SYMBOLS AND METAPHORS: TRANSLATIONS FROM "HIKAYAT INDERAPUTERA" INTO PAINTING

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ABSTRACT

This research covers constituents of symbols and metaphors based on 'Hikayat Inderaputera' and it is connected to the intrinsic and extrinsic elements in visual art. The research is actually related to the view of possibilities of metaphor applied in the study of painting. 'Hikayat Inderaputera' can be translated into expressions, imaginations, and perceptions through painting and it also gives meaning and connection in semiotic approach. In a creative process, paintings are always related to narrative as a visual language and it is a part of structure in picture making. To understand metaphors, we need to consider semiotic as a methodology and it requires language as a structure, arguing that structuralism could equally be applied to any system of meaning making. It is actually a set of signal or codes. This research also explains how the researcher remarks and relates 'Hikayat Inderaputera' to previous works. In painting, artists always apply metaphors to create visual narratives while they are also being reflected writers. In addition, the researcher realized "Hikayat Inderaputera" as a way of expressions in creating symbols and metaphors. It can be translated into new possibilities of readings, visual languages, signs and can also be developed in new directions to represent other associations in images making especially in painting.

Keywords: *Symbol, Metaphor, Painting, Visual art, Fine art.*

1.0 Introduction

The history of traditional "*Hikayat*" started from oral communication. It began around the 17th century to the 19th century, when people (Malay) started to write literatures and recited them orally in front of audiences. The "*Hikayat*" text has been linked to the unique requirement involved in the oral performance. The word "*Hikayat*" originates from the Arabic word which means 'message' and 'messenger'. "*Hikayat*" is actually a message; to tell a story based on humanity and the concept concerns the possibility of telling a story (Siti Hawa Saleh, 1997).

"Hikayat Inderaputera" is about a prince's adventures and journeys where his problems and conflicts were always resolved. *"Hikayat Inderaputera"* was told in many languages and regions such as Makasar, Bugis, Aceh and Indo-China. This literature is recorded as the oldest work with strong influence of Hinduism as it came about before Islam was spread to Nusantara (Winstedt, 1920). Nuruddin Ar-Raniri (n.d.) stated in his book titled *Sirat-al-Mustakim* that *"Hikayat Inderaputera"* and *"Hikayat Seri Rama"* can be used as a 'toilet paper' because Islam and Allah are not mentioned in the text, and also declared as lieutenant. However, this literature can be assimilated in Islamic culture by looking at the moral value and narratives (Ali Ahmad, 1968).

This research celebrates myth as a part of the processes in understanding the story line of paintings. This has also become accustomed in our current lifestyle. The stories and adventures of *"Inderaputera"* can be adjusted in new narratives nowadays as generalization and this also created a new perspective in an urban context.

The processes of reading *"Hikayat Inderaputera"* needs some adjustments in the context of self-experience and information especially for artists and painters. Artists always play with imagination as a key to start the process of idea (Ingledew, 2011).

Understanding *"Inderaputera"* in the context of syntax requires a very critical approach where some serious analyses are needed in interpreting *"Hikayat Inderaputera"*. First of all, Malay *"Hikayat"* contains Islamic or Hinduism-Buddhism elements. These elements are the exposure to develop and assimilate each literature representing different characters and different periods. For example, the character in *"Hikayat Inderaputera"* was visualized as a prince's adventures, which illustrates the elements of Hinduism (Mohd Zariat Abdul Rani, 2007).

2.0 Methodology

This research is about studying and understanding *"Hikayat Inderaputera"* in the context of visual art where two methods were used. First, the researcher used semiotic approach in interpreting and analyzing *"Hikayat Inderaputera"*. Pierce theory suggests that sign or symbol refers to the object and it is associated with the signifier and the signified. He also refers this relation to 'rationality' or 'virtue of idea'. The connection of the symbol can be interpreted and analyzed according to human habits as their conventionality state of mind (Chandler, 2002).

To consider symbols in *"Hikayat Inderaputera"*, the researcher looked into choices of interpretation depending on the main character. For example, *"Inderaputera"* is a man who has been approached to be the king of human, demon and goddess (myth).

Secondly, the researcher relates symbols in *"Hikayat Inderaputera"* based on metaphor as a visual perspective. The transmission of an object (signified) remarked consciousness, perceptions, expressions and synthesis to fulfill the concept of the idea. This common process is the basic understanding of symbols and is reflected on psychological establishment (Petrenko & Korotchenko, 2012).

This theory is supported by three factors in developing art making. First, the consideration of style in art must clearly complement the consequence to build a form in body of artwork. Second, all objects should match the story depending to the historical aspect, social status, culture, or belief. Lastly, artwork needs the creation of sign and symbol

to create the flow and quality of the artwork. All these factors actually have a strong relation and significance to the base idea, especially to make a choice of interpretation and it has become the methodology in creating the idea (Panofsky, 1955)

3.0 Research Analysis (Process of Interpretation) and Findings
In this chapter, the researcher interpreted and analyzed various paintings to define symbols and metaphors which are connected and related to *"Hikayat Inderaputera"*.

Figure 1: The Birth of Inderaputera,
Anuar Rashid (1978)

Anuar Rashid visualized the landscape depicting night time to create the mood of perception about *"Inderaputera"*. This is done due to the reference to the beginning of *"Hikayat Inderaputera"*:

> *"Al-kisah peri mengatakan tatkala Inderaputera diterbangkan oleh Merak Emas dan peri mengatakan tatkala Inderaputera diangkat cucu oleh nenek kebayan dan peri mengatakan tatkala Inderaputera diangkat anak oleh Perdana Menteri dan peri mengatakan tatkala Inderaputera direstui oleh Menteri Raja Syahian."*

(Hikayat Inderaputera)

Anuar Rashid actually used colours to portray symbolism. When we saw his work, what comes into our mind is the perception of mystical element. Anuar Rashid tried to illustrate his idea via circular compositions and open space. The blue colour is related to the colour of the atmosphere, ocean and sky (Zakaria Ali, 2010). Here, we can interpret that the blue colour is linked to the environment and situation. Looking at the art piece closely, there are certain areas which were left with smudge effect. Due to this, it is hard to determine what these areas symbolize or what could be interpreted from them.

Blue colour defines universe, sky and heavenly sign

Mountain symbolizes hope, power and legend

Peacock is related to the story of *Inderaputera*'s adventures

Gateway defines chapter, kingdom and city

*Figure 2: Detail of the Birth of Inderaputera,
(Metaphors and symbols analysis)*

*Figure 3: An Illustration from the Ramayana of
Sangram Singh II: Garuda Visits Rama Udaipur,
North India (1710-1720)*

"Indera" is the king of god in Hinduism myths who was born as a 'golden child' and became the king of the three worlds. Hinduism believes that *"Indera"* is the most beautiful, handsome and perfect man (Mackenzie, n.d.). These qualities of *"Indera" are* illustrated in an epic narrative. For example, in *"Hikayat Inderaputera"*, it is mentioned that:

"Ialah yang terlalu amat masyhur di tanah manusia dan di tanah jin dan di tanah indera dan cendana dan di tanah mambang dan peri dan pada tanah dewa. Syahadan yang terlalu elok rupanya serta sikapnya dan terlalu amat pantas barang kelakuannya."

(Hikayat Inderaputera)

These words have proven that *"Inderaputera"* is closely related to Hinduism myth. Here, the researcher started to relate *"Inderaputera"* to the Indian art. Hindu gods are always represented as an avatar, the shining one and the world guardian. To represent the avatar, the gods are portrayed as having a dark blue skin.

For example, Krishna and Ramayana were also portrayed in dark blue colour (Cains, 2008). In ancient Egypt, the god sand kings were often depicted with blue beard and wigs. Blue is also a symbol of peace and purity (O' Conell, Airey & Craze, 2007).
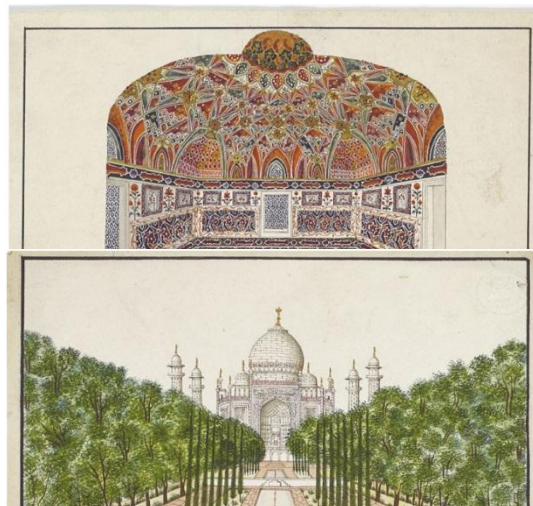

Figure 4: From the collection of Field Marshal Earl Kitchener of Khartoum (1850-1916) and thence by descent. India, Agra, circa 1820

Nearly every ancient culture has traditional myths basically recording the great god of war leading a battle and defending the kingdom. However, Muslims only believe in one god which is Allah and no other.

"Hikayat Inderaputera" contains too much of Hindu myths. This can be seen in the characters, incarnation and magic. Another symbol in *"Hikayat Inderaputera"* is "gateway". Figure 3 shows that "gateway" is a sign of an entrance as well as representing chapters. It represents the inside and outside areas, an entrance of a city, the space of a defensive area, and also as a symbol of arrogance and dignity (Siti Zainol Ismail, 2003).

In the Malay culture, gateways are usually portrayed as having a curve similar to a dome. This design is originated from India and has a prominent influence in designs during the reign of the Islamic emperor. This design can be seen implemented in the design of the Taj Mahal and the Minna Tower. Gateways with this design symbolize a kingdom, emperor, victory, and power (O' Conell, Airey & Craze, 2007).

4.0 Discussion

"Hikayat Inderaputera" generally looks at nature as an inspiration and always played with the 'wave of atmosphere'; this means the situation and environment in literature can be changed from reality to myth vice versa. If we look into the structural concept of "*Hikayat*", it rarely bears similarity to the structural concept in western painting during the surrealism era that was founded by André Breton and Salvador Dali in 20th century. Charles E. Gauss (1943) supported the above statement by saying that the concept of surrealism depicts only emotion, subconsciousness, myth, and unpredictable forms.

"Hikayat Inderaputera" is not only about the concept of surrealism. It also brings forth the understanding of perfection in life, referring to Islam (Allah is regarded as the highest), and the path of the teaching of our chief (Prophet Muhammad). "*Hikayat Inderaputera*" does not only contain the element of surrealism but also has a sense of beauty in human behavior and the surrounding world. For this reason, the researcher relates this concept to the Islamic Art.

The character of Islamic art is represented in a form of abstraction and, it has one objective: to express "*Tauhid*". God (Allah) is abstract, and the expression of God must be abstract. As Muslims, we cannot imagine what form the God is in, and we cannot reach to the God with only a random thinking process; it is beyond our thinking ability (Lois Lamya Al-Faruqi & Ismail Raji' Al-Faruqi, 1968).

5.0 Conclusion and further recommendation

In conclusion, we need to consider symbols and metaphors by looking at similarities to understand meanings in painting. This means, to analyse and connect "*Hikayat*" without appreciating similarities would be impossible. In this case, the researcher thinks that it could be considered that a similarity does not make one entity as a symbol. We need to assume that two or more entities that look alike are the same (De Loache, 2005).

The researcher reflected Anuar Rashid's painting as a visual reference and it actually shows the similarity, metaphors and symbols. For example, the golden-yellow bird is considered as a peacock, edge by edge depicts mountains, and the hazy spots are assumed as several places in "*Hikayat Inderaputera*". This perception triggers our mind to think about symbolic and metaphors in searching for meanings in painting.

The understanding of painting needs and requires narrative as the main point to achieve meaning and rationality. This research can inspire Malaysian artists and provide direction to identities, cultures and traditions. For example, The National Cultural Congress in 1971 emphasized Islamic culture and Malaysian Identity to re-shape the Malaysian contemporary art scene nowadays.

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