

**MALAY WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE FAMILY AND THEIR RESPONSES
TO A CHANGING WORLD – A FEMINIST POSTCOLONIAL READING
OF ELLINA BINTI ABDUL MAJID'S *PERHAPS IN PARADISE***

BY

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ABSTRAK

PERANAN WANITA MELAYU DI DALAM KELUARGA DAN TINDAKBALAS TERHADAP DUNIA YANG BERUBAH – SATU KAEDAH FEMINIS PASCA KOLONIAL DI DALAM NOVEL *PERHAPS IN PARADISE* KARYA ELLINA BINTI ABDUL MAJID

Untuk memastikan sesuatu keluarga itu aman dan harmoni, wanita memainkan peranan yang pelbagai. Berada di dalam institusi kekeluargaan tidak bermaksud bahawa wanita tidak dipengaruhi oleh perubahan yang berlaku di sekeliling mereka. Keputusan yang dibuat di dalam dunia politik acapkali memberi kesan kepada sosialisasi masyarakat. Wanita tidak dapat lari daripada dipengaruhi oleh keputusan-keputusan politik tersebut.

Sehubungan itu, fokus kajian ini adalah untuk mendalami bagaimana wanita di dalam novel *Perhaps In Paradise* memainkan peranan di dalam keluarga kelas pertengahan dan bagaimana mereka bertindakbalas terhadap perubahan sosio-politik di dalam persekitaran mereka. Novel ini yang ditulis oleh Ellina binti Abdul Majid dikaji menggunakan kaedah feminis pasca-kolonial.

Kajian yang dijalankan mendapati peranan wanita di dalam kelas pertengahan didominasi oleh unsur-unsur tradisi dan agama. Adakalanya karakter-karakter wanita ini ditindas apabila mereka akur kepada amalan tradisi dan agama. Bagaimanapun, keakuran mereka telah memantapkan keutuhan keluarga mereka. Sebaliknya, apabila mereka mencontohi Barat untuk memperolehi kebebasan, mereka disingkirkan daripada masyarakat mereka sendiri. Adakalanya juga, budaya Timur dan Barat sama-sama boleh diamalkan untuk memberikan kehidupan yang lebih bermakna kepada karakter-karakter wanita tersebut.

ABSTRACT

Women in the family play multiple roles in order to ensure that the family lives a peaceful and harmonious life. Inhabiting the family setting does not mean that women are not affected by the changes that take place in their surroundings. More often than not, the political decisions made affect the socialisation of the people and as a result, women are also inevitably influenced.

Based on such a premise, it is the focus of this research to investigate how the female characters in the novel *Perhaps In Paradise* manage their roles in the middle class family and how they respond to the socio-political changes occurring in their milieu. This novel which is penned by Ellina binti Abdul Majid is studied by engaging the feminist postcolonial theory.

The analysis uncovers that the roles played by the female characters in the middle-class family are negotiated through the hegemonic practices of tradition and religion. At times the characters are subordinated when they succumb to such practices. Nevertheless, when they do submit, they manage to preserve the family's sanctity. On the other hand, in certain cases when they retaliate and choose to look to the west for liberation, they could be marginalised in their own society. At other times, the cultures of east and west can be negotiated to provide meaningful lives to the characters.

CHAPTER 1

1.0 INTRODUCTION

“Women, passive, long-suffering, complicit, have been colonised subjects for centuries” (Lim, 1994: p. 39).

The proposition by Shirley Geok-lin Lim above provides the basis to why women’s experiences should be highlighted. Other feminists have been aware about this subjugation which has taken place for hundreds of years. Their crusade has been led by Mary Wollstonecraft with her publication of *A Vindication of the Women’s Rights* in 1792. This awareness has guided them to study various issues in relation to women so that more women are given agency about their subjugated positions. The colonisation of women by the patriarchal beliefs governing the societies results in their inability to act and speak in the way they truly desire. Their voices are silenced and they are denied existence, consequently, they are marginalised. Hence, women’s experiences should be explained to set the agenda for liberating them from this oppressive silence.

As an extension to this, Adrienne Rich (2003: p. 38) has written about women emphasising that “...we who are not the same. We who are many and do not want to be the same”. Her words bring to light the importance of reading women’s experiences not in the universal framework, but in their own contexts. Contexts here can be proclaimed as the circumstances under which the experiences occur. Such circumstances are important because initially, women’s experiences are regarded as homogeneous. Feminism, being the social and political agenda for championing the rights of women, used to speak for all women (Lim, 1994). As knowledge evolves, women of colour have increasingly queried this assumption (ibid). This query has to

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do with the conception that every woman's experience is different and unique to her surrounding situations.

Malaysian women are included in the group of women of colour due to their geographical and historical backgrounds. These women form a part of the Malaysian society which is highly heterogeneous. The heterogeneity of the Malaysian society is caused by the diverse backgrounds, origins and also because of the different levels of education and skills (Azizah, 1984). Littrup (2000: p.82) quotes Adibah Amin who supports the contention on the heterogeneity of the Malaysian society generally and the Malaysian women especially by writing that "we don't want to be the same, but to be equal". This proclamation to be acknowledged as equal to the western counterparts results in the need for the revision of the western universalist programme (Lim, 1994). Such a programme by western feminists used to represent all women regardless of their backgrounds (ibid). As posited by Karim (1992), a complexity of structures of social differentiation in different cultures suggests that the position of women cannot be argued from a universal theory. This contention explains that the complexities of the socialisation of women in different cultures make their experiences not homogeneous. This heterogeneous nature of women's experiences needs to be explained in their own terms and situations.

For instance, in an analysis of women and modernity in a Malay television drama, Shakila Manan (2002) has discovered that even a highly western educated Malay woman actually goes back to her root in matters like choosing a partner in marriage. In this particular analysis, the female character chooses a more traditional man compared to the more westernised one as her partner. This is because, once a woman is married, she is assured of continuous male support, guidance and

protection (ibid). Hence, being emancipated does not mean a woman in a Malay society will automatically resort to the standard dictated by the western feminists. This notion highlights that the issue of one's identity is involved in matters pertaining to culture. As such, in order to acknowledge one's self, the hegemony of tradition and religion that presides over one's life for example cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is crucial to provide a space for women of different cultures so that their voices can be heard through recounting their experiences. Malaysian women whose cultures are essentially different from the western women have to assert their identities or else they will be silenced.

One of the ways to look at the various women's experiences in Malaysia is by focusing on their portrayal in the literary world. According to Koh (1980), literature is concerned with values and thus with human relationships. These values and human relationships are a social phenomenon and hence, a part of life. Therefore, literature is a body of writings that exemplify the lives of certain groups of people. Even though Zawiah (2003) contends that literature is a construction of 'reality' purported by the writer, it is a 'reality' that is created based on the social phenomenon taken from real life. Hence, literature is never innocent. This lack of innocence means that a piece of literary writing always brings some hidden messages in it.

Zawiah (2003) concurs that language of fiction is also the language of ideology. Ideology, which can be referred to as a set or sets of beliefs, formally established or not (Eagleton, 1976) is the spirit that permeates any writings. Due to this fact, analysing the experiences of the Malay women through Malaysian literature can be enlightening. The beliefs and explanations on Malaysian women's actions and decisions can increase the understanding of this group of women. This

understanding is hoped to provide Malay women with a voice and thus liberating them from silence.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Two vital facts that link a majority of women everywhere are childbearing and nurturing capacities. These two attributes are more pronounced if they are explained in the context of the world's oldest form of expression of human relationship that is the family. The word family is almost synonymous with woman and is unsurpassed in importance in most women's lives (O'Connell, 1994). Family affects every aspect of women's lives such as socialisation and education, sexuality, the way they are expected to behave as women, wives, mothers and carers (ibid). In the family itself, the internal relationships and support systems are unique to each family unit (ibid).

In the Malaysian context, women's roles are reciprocal to the notions of family, marriage, children and love (Hing, 1984). Shirley Lim, in an interview with Nor Faridah (2001) further concurs that Malaysian women are always organised as part of a family system. In fact, Ong (2003) postulates that in the construction of modern Malaysian society, the key elements are the competing images of Malay women and family. These observations signify that in the case of Malay women particularly, the notion of family plays an overriding importance in their lives. Furthermore, the centrality of family in Malay women's lives makes it a highly important domain for their socialisation and growth. In light of this, Malay women's capacities as a mother, daughter, sister and wife should be studied because the roles they play in the family define their existence as women.

Families in Asia generally are moving towards the western nuclear family model (Das, 1979). As such, families in Malaysia also cannot escape from this

inevitable wave of change. This evolution is inescapable because a family is always vulnerable to external forces that help to shape its dynamics (O'Connell, 1994). One highly significant force in this country is the fact that Malaysia used to be a colonised land. Hence, the influence of colonisation usurps the family institution, changing its backgrounds. This situation is more pronounced in families who are situated in urban settings just like the characters in the novel studied. Urban Malays are found to be more westernised since they emulate the British way of life (Karim, 1992). This is because the Malays who live in the urban areas are generally more educated and more exposed to the western ideals. This exposure provides them with the choices whether to assimilate the western culture into their lives or not.

Since changes occur in the family due to western influences, the traditional family values are compromised. As posited by Lazar (1979), in a developing nation, traditional families are evolving to become modern families. This evolution will involve assimilating foreign values into their lives. Concomitant with this, such a scenario could pose tension and conflicts in the members of the families, especially between the older and the younger generations. However, the preservation of a family's harmony is crucial to ensure a meaningful life for all members. Therefore in the context of this study, the female family members have to resolve the conflicts in the ways best to them. By explaining how the women overcome their predicaments in the family settings, their voices will be heard. This provision of voice creates agency for the women. Significantly, this agency helps to raise the women's awareness about their subjugated positions.

In addition to this, it cannot be denied that women's experiences are also coloured by their associations with the world at large. This is because when a woman goes out into the world, she is entering the public realms, away from the

secure embrace of family life. Consequently, her associations with those outside the family will also help to define her being. As in the case of Malaysia, the experiences are affected by a world that is changing partly due to British colonisation. British influence is obvious in many aspects of Malaysian lives. The most obvious one remains the country's development which is modelled after the English monarchy and democracy (Shaharuddin, 1988).

The novel chosen is set in the late sixties until the present time. Late sixties was the time that denoted major changes to the society due to the imbalance of political and economical stratifications among the major ethnic groups particularly the Malays and the Chinese (Shaharuddin, 1988). As a result of this imbalance, the young nation at the time was highly unstable and full of tension. This tension culminated in the form of the May 13, 1969 racial riot. This event marked various political interventions that inevitably affected the social lives of the people. Hence, since the story starts at the point when the riot happens, the female characters in the novel cannot escape from the changes that are taking place in their surrounding. These changing experiences should be examined to provide further comprehension of the women's actions and decisions. Accordingly, this comprehension is expected to provide a voice to the Malay women.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The book *Perhaps in Paradise* discusses the experiences of a highly positioned Malayan civil servant's family. More specifically, it recounts the experiences of female characters whose roles are heavily defined in their existence as family members. As noted by Abdul Rahman (1999) who quotes Nordin Selat's study in 1976, the highly positioned Malaysian civil servants have actually formed a newly emerging middle class group. In the Malaysian novels written in English, this

type of characters is seldom highlighted. Even though a few local English novels written by women also centre on the characters that are from the middle class families, they do not explore female Malay characters from the newly emerging middle class point of view during the late sixties.

For instance, novels by Chuah Guat Eng (*Echoes of Silence*) and Mary Gerrina Louise (*Road to Chandibole, Junos*) deal with characters in the middle and even in the lower economic strata (Nor Faridah and Quayum, 2001). However, these writers are more focused on their own ethnic groups. Since Malaysia is a country that has a diversity of cultures, it is important to note the differences between the ethnic groups or even classes. Concomitant with this, it would be noteworthy to analyse the experiences of the Malay women from the higher stratum of the society. By doing so, this group of women are represented in the discourse at large since their experiences are given due attention.

Furthermore, the novel also illustrates the life of the protagonist, Kina who has the privilege of pursuing her secondary education at a boarding school in the United Kingdom. At the time the story is set, this scenario is rare among the Malays and actually only common to the Malay aristocratic circle. Hence, it is noteworthy to study how the western education and exposure affects a girl who comes from a privileged middle class family.

In the same vein, most research on women's issues in Malaysia are focused on women's involvement in the public sphere like in the education, politics and economy (Fan Kok Sim, 1984). Therefore, the actual experiences of Malaysian women in the private realm or family are still hidden. Resolutions to conflicts and preservation of family unity in a Malay family from a privileged background are still under-explored. By the same token, how these women face the challenging milieu

that is evolving is also another issue that is important to note. The personal experiences of the higher middle class Malaysian women in a world that is changing, their motivation and decisions are still unidentified.

On the same note, as mentioned earlier, the family under discussion is a Malay family. As highlighted by Zawiah (1988), Malay women actually suffer from under-exposure as much in fiction as in reality. In Malaysian English fiction written by non-Malays, female Malay characters merely exist on the sidelines of action (ibid). This is because Malay characters are difficult materials for non-Malay writers since they need to comprehend the socio-cultural underpinnings behind such characters (ibid). The Malays on the other hand, do not feel the urgency to express themselves in English since the national literature in Malay Language should be enough to sustain them (Quayum, 2003).

Hence, this results in only a handful of Malay writers writing in English. The repercussion to this is that not many Malay characters are at the centre stage and thus, not available in abundance for scrutiny. Due to this, it is highly desirable to study these Malay female characters since this would help to provide them with a voice and representation. This representation could help to emphasise the heterogeneity of Malay women, as compared to the western women or women from other ethnic groups in Malaysia. In so doing, the Malay women will be provided with an agency and simultaneously, making them aware about their subjugation in the society.

Both issues of female roles in the family and a changing world have threads that tie strings of events together in the novel *Perhaps in Paradise*. The feminist postcolonial theory is adopted in this research in the attempts at explaining the actions and decisions taken by the Malay women in the story.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research endeavours to achieve the objectives as follow :

1. to explore how the female characters manage their roles in the middle class family in Ellina binti Abdul Majid's novel *Perhaps in Paradise*.
2. to examine how the female characters respond to the socio-political changes that occur in Malaysia in Ellina binti Abdul Majid's novel *Perhaps in Paradise*.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research attempts to obtain answers to the following questions :

1. How do the female characters manage their roles in the middle class family in Ellina binti Abdul Majid's novel *Perhaps in Paradise* ?
2. How do the female characters respond to the socio-political changes that occur in Malaysia in Ellina binti Abdul Majid's novel *Perhaps in Paradise*?

1.5 RATIONALE

It is the aim of this research to promote greater understanding of how Malay women handle their roles in the family and how they react to a world that is undergoing socio-political changes. These experiences are portrayed through an exploration of the novel *Perhaps in Paradise*. This exercise is expected to raise a certain degree of awareness regarding women's experiences from a postcolonial environment.

Males have identified themselves historically with the universal culture, in effect edging out female culture from the umbrella (Ventura, 1994). As a consequence, women are often not represented in the discourse at large because of their gender. This phenomenon causes lack of representation which reinforces their subjugation. As in the case of women of colour, Hooks (1984), argues that the

existing feminist movement ignores the existence of all non-white women and even poor white women. This ignorance perpetuates marginalisation since the voices of the coloured women are not heard. This marginalisation is akin to colonialism because the women are not represented in the feminist discourse itself (Mohanty, 1988). Hence, to rectify this problem studies which are conducted about women should be sensitive to gender, race and class (Spivak, 1988). By theorising these non-white women's experiences, they are empowered and strengthened. This empowerment and strengths could help to liberate them from the dominant western and patriarchal discourse.

In the novel studied, Ellina paints the pictures of Malay women going through lives in elitist families. These female characters undergo changes in their lives because of a changing environment. Changes in their surroundings are first manifested in the family. This situation is inescapable as a lot of changes took place to build a new nation after independence. Hence, the policies created also affect those in the private sphere.

The private sphere or the family is indeed very significant in the creation of a united and harmonious nation. Research has shown that a problematic society is one which has complications at the micro level or family (Kausar, 2002). Therefore, how the women in a Malay family play their roles to resolve the conflicts in order to preserve the family's unity and harmony should be investigated. This is because the female characters in the novel are exposed to western ideas and lifestyle. Hence, how they balance the new influences and the old traditions and customs in order to cope with their lives is worth scrutinising. This investigation is deemed justifiable because only then can the women's roles in the Malay family be highlighted.

In addition, a postcolonial nation like Malaysia undergoes many transformations in the name of development. These advancements in technologies are mostly derived from the west. However, at the same time, this country is struggling to establish an identity free from the imperial centre (Johae, 1994) just like any other postcolonial nation. The attempt at constructing its own identity is seen desirable for the country because it yearns for total liberation from the colonised past (ibid). The much needed western technologies and at the same time, a much desired true national identity creates a conflicting situation. This conflict is perpetuated since a newly independent nation needs the western technologies to develop but at the same time tries to resist its ideologies. Such a conflicting phenomenon would certainly give rise to tensions in the citizens.

Malaysian women cannot avoid this tension since they are part of the society. Therefore, they have to assimilate certain western values congruent to their own beliefs so that they can evolve together with the nation. By doing so, they are growing with the development but at the same, retaining their identities as Malay women. Studying how the characters form their identities as Malays is crucial because then it can be known whether they have actually negotiated their roots in order to survive in a developing nation.

Until recently, studies conducted on this novel are very few and none of them uses the feminist postcolonial approach. For example, a study by Mazni Muslim (2001) discusses the novel using the Islamic feminist point of view. This particular analysis highlights the characters' awareness of their identities as Muslims and the framework is based on the Islamic tenets taken from the Quran and *hadith* or sayings from the Prophet.

Feminism and postcolonialism are two basic premises on which this thesis draws its concepts. Feminist postcolonial theory is adopted as the research framework since only female characters' experiences are examined and all of them are from Malaysia which is a country under colonial rule until 1957. The research seeks to analyse how Ellina, who is a Malay writer, portrays female characters in her story through their conflicts, ambitions and desires.

1.6 ELLINA BINTI ABDUL MAJID

Ellina binti Abdul Majid was first a journalist before she ventured into a series of other jobs such as research assistant with an inter-governmental organisation, a public relations executive and a law lecturer. A married woman, she has three children. Her tertiary education was completed in the United Kingdom with an Honours degree in Law and Social Anthropology from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Ellina used to write for the magazines and radio and has won prizes for her writings in short story competitions. As a writer, she was described by Johan Jaafar a critic, as possessing the 'virtue of simplicity' and 'is strikingly evocative' (Ellina, 1997). Lloyd Fernando, a prominent writer and also a critic in the Malaysian Literature in English scene has commented on her prize-winning entry in the NST-McDonald's short story competition in 1987 as 'simple, unpretentious and excellently crafted' (ibid).

Perhaps in Paradise is her first novel, published in 1997. In the story, Ellina's characters are portrayed as women who deal with the passing years and the conflicts in their lives by having to choose the traditions and religion or the western ideas. At times, the characters cannot escape but come to a compromise between these east and west cultures. Throughout the story, they also exhibit staunch support

for each other as members in the family, relatives or even as friends. Even though some of the decisions taken by the characters are against the norms and tradition, the actions are taken because of circumstances which require them to do so.

1.7 NOVEL IN THIS RESEARCH –*PERHAPS IN PARADISE*

The novel is tagged as a bittersweet, nostalgic novel about growing up by the author. Indeed, when reading this story, one notices that the first few chapters deal with the sweetness and wild abandon of the childhood years. As the narrative progresses, the central characters who are the protagonist, Kina and her two other sisters also grow up, shedding their innocence with the experiences they undergo. However, the nostalgic element permeates the novel till the last page since it ends with Kina in the present explaining her decision which is a consequence of her past experiences.

Kina's family around which the story revolves is a higher middle class Malay family. Kina's father is a civil servant of very high position and is able to afford a cook, a maid, a driver and a gardener. This stratum of people make up the minority at the time the story begins in the late sixties. During that period, most Malay families were still living in the villages and thriving on paddy planting, rubber tapping or fishing.

The novel has twelve chapters, one brief but important prologue because it sets the flashback mood of the story and one insightful epilogue. Chapter one introduces Rose, Min, Kina as the sisters, Mama, Norah, Jean Jacques (Norah's French husband, Amri (Norah's son) and *Abah*. Kina the youngest sister acts as the narrator and this results in the narration sounding childlike and innocent.

The tragic event of thirteenth May 1969 is revealed in chapter two. However, the fact that the story is told from a child's eyes makes the event seems

inconsequential. This is because for the children, the incident is only an inconvenience since they have to put up with a neighbour, Aunt Cynthia because the parents are away. However, the pain of loss and fear does not escape them because Aru, their driver dies due to the rebellion and this is their first taste of how real life is. Norah as an aunt has a huge influence on the sisters especially Rose who tries to imitate Norah's western style.

Chapter three denotes the implementation of the New Economic Policy, a political pronouncement made as a result of the May thirteenth incident. Various changes occur to the nation, especially the emphasis on education for women. This is evident since the family starts planning for the sisters to pursue better education at boarding schools and even abroad. Rose, being a teenager is showing signs of delinquency and restlessness. She suddenly finds herself married off to a divorced man, *Abang* Ray after she is caught skipping school to hold clandestine meetings with him. Aunt Wong, as the mother's best friend and Mel, Kina's best friend are also introduced here.

Many conflicts start to rear their heads in chapter four. Min begins her journey in life as a successful residential school student. Rose's marriage is showing her cracks and she suffers from domestic violence. She hints at her distress by dropping clues to her family but they choose to ignore her cry for help. Another grave tragedy is Norah's demise due to cancer which results in Amri being brought back to France by Jean Jacques, his father.

Rose's behaviour is becoming more erratic in chapter five, signifying her mental turmoil. However, the family including the in-laws pretend not to notice since for them, it is very important to keep up appearances. This façade of a well-balanced family is the more important since the family comes from the upper

echelon of the society. However, the sisters, Kina and Min are kept in the dark since they have limited experiences in marital situations. Mama is showing signs of resignation after Norah dies. At this juncture, Kina is told that she is going to pursue her secondary education in England because the family has ambitions for her.

Six chapters, from six to eleven, are devoted to recounting Kina's diasporic experiences as a secondary school student in the United Kingdom. Her independence, courage and versatility are tested here. She emerges a winner since she manages to handle her ordeal well. These chapters witness her friendship with an English girl, Isabelle, who influences her actions and decisions. Kina's friendship with an elderly English couple, Uncle Max and Aunt Emma who become her foster parents also develops in these chapters. Kina is also developing interests with member of the opposite sex, Shukri, a Malaysian student studying in the United Kingdom.

In the last chapter, Kina goes home for a holiday only to face a gruesome truth regarding her sister Rose. She accompanies Rose to an underground clinic because the latter wants to commit an abortion. Rose dies of infection and the whole family mourns deeply. Kina is haunted by guilt because she cannot do anything to help Rose. She is also tremendously shocked to find out that her other family members actually know about Rose's condition but decide to keep mum about it for fear of scandals.

The epilogue has a tinge of sadness to it, like a eulogy since the novel closes with Rose's death. It explains to the reader the consequences of past events on the characters in the present time. Kina remains unmarried despite her success as a career woman. She fears she would end up in a marriage with a stranger who beats her up like what *Abang Ray* does to her sister.

Kina has been entrusted as the narrator throughout the novel, giving the reader a limited omniscient point of view. The novel encapsulates one woman's experiences who is sometimes in the middle of conflicts herself and at other times merely an onlooker of misgiving events. Her mother, the two older sisters, the aunt, the women relatives and her best friends are the people who influence her outlook on life. Besides Kina, Mama and Rose are also affected deeply by the chain of events which require them to change based on their circumstances. Due to this, they are also the main characters in the story.

How the women characters exist together, seemingly independent from their male counterparts is one thing that is striking about the novel. Men in the story are not discussed thoroughly and at times seem to exist only as peripheral characters. Women in this novel take centre stage; women and their struggles in facing life's trials and tribulations are the ones that matter.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Family – the primary beneficiary and focus of women's labour (Humm, 1989). It is a site for the production of non-money economy through women's bearing and raising of children. This non-money economy contributes to the production of human capital for the nation and thus making women central to the development (Momsen, 1991).

Role – Khalijah (1994) relates role as pertinent to participation and contribution. She also suggests the capacities that women can do as related to their roles. O'Connell (1994) and Khalijah (1994) both concur that women's participation, contribution and capacities in the family are highly tied to the notions of them being a mother, wife, and daughter. In the context of this study, the role is extended to

include the notion of being a sister in the family. Hence, role can be elucidated as how the women in the family contribute and participate in their capacities as a mother, wife, daughter and sister.

Changing World – an evolving country, in this context Malaysia that is affected by influences which change the situations of the people. In this country, the ultimate political power is the government who make decisions that can change the lives and socialisation patterns of the people. As posited by Appa Rao, Joss-Larsen, Nordin and Guan (1972), Malaysia's legal and constitutional means which are essentially political create and hold the nation together. In attempting to hold the nation together, the safety, health and welfare of the citizens which represent the social lives of the people must be provided for (ibid). Due to this, a changing world in this study is Malaysia that is created because of the political manoeuvrings which then affect the socialisation of the citizens. Hence, a changing world is manifested as the socio-political changes which occur in the country.

Difference – Humm (1989) describes the word as a necessary polarity between women and men as well as between women and women. She based her definitions on Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone works on feminism which conclude that women's differences from men are the chief mechanism of women's oppression. At most postcolonial sites which are predominantly the places for coloured women, differences between women can be differentiated by class, ethnicity and life stage (Momsen, 1991).

Voice – Humm (1989) based her definition of voice on Gilbert and Gubar's work (1979) who concur that representation of the voice in literature by women writers is a textual strategy used by the writers to deconstruct images of women inherited from male literature. This contention explains that women are given representation through writings about them because only then their experiences are made available to the dominant discourse.

Empowerment - a term means to give strengths to women. By empowering women, they become the agents of change, self-reliant and economically independent (Momsen, 1991). In order to empower women, their experiences need to be acknowledged in their own terms so that they will be aware of their oppressed positions. This awareness will empower them and consequently allow them to plan steps to oppose this oppression.

Subordination – it is a central feature of all structures of interpersonal domination (Humm, 1989). Humm (1989) quotes Simone de Beauvoir in her powerful work, *The Second Sex* who purports that men's view of women as fundamentally different reduces women to the status of the second sex and hence, subordinated. For instance, white Americans who consider themselves as the absolute, the essential, in contrast to the Asians who are seen as incidental and inessential, are perpetuating the subordination of the Asian subjects (Lim, 1994).

Experience – women’s private awareness and knowledge drawn from participation on social life (Humm, 1989). In order to give the privilege to women’s voice, the feminist theory needs to study the experiences of women in other societies, from different classes, races and nationalities (ibid).

1.9 LIMITATIONS

This research lends its focus on the main female characters in the novel *Perhaps in Paradise*. These main characters are the ones who enter the story and stay almost till the end, allowing the reader enough time to get acquainted with them as individuals (Zawiah, 1988). Only issues relating to female roles in the family and a changing world are given prominence because they are significant as early as the novel unfolds till it closes in the end.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to examine various issues which are related to the key concerns in this research which are the analysis of female roles in the middle class family and the female characters' responses to the socio-political changes in the country. For the purpose of this study the researcher employs the feminist postcolonial theory to examine and discuss how the main female characters manage their roles in the family and how they respond to the socio-political changes in the country.

Perhaps in Paradise requires a feminist approach because the female characters are the ones who shape the novel. It is also a postcolonial novel not only because it is written in the postcolonial era but the plot and settings are largely affected by postcolonial issues. This novel discusses how female members of the family negotiate their roles and how these roles evolve due to various reasons and events in their lives. It also involves the formation of female identities and how it is linked to the changing identity of the nation. This in turn redefines Malay women's experiences within the family domain. Thus, the adoption of the feminist postcolonial theory is deemed appropriate for its analysis.

Since Ellina binti Abdul Majid is a Malaysian novelist, this chapter will first review previous research concerning Malaysian literature in English. Then, there will be reviews on the feminist approaches and postcolonial approaches. Next, the feminist postcolonial theory is reviewed with the aim of showing how important it is to acknowledge the differences between women even though they might come from the same family. These diversities need to be recognised because women in postcolonial

sites react differently to conflicts in the family. These varying responses are caused by the transformations in their surroundings. In addition, the researcher will also look into past studies on the Malay women, family in Malaysia and the socio-political changes in the country. These reviews are conducted to obtain a deeper comprehension of the issues to be studied in this research.

2.1 MALAYSIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

English has a long history in this country starting from the British imperialism since it was used in the colonial administration. Nevertheless, as the Federation of Malaya was preparing for independence, the report by the Abdul Razak Committee on Education set up in 1956 resulted in the Malay language becoming the medium of instruction in all primary and secondary schools (except those using Chinese and Tamil as the mediums of instruction) (Tham, 1981). Due to this, English in this country has drastically been down-shifted from colonial pre-eminence to its present position as a second language (Lim, 1994). As a consequence to this, the mainstream literature is written in Malay with the aim of fostering the Malaysian identity, leaving English as a sectional literature that appeals to only a small number of audience (Quayum, 2003).

English fiction generally and novel writings specifically in the history of Malaysia have their roots back to the colonizers' time. The writers were mainly the British Residents such as Hugh Clifford and Frank Swettenham who were posted to this country (Quayum, 2002). The locals only started to write in the 1950s with the writers mostly belonged to a male English-educated 'elite', attracting only a small audience (Campbell, 2000). The writers who are prominent in this literary circle include names such as Lloyd Fernando, Lee Kok Liang and K.S. Maniam (Lim, 1994). Their writings

are mostly preoccupied with the issues of social identity other than as British colonial subject (ibid).

Women writers in this country have actually started contributing to the literary development in English as early as the 1950s. Such writers include the expatriates such as Han Suyin and Katharine Sim who wrote novels, Margaret Leong who wrote poems and Sybil Kathigasu who wrote her autobiographical memoirs in prose. (Nor Faridah and Quayum, 2001). The issues central to the works of these authors include the plight of the marginalised and underprivileged, protests against the British imperialism, conflicts between the ruled and the ruler as well as the horrors of the Second World War in South East Asia (ibid). Unfortunately, the 1960s to 1980s only saw women writers in English contributing to the genres of poetry and short stories.

It was not until the 1990s that Malaysian women writers began to write novels again, pioneered by Chuah Guat Eng and Marie Gerrina Louis (Nor Faridah and Quayum, 2001). Being post-independence writers, they deal with diverse issues inter-connecting past and present, addressing the question of identity in a post-colonial setting in which they challenge limiting and discriminating borders like race, class and gender (ibid). Notably, these writers focus on the depiction of people from their own ethnicities. Guat Eng writes about issues in the Chinese families and Louis writes about the concerns in the Indian communities (ibid). Therefore, the subject matters raised in these novels are those which pertain to their own communities.

The Malay issues can be found in the writings of female writers such as Che Husna Azahari dan Dina Zaman. Dina Zaman focuses on urban people and is more comfortable with short stories, poems and non-fiction. On the other hand, Che Husna

paints the picture of Kelantan peasant life in her short stories and novella like *The Rambutan Orchard*. Ellina binti Abdul Maid is added to the list of Malaysian writers writing in English when she published her first novel in 1997, *Perhaps in Paradise*. Her focus is also on the urban population like Dina, but Ellina is more concerned with the higher class people unlike Dina who focuses on wider range of characters like the urban misfits such as the prostitutes and street hawkers (Nor Faridah and Quayum, 2001).

Zawiah (1988) postulates that a study on the Malay characters in Malaysian novels in English would witness a combination of literary analysis of characterisation with a sociological analysis of the Malay society. This is deemed necessary since the sociology of the Malay society will help to explain the events created in the novel. Nevertheless, as has been suggested earlier, Malay female characters in many Malaysian novels written in English suffer from under-exposure and have been placed merely on the sidelines of the action (ibid). Novels written prior to the birth of writers like Ellina, Che Husna and Dina Zaman never even mentioned the existence of the promising breed of professional Malay women (ibid). Hence, there seems to be an urgency to study the portrayal of Malay women like the ones painted by Ellina so that Malay women and their experiences are not silenced.

2.2 FEMINIST THEORY

Feminism is predominantly the ideology of women's liberation since intrinsic in all its approaches is the belief that women suffer injustice because of the sex (Humm, 1989). It started to gain its way into the minds of people way back in 1792 with Mary Wollstonecraft's writing, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Since then, many women have fought, suffered and triumphed in the name of women's rights.

Scholars on feminism posit that the term gender is actually a social construct (Momsen, 1991). Booker, Selden & Widdowson (1997) quote Simone de Beauvoir, a leading feminist who states in her powerful book *The Second Sex*, as saying that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman because it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature. Thornharm (2000) further confirms this standing when she contends that women are socialised into accepting the ideology of femininity and with it, their inferior status. Therefore, according to the feminist theory, women are subjugated because of the socially constructed image that is gender. When women accept this given image without question, they become 'the other' and thus, reinforcing their inferiority (Humm, 1989).

The long history of feminism can actually be divided into a few phases. The first phase is tagged as the first-wave which refers to a period of feminist activities concerned with women's inequality and materialism (Watkins, 2001). It also focuses primarily on gaining the right of women's suffrage. The second phase is termed the second-wave to describe a newer feminist movement that focuses on fighting for the social and cultural inequalities suffered by women as political inequalities (ibid). It is also concerned with emphasising the differences between women and men and amongst women themselves (ibid).

The following phase is designated as the Third Wave. Dicker & Piepmeier (2003) argue that the third-wave is concerned with the next generation in the new millennium who needs to develop a politicized, collective feminism that aligns itself on the strategies of second wave feminists (ibid). However, it is grounded in the material realities and culture of the twenty-first century (ibid). Therefore, the third wave