written.

To guarantee the reliability and validity of the metaphor analysis, triangulation methods were applied. This included cross-referencing interpretations with existing scholarly literature and independent analysis by multiple researchers. The collaborative approach minimized subjectivity and enhanced the robustness of the findings.

The data for this study were derived from multiple sources, including manuscript copies and printed versions of *Hikayat Si Miskin*. The manuscript selection was based on availability and historical significance, with preference given to texts that maintained linguistic and structural integrity. Each metaphor identified in the text was analyzed using semiotic concepts, such as sign, signifier, signified, and symbolic meaning. The metaphors were then examined within the story's context to determine their significance and relevance to classical Malay cultural values.

This method allows for a comprehensive exploration of the richness of metaphorical meanings in *Hikayat Si Miskin*. By contextualizing the findings with the worldview of classical Malay society, this study highlights the moral, cultural, and symbolic messages embedded in the text. This approach underscores the role of *Hikayat Si Miskin* as a reflection of the

cultural and moral values of traditional Malay society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of classical Malay literature

Classical Malay literature is a cornerstone of the literary heritage of the Indonesian archipelago, flourishing during the golden age of Malay kingdoms such as Malacca, Johor-Riau, and Aceh (Braginsky, 2024; Falarti, 2022; Lahiri-Roy & Martinussen, 2024). Written primarily in prose and poetry, these works served as repositories of moral and religious teachings, reflecting values such as honesty, patience, loyalty, and devotion to God (Haron et al., 2020). For instance, *Hikayat Si Miskin* emphasizes patience and reliance on God, depicting the protagonist's resilience in overcoming life's difficulties through faith and perseverance (Çınaroğlu, 2024; Haron et al., 2020; Jones, 2022; Metry et al., 2024; Wilt et al., 2019). These literary works were not merely for entertainment but also served as tools for moral education, embedding both explicit and implicit messages to instill virtues and foster spiritual growth in readers or listeners.

The richness of classical Malay literature lies in its use of allusions, metaphors, and proverbs, which enhance both its aesthetic and symbolic depth. Natural elements, such as the sea, mountains, and stars, are often used to symbolize challenges, ideals, or human destiny, while supernatural elements like divine intervention, mythical beings, or magical objects reflect the spiritual beliefs of the Malay people (Kukushkina, 2023; Moten & Wok, 2019; Winstedt, 2024b, 2024a). The narratives are typically simple and linear, characterized by repetitive patterns that emphasize key messages and make the stories easier to recall (Bloembergen & Kloos, 2023; Mandal, 2023). These narratives often include *pantun* to evoke emotions and reinforce moral lessons, making them a rich representation of Malay culture, including its customs, social structures, and worldview (Alatas, 2022; King & Wilder, 2020; Saxena, 2022).

Values such as patience, perseverance, and reliance on God are central themes in *Hikayat Si Miskin*, *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, and *Hikayat Raja Pasai*. In *Hikayat Si Miskin*, the protagonist's struggles against poverty and misfortune highlight the transformative power of resilience and prayer. *Hikayat Hang Tuah* emphasizes loyalty and devotion, showcasing Hang Tuah's steadfastness amidst personal and political conflicts, guided by faith and moral integrity (Tiwon, 2024).

Meanwhile, *Hikayat Raja Pasai* portrays patience and perseverance in governance, where rulers seek divine guidance to maintain stability and resolve conflicts, illustrating the integration of religious values into leadership (Rusli & Mukhlis, 2023). These works collectively demonstrate how these values are deeply rooted in Malay culture, serving as moral guides both for individuals and society.

The development of classical Malay literature was significantly influenced by diverse cultural and religious traditions. Hindu-Buddhist influences between the 7th and 14th centuries introduced themes of divine kingship and cosmological order, as seen in *Hikayat Banjar* and *Hikayat Malim Deman* (Brahim & Kathrina, 2022). The arrival of Islam brought new narrative structures and themes, such as stories of prophets and messengers. Works like *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* and *Hikayat Nabi Yusuf* combined Islamic values with traditional storytelling, enriching Malay literature with spiritual and moral dimensions (Aljunied, 2022; Bin Ridzuan, 2023; Saiin et al., 2023). In *Hikayat Si Miskin*, Hindu-Buddhist influences are evident in the concept of divine intervention, while Islamic teachings on faith and prayer are seamlessly integrated into the narrative (Sajir, 2023).

The transition from oral to written tradition further underscores the resilience of classical Malay literature. Features of oral storytelling, such as repetition, direct audience engagement, and rhythmic structures, were retained in manuscripts like *Hikayat Si Miskin*, preserving their accessibility and memorability (Zakaria et al., 2020). Phonetic adaptations and rhymed colophons reflect efforts to maintain the musicality and communal spirit of oral traditions (Kresse & Vierke, 2022). Additionally, the integration of cultural and religious elements ensures the manuscripts remain authentic representations of Malay beliefs and values (Richards, 2021).

Thus, *Hikayat Si Miskin* exemplifies how classical Malay literature combines oral and written traditions with diverse cultural influences, creating a rich and enduring literary heritage. Values such as patience, perseverance, and reliance on God not only shape the narratives but also reflect the moral fabric and cultural identity of Malay society.

Getting to know the time setting of the Hikayat Si Miskin

The *Hikayat Si Miskin* tells the story of a man who has experienced various difficulties since childhood. The time setting in this story is very

important, because it sets the atmosphere and describes the life of Malay society at that time. The time setting in the story provides a strong picture of the social differences and simple life of Malay society. As well as the moral values that were held firmly by society at that time.

Quoted from the book *Introduction to Literary Theory*, (Duile et al., 2023), the time setting in classical Malay literature generally describes an agrarian society that holds tightly to tradition and religion. In addition, the time setting in Malay stories often highlights the kingdom era with the life of society. At that time, people's lives were regulated by a cruel social class system.

In his childhood, *Si Miskin* lived in severe poverty with his family. The time setting of the story in this period shows the suffering experienced by poor families in the midst of a stratified society. Where the rich and the poor have a big difference in status. Furthermore, the time setting in this tale also implies the Malay people's belief in supernatural things. In many tales, including the *Hikayat Si Miskin*, the intervention of supernatural powers such as prayer and the help of spirits.

This shows that people at that time had a strong belief in supernatural powers as part of their lives. *Si Miskin* in this tale prays sincerely for his life to change. This prayer is then answered with the help of supernatural powers that influence his fate.

In the study of classical Malay literature, the time setting in tales is often not explicitly stated such as a certain year or era (Sevea, 2019).

However, it is more about the social conditions or situations that can be recognized. For example, it is seen in the *Hikayat Si Miskin* which emphasizes the values of patience and sincerity. The time setting of the *Hikayat Si Miskin* ends with the change in *Si Miskin's* fate after going through many trials. This implies the message that in the long run, patience and prayer can change a person's destiny. Values such as patience, fortitude, and sincerity in the midst of trials are the moral messages that this tale wants to convey. That the characters of the *Hikayat Si Miskin* consist of: (1) *Si Miskin* (husband), who was later named *Maharaja Indra Angkasa*. (2) *Si Miskin's* wife, who was later named *Ratna Dewi*. (3) *Maharaja Indra Dewa* (King of the *Antah Berantah* Kingdom) (4) *Maharaja Markamah* (son of *Si Miskin*) (5) *Nila Kesuma* (Daughter n of *Si Miskin*)

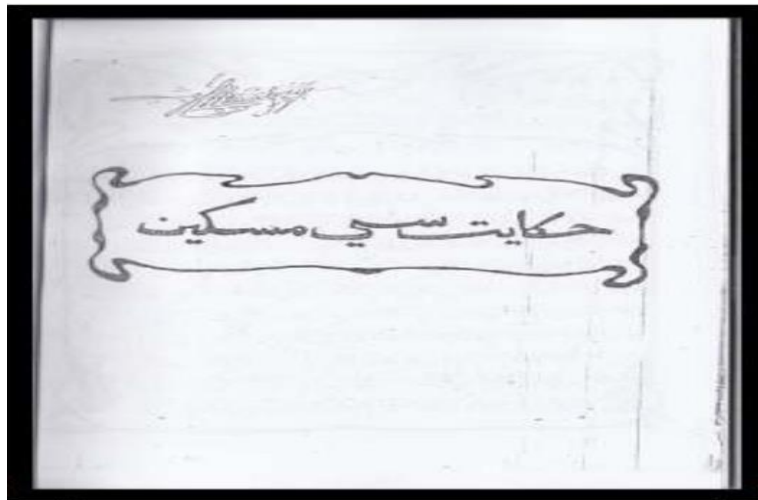


Figure 1. The title of the manuscript to be transliterated is *Hikayat Si Miskin*
Source: (Roza et al., 2022)

Figure 1, depicting the title page of the *Hikayat Si Miskin* manuscript, provides essential insight into the authenticity and historical value of the text as part of the classical Malay literary heritage. The use of Arabic-Malay script reflects the influence of Islamic culture on the

development of Malay literary traditions. The presence of this title page confirms that the manuscript is an authentic historical document, serving as a foundation for research aimed at understanding the moral and cultural values of 19th-century Malay society.

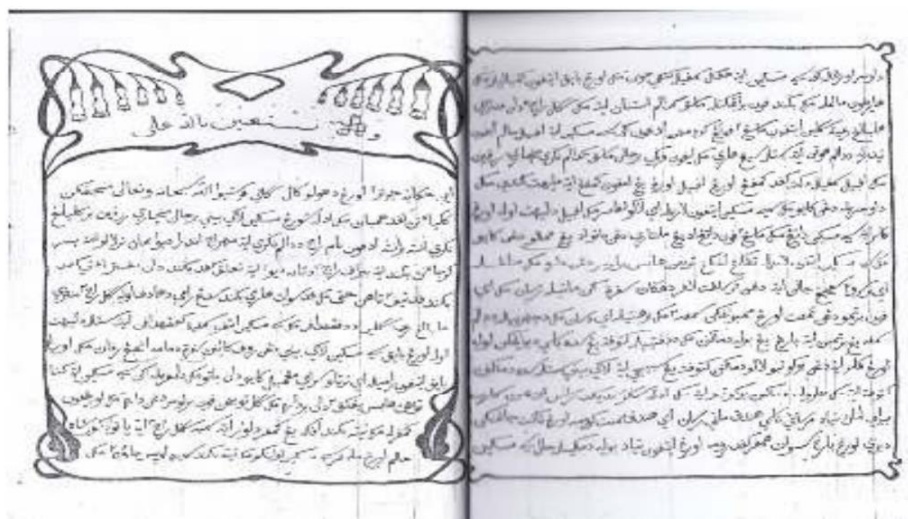


Figure 2. The first page of the *Tale of the Poor* Source: (Roza, 2014)

Figure 2 shows the first page of the story *Hikayat Si Miskin*, marking the beginning of the protagonist's journey through various life challenges. Written in Arabic-Malay script, the text not only enhances the visual aesthetics of the manuscript but also serves as a symbolic introduction to the narrative. This page sets the stage for the protagonist's struggles, which are closely tied to the metaphors analyzed in the study, such as "poverty as dark as a starless night," depicting the protagonist's despair. Together, these images not only affirm the manuscript's authenticity but also enrich the understanding of the cultural and religious context explored in this research

The text of the *Hikayat Si Miskin* is a manuscript written in Arabic-Malay script. The language used in the manuscript is Malay. This manuscript consists of 69 pages, but the manuscript consists of 136 pages. The thickness of the photocopied *Hikayat Si Miskin* manuscript is 73 pages. However, the number of pages listed in the manuscript is 183 pages. The age of the *Hikayat Si Miskin* manuscript is 55 years. The age of the manuscript is calculated based on the year of re-publication of the *Hikayat Si Miskin* manuscript, which is 1958. The *Hikayat Si Miskin* manuscript is a manuscript that was republished by the publisher *Jembatan dan Gunung Agung*, by Aman Datuk Majo Indo, in Jakarta in 1958.

Metaphors in the Tale of the Poor or the Tale of Maharaja Marakarma

The author further explains several quotes from the saga of the Poor that use the following metaphors:

Bird (burung)

Text quotes

While in exile, Marakarma received many supernatural powers from genies, giants and snakes. One day, Marakarma managed to catch a bird. Because his brother wanted to eat the bird, Marakarma went looking for fire to cook it. After arriving at the village, Marakarma was arrested, accused of stealing and beaten until his body was swollen. Marakarma fainted and was tied with a rope and thrown into the sea.

Gold (emas)

Text quotes

So, when times were good, the poor man's wife gave birth. A boy is very good in appearance and beautiful in appearance. So, the child is called marakarma, meaning a child in trouble. Since the birth of his child, the poor man's fate has changed. He suddenly got too much gold.

By worshipping the god, a land also emerged. He named the country Puspa Sari and himself Maharaja Indra Angkasa. His wife became Ratna Dewi. Not long after, a princess was born into the world. The princess was named Nila Kesuma. Meanwhile, Puspa Sari's country is increasingly populated.

Palace (istana)

Text quotes

One day, Mengindra Sari went hunting. He found Nila Kesuma crying under the Waringin tree. Nila Kesuma was then brought back to the palace and married. The Nila Kesuma was named Mayang Mengurai.

Sea (laut)

Text quotes

This is also the story of Marakarma who was thrown into the sea. Marakarma washed up on the shore. The beach is the base of a giant. Marakarma was found by the princess Cahaya Kairani, the daughter of king Malai Kisna, who was kidnapped by a giant to be eaten. Because Princess Cahaya Kairani was still small, she was kept.

Table1. *Metaphor analysis in Hikayat Si Miskin or Hikayat Maharaja Marakarma based on theme, context, and meaning contained*

No	Metaphor	Context in the Story	Context in the Story
1	<i>Kemiskinan sebagai "gelap malam tanpa bintang"</i> Poverty as "dark as a starless night"	Describes the situation of the main character who lives in poverty and without hope.	Symbolizes isolation, lack of hope, and dependence on God to gain enlightenment.
2	<i>Emas sebagai "cahaya keberuntungan"</i> Gold as "lucky light"	When the main character finds gold that changes his fate.	Symbolizes good fortune, changes in fate, and blessings obtained through effort and prayer.
3	<i>Laut sebagai "ujian kehidupan"</i> The sea as a "test of life"	The journey of the main character who must cross the sea to find a way out of his suffering.	Symbolizes the great challenges that humans must face in life to achieve success.
4	<i>Istana sebagai "puncak kehidupan"</i> The palace as the "peak of life"	The main character is finally invited to the palace and given an honorable position.	Symbolizes success, glory and appreciation for hard work and faith.
5	<i>Burung sebagai "utusan ilahi"</i> Birds as "divine messengers"	The presence of birds provides guidance to the main character on his journey.	Symbolizes guidance from God or supernatural powers that help humans out of difficulties.
6	<i>Air mata sebagai "penyesalan dan doa"</i> Tears as "regret and prayer"	When the main character cries and begs God when facing misfortune.	Symbolizes sincerity of heart, recognition of human weakness, and sincere prayer to God.
7	<i>Gunung sebagai "cita-cita yang tinggi"</i> Mountains as "high ideals"	The main character is determined to achieve success even though the challenges are as big as a mountain.	Symbolizes dreams or life goals that require great struggle to achieve.

Based on the table above, the metaphors in *Hikayat Si Miskin* are a vital element in expressing the cultural, moral, and spiritual dimensions of classical Malay society. Each metaphor provides a unique lens to understand the protagonist's journey while reflecting broader societal values and beliefs. For instance, the metaphor "poverty as dark as a starless night" captures the protagonist's state of despair and isolation, symbolizing the dependence on God to find hope and enlightenment. This metaphor emphasizes the value of faith in navigating life's hardships.

The metaphor "gold as lucky light" highlights the transformative power of divine blessings and hard work, symbolizing the protagonist's change in fortune through effort and prayer. Similarly, the metaphor "the sea as a test of life" illustrates the struggles and challenges the protagonist must overcome to achieve personal growth and success. It represents the idea that life's trials are necessary stepping stones to greater achievements.

Other metaphors, such as "the palace as the peak of life," symbolize the ultimate reward for virtue and perseverance, reflecting cultural notions of glory and societal recognition. The metaphor "birds as divine messengers" integrates the spiritual realm into the narrative, symbolizing guidance and protection offered by divine or supernatural forces. This highlights the interconnectedness of spirituality and human effort in Malay culture.

"Tears as regret and prayer" conveys deep humility and sincerity, symbolizing the act of seeking forgiveness and divine assistance in moments of despair. Meanwhile, "mountains as high ideals" represent the protagonist's unwavering commitment to achieving life goals despite overwhelming obstacles, reflecting the cultural admiration for ambition and perseverance.

Through these metaphors, *Hikayat Si Miskin* transcends its function as a literary work, becoming a repository of moral wisdom and cultural values. It delivers timeless messages that emphasize patience, determination, and faith as essential virtues for overcoming challenges and achieving success in life. The metaphors not only enrich the narrative aesthetically but also offer a profound insight into the worldview and identity of classical Malay society.

Moral values of the story of the Poor Man

The story of the Poor Man contains messages that

can be life lessons, especially for children. The moral values in the story of the Poor Man include:

Perseverance and patience. The story of the Poor Man teaches the importance of having perseverance and patience in facing life's trials. Although initially living in poverty and experiencing rejection, the Poor Man and his wife remained patient and tried hard.

Belief in God. This story emphasizes that a person's fate is determined by God. The Poor Man and his wife received a miracle in the form of gold because they believed and were sure of God's destiny.

Respecting others. Respecting each other is one of the moral values that stands out in this story. Respecting each other can ward off envy and the desire to harm others. This can be seen from the attitude of the leader of the Antah Berantah Kingdom who changed after the Poor Man became rich.

Honesty and virtue. Even in difficult circumstances, the Poor Man and his wife remained honest and did good to others. This is classified as an important moral value that can be emulated.

Compassion and solidarity. The message of compassion and helping others is reflected in the commendable actions of the people, who are willing to provide food and assistance to the Poor Man and his wife. Because, the Poor Man should not be treated arbitrarily.

Messages in the story of the Hikayat Si Miskin

Based on the review above, the following are some of the messages of the *Hikayat Si Miskin* story: (1) Teaches the importance of patience, perseverance, and humility in facing life's difficulties. (2) Teaches the importance of being grateful and not being greedy. (3) Teaches the importance of respecting parents and helping each other. (4) Teaches the importance of believing in God and not believing in predictions that are not necessarily true. (5) Teaches the importance of being honest and behaving well even in difficult circumstances. (6) Teaches the importance of loving each other as siblings. (7) The *Hikayat Si Miskin* also experienced the loss of elements of Hindu religious thought contained in it. In this tale, Islamic thought is indeed not included, but this tale closes with a statement that several aspects of thought in this book are considered heretical. The changes in Indian-influenced tales that were adapted into Malay are indeed diverse. Most of them include Islamic concepts such as the name of Allah and the Prophets, changing the title

name etc. For example, "Hikayat Mara Karma", the title becomes "*Hikayat Si Miskin*" which is the subject of this research

CONCLUSION

Hikayat Si Miskin is one of the classical Malay literary works that is rich in cultural, moral, and religious values. The analysis of the metaphors contained in this tale demonstrates that figurative language, such as metaphors, plays a crucial role in conveying symbolic messages and enriching the aesthetics of the story. The metaphors in this text not only function as aesthetic elements but also as a means to describe the social struggles, religiosity, and dynamics of the main character's life. For example, the metaphor of "poverty" in the story not only represents material conditions but also symbolizes a spiritual journey toward awareness and devotion to God. Additionally, natural metaphors such as "sea" and "mountain" reflect the challenges of life that must be faced to achieve success.

This study highlights that Hikayat Si Miskin holds not only narrative values but also provides insight into the worldview of classical Malay society, which integrates religious, cultural, and universal elements in everyday life. However, it is essential to acknowledge the potential subjectivity in interpreting metaphors, as these interpretations are often influenced by the researcher's perspective and cultural context. Future studies could address this limitation by employing multiple analytical frameworks or engaging in collaborative interpretations to ensure a more comprehensive understanding.

Moreover, further research is recommended to explore other classical Malay texts or conduct comparative studies with literary works from different cultural traditions. Such studies could provide deeper insights into the universal and unique aspects of Malay literature, enhancing the appreciation of the Nusantara literary tradition and its relevance to contemporary life. This research contributes significantly to the study of classical Malay literature, particularly in understanding metaphors as both aesthetic and symbolic devices, while also encouraging a broader exploration of the rich and diverse literary heritage of the region.

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