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**An Exploratory Study on Linguistic Sexism in Malaysian Secondary  
School English Literature Textbooks**

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**Abstract**

Linguistic differences between men and women have been a widely popular topic for the last 30 years. This paper is concerned with these differences and how they are represented in today's current textbooks. The current study is an attempt to investigate if there is an occurrence of linguistic sexism in the English literature textbooks used in a secondary school in the northern region of Malaysia. The study used two literature textbooks that were currently used by form 4 students in the school. The two books, namely, 'The Poison Tree' and 'A Collection of Short Stories, Poems and Drama' were examined if linguistic sexism occurred by a critical content analysis (CDA) by Fairclough. This study uses the method of content analysis that was presented by Xu (2009). It is based on the following items: 1. External appearance of female/male characters and 2. Personality of male/female characters. The primary focus of this paper is to see whether linguistic sexism occurs in the literature textbooks used in the secondary schools in Malaysia. A qualitative analysis based on the preceding criteria found that the males rule over the females in almost every category linguistically.

*Keywords: Linguistic sexism, Critical discourse analysis, Literature textbooks, Secondary school.*

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Seeking Advice Strategically Online: Malaysian Women and their Infertility  
Problems

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Abstract

The ability to produce children is especially important in some societies as it strengthens marriages and it also ensures the continuation of family lineage (Dyer, 2007). Nonetheless, not all couples are able to have biological children. Infertility affects 8%-10% of the global population (Reproductive Health Outlook, 2003), and in Malaysia, one in seven couples suffers from infertility problems (Kasmiah Mustapha, 2002). As the Malaysian society is one that is largely patriarchal (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), women usually bear the brunt of the infertility stigma, irrespective of which partner is infertile (Akhtar, 2011; Evens, 2004). They are frequently looked down upon, suffering from criticisms, ostracism, and sometimes, broken marriages due to childlessness (Akhtar, 2011). Consequently, infertility is a taboo topic (Evens, 2004), and Malaysian women with infertility problems are often secretive about their problems, afraid of being stigmatized. However, with the anonymity afforded by computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Herring 2011), these women can now turn to the online medium for help and support. As yet, not much is known about how Malaysian women with infertility problems communicate their predicament and seek help. This study therefore aims to investigate the types of strategies Malaysian women employ when seeking advice on infertility treatment in an online setting. Messages posted in a Malaysian online forum were analyzed for their advice-seeking strategies using the web content analysis method. The findings identified three main advice-seeking strategies in the messages, and also showed that culture played a part in influencing the manner in which advice was sought. As such, the findings suggest that an anonymous CMC is important as a platform for Malaysian women with infertility problems to seek help and advice, and that their advice-seeking strategies are closely tied in with culture.

*Keywords: infertility, women, Malaysian, advice-seeking, culture, computer-mediated communication.*

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Unequal Dynamics of the Gaze: Gender, Narration and Panopticon in Jhumpa  
Lahiri's Fiction

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Abstract

Visual metaphors so thoroughly pervade Indian American diaspora writer Jhumpa Lahiri's debut short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*. In the light of the significance of looking in feminist theories and postcolonial (woman) studies, this essay examines Lahiri's literary engagement with the visual phenomena in her short story "Mrs. Sen's". The position being argued for in this analysis is that the titular female protagonist practices panopticism—with respect to its normalizing and homogenizing systematization—and exercises power over herself even as she renounces it, and in so doing, unravels the manner patriarchal social standards have become internalized by female subjects. Through an interpretation of the narrative based upon the socio-psychoanalytic theories of the gaze, the analysis reveals that: First, the Panoptic gaze operates capillary to systematically oppress the subaltern woman in keeping with the hegemonic discourse of American society; Second, the act of observation is associated with a necessarily masculine position, thereby, the woman's—not least the subaltern who fails to make assimilative compromises—assuming the role of observer is parodied; And third, any attempts, on the side of women, to deconstruct or reconstruct the pre-established normative scripts is directly associated with monstrosity, sadism and infanticide. The essay concludes that Lahiri is fundamentally antifeminist, since the existing politics of the gaze within the narrative repeats the gynophobic conceptions of the gaze, that are pre-established in Western metaphysics, and that operate at the expense of women.

*Keywords: Panopticon, monstrosity, internalization, Subaltern woman, Mrs. Sen's*

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# CULTURE AND RELIGION

A Review on the Role of Women in the Traditional Religion of the Dusun  
Lotud in Tuaran, Sabah

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Abstract

The Dusun Lotud people in Tuaran, Sabah are one of the indigenous sub-ethnic groups under Kadazandusun, the official term to classify the indigenous ethnic groups having similar culture and language with various dialects under the Dusunic language branch. They have their own distinctive traditional religion that seems to be forgotten in recent times. The objective of this paper is to study the significant role of women in the Dusun Lotud's traditional religion by reviewing past literatures through archival research and extracting information from newspapers and videos through content analysis. Previous literatures have stated the major role of women in the traditional religion of the Dusun Lotud. The foundation of the religion is a group of priestesses called the *tantagas*. Although certain records stated that men can also be a *tantagas*, most of them are women. Men tend to only play minor roles in the traditional religion compared with women. Hence, women play huge roles in the Dusun Lotud traditional religion, especially the *tantagas* group that is substantial in sustaining their religious practices.

Keywords: *Dusun Lotud, women role, traditional religion, tantagas.*

1. Introduction

Traditionally, gender roles between men and women differed because it was assumed that there are innate biological or psychological reasons to answer the questions. However, recently another assumption stating that gender roles are heavily influenced by culture has been surfaced (Kornblum, 2012:329). Some roles of men might be dominantly been done by women in a particular society and vice versa.

In terms of religion, women always have a significant, specific or distinctive aspect that could influence a religion. For example, in traditional religions, the role of women is influenced by the belief of a mother-goddess that can provide images of women as leaders, healers, artists, music makers and food providers (Lindsey, 2015: 387). This shows that if the traditional religion of a particular society has a belief in goddesses, then it could influence the role of women in that society.

A traditional religion is culture-based and becomes the way of life of a particular ethnic

group, such as the indigenous communities (McGuire, 2002; Park, 2005). People adhered to a traditional religion are more focusing to preserve the religion among their own community as a way of preserving their cultural identity (Park, 2005). The Dusun Lotud people concentrated in Tuaran, Sabah is one of the indigenous societies with a distinctive traditional religion yet has becoming less significant in recent times (Deejay, 2014). This paper will review the roles that are specific or distinctive to women among the Dusun Lotud people, particularly in their traditional religion.

## 2. Research Methodology

The research strategy is non-experimental, which is using qualitative methods in collecting and analyzing data. Neuman (2011) has categorized qualitative data into two, which are field research and historical-comparative research. Historical-comparative research is a research technique that studies certain patterns or trends by comparing various cultures and societies (Ibid.). The historical-comparative research methods used for this research are archival research on past literatures and content analysis on newspaper cuttings and video clips. The scope of this research will only be focusing on the gender-based roles in the traditional religion of the Dusun Lotud people. Since the Dusun Lotud people are dominantly populated in the district of Tuaran, Sabah, thus the scope is only limited to the particular people in the area. Hence, the role of women especially in the traditional religion of the Dusun Lotud people could be discussed and listed.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### 3.1 *The Dusun Lotud people*

The Dusun Lotud people are one of the indigenous ethnic groups classified under the official term Kadazandusun, a term used to classify the majority indigenous groups in Sabah with almost the same culture and language under the branch of Dusunic language (Arnold & Tony, 2011). They are an egalitarian and bilateral society (Blood, 1990; Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). Mainly populated in the district of Tuaran, Sabah, there are over 10,000 populations of the Dusun Lotud people in the area (John Baptist, 2008). The Dusun Lotud people recognize their differences from other Kadazandusun groups (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). Hence, most of the Dusun Lotud people identify themselves as Suang Lotud

that could be directly translated as the Lotud race or ethnic. The use of this term can be seen through the formation of the Sabah Suang Lotud Association in 2010.

The Dusun Lotud people have a traditional religion with the belief of a pair of supreme deities – the god *Kinohoringan* and the goddess *Umunsumundu* – who creates the world together (Evans 1923:46-47; Regis & John Baptist, 1993:197; Jeffrey 1994; John Baptist 2008:4). Besides that, the pair of supreme deities has a daughter named *Muntaba* which is deemed to be the goddess of fertility among the Dusun Lotud people. The foundation of the traditional religion is a group of priestesses called the *tantagas*, the ones that are responsible in conducting religious rites and rituals. They use ancient holy prayers in ancient Lotud language called the *rinait* to perform rituals. Besides that, there is also a group of gifted individuals who are able to communicate with the supernatural in the spirit world through a familiar spirit. They are called as the *libabow*. Both the *tantagas* and the *libabow* are important figures in the traditional religion of the Dusun Lotud people, and both groups are mostly women. It is also said that the supreme goddess *Umunsumundu* is the pioneer of the *tantagas* group and has sometimes appear in the dreams of certain *tantagas* to instruct them with the necessary rituals to be performed in certain times (John Baptist, 2008; Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009).

Most of the Dusun Lotuds are now Christians or Muslims, though a small number of them still practice their traditional religion (Regis & John Baptist, 1993; John Baptist, 2008). The practice of the traditional religion of the Dusun Lotud declined in recent times because most have converted to the Christianity or Islam (Blood, 1990; Jeffrey, 1994; John Baptist, 2008; DeeJay 2014). Although most have converted their religion, certain cultural aspects of the Dusun Lotud people are still conserved, such as their traditional dance, music and attire (DeeJay, 2014). These aspects are maintained because it is considered acceptable in their current monotheist religion (DeeJay, 2015). Though, the functional context of these aspects has changed to fit in with the new religion. Traditionally, the traditional dance, music and attire are used in religious rituals of the Dusun Lotud's traditional religion. However, after conversion, the functional context of these aspects has changed into entertainment as well as a form of retaining their cultural heritage and identity (DeeJay, 2014; 2015).

### 3.1.1 *The Traditional Religion*

The traditional religion of the Dusun Lotud people, just like most of the other ethnic groups of Kadazandusun, is animistic (Evans, 1922). However, Phelan (1983) suggested that

classifying the traditional religion of the Kadazandusun societies are debatable, as their belief is monotheistic, but their practice is animistic. But, it is argued that for the Dusun Lotud people, though the religious practices are animistic, their belief is duotheistic, with the belief of a pair of supreme deities, *Kinohoringan* and *Umunsumundu*, which is the belief in the most powerful and mightiest pair of deities that compliments with each other in harmony (Deejay, 2014).

According to the Dusun Lotud's traditional legend on the creation of the world, the world is a mere vast area of ocean with only a large rock in the middle (Evans, 1923:46; Regis & John Baptist, 1993). When the rock broke into half, the supreme deities *Kinohoringan* and *Umunsumundu* appeared and created the sky, the earth and mankind together (Evans, 1923:46-47; Jeffrey, 1994; John Baptist, 2008; Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009).

*Kinohoringan* and *Umunsumundu* had an eldest daughter named *Muntaba*, who was sacrificed to provide food for mankind (Regis & John Baptist, 1993; Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). Before *Muntaba* was sacrificed, she told her mother *Umunsumundu* to do various rituals to be done in various rice planting seasons (Regis & John Baptist, 1993). Perhaps those rituals initiate the *mamahui do parai* or the ritual of planting and harvesting rice (Deejay, 2014). This also shows that *Umunsumundu* is in fact the first *tantagas* or the one initiated the formation of the *tantagas* (John Baptist, 2008; Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). Parts of her sacrificed body transformed into various types of food crops while her blood transformed to rice (Evans, 1923:47; Regis & John Baptist, 1993; Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). The legend of *Muntaba* became a principle among the Dusun Lotud people to respect food, especially paddy and rice. In fact, children are taught to not waste food, particularly rice, because the rice will "cry" if left uneaten (Deejay, 2014).

The Dusun Lotud people followed the principle of *adat*, the traditional law which regulated their life and behavior (Miyamoto, 2002; Wong, 2006; Baptist, 2008). *Adat* consists of a set of rules of conduct believed to prevent the people from offending the supreme deities and other supernatural beings (John Baptist, 2008). The wrath of the supernatural beings can cause the universe to be imbalanced (John Baptist, 2008; Pugh-Kitingan *et al.*, 2009). Imbalances of both worlds would cause the universe to be "hot" or *alasu* that could cause natural disasters, depletion of crops, plague and deaths (Miyamoto, 2002; John Baptist, 2008; Pugh-Kitingan *et al.*, 2009). To achieve the balance back, the universe would have to be "cooled", and if one breaks the rule towards other men or women, they will be fined with *sogit* (from the word



‘*osogit*’ which means cold) sometimes accompanied with performing rituals or *momoliyan* to avoid the wrath of supernatural beings (John Baptist, 2008; Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009).

### 3.2 The Role of Women in the Traditional Religion

Women always have a more dominant role of being the religious chief or priestesses in the practice of traditional religion of the Kadazandusun as a whole (Evans, 1923:4; Hanafi, 2003; Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). Based on the research, the role of women in the traditional religion of the Dusun Lotud people is considered to be more dominant than men. There are three types of roles that can be categorized in the Dusun Lotud’s traditional religion, which is (i) the role as a *tantagas*, (ii) the role as a *libabow* and (iii) minor roles in performing rituals. The significance of women in these three roles can be classified as fully dominant, dominant and equally dominant, whereas the significance of men can be classified as not dominant, less dominant and equally dominant (Table 1).

Table 1: The dominance in the role in the traditional religion according to gender

| Role            | Gender | Dominance in the role |          |                  |               |              |
|-----------------|--------|-----------------------|----------|------------------|---------------|--------------|
|                 |        | Fully dominant        | Dominant | Equally dominant | Less dominant | Not dominant |
| <i>Tantagas</i> | Men    |                       |          |                  |               | √            |
|                 | Women  | √                     |          |                  |               |              |
| <i>Libabow</i>  | Men    |                       |          |                  | √             |              |
|                 | Women  |                       | √        |                  |               |              |
| Minor role      | Men    |                       |          | √                |               |              |
|                 | Women  |                       |          | √                |               |              |

#### 3.2.1 *Tantagas*

Terms for the priestesses vary according to the ethnic group of Kadazandusun from different areas (Christine, 1994; Jeffrey, 1994). For example, the Kadazans from Penampang uses the term *bobohizan* (Hanafi, 2003; 2008). However, unlike the Penampang Kadazans’ *bobohizan* who serves as a priestess as well as a spirit medium (Hanafi, 2003), the Dusun Lotud people have the *tantagas* and *libabow* who function separately as the priestess and the spirit medium respectively (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). Although in previous times, a small number of men also could be *tantagas* (Regis & John Baptist, 1993), now the role is held

by women, mostly 50 years old and above (John Baptist, 2008; Pugh-Kitingan *et al.*, 2009).

The talent or calling to be a *tantagas* is said to be acquired through dreams (Maria, 1994), but it is not as simple as that. Once someone feels the calling, she would undergo some form of training or *moki'ira'* to be a *tantagas* (Maria, 1994; Regis & John Baptist, 1993; Francis, 2012; DeeJay, 2014). The training usually involves learning rituals as well as the ancient chants or prayers known as the *rinait* which contains the story of the creation of the world, the exploits of the deities, the origins of rice, prescriptions for moral living, ritual practices and other aspects of cultural life (Blood, 1990; Regis & John Baptist, 1993; Maria, 1994; Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009).

The role as a *tantagas* in the traditional religion of the Dusun Lotud is fully dominant with women (Evans, 1923:4; Blood, 1990). This is because without the chant of *rinait* by the *tantagas*, a ritual cannot be done successfully. The main role of the *tantagas* is to balance the physical and spiritual worlds in the universe by conducting the religious rites and rituals (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). Hence, without the *rinait*, a *tantagas* cannot perform rituals, thus the universe cannot be balanced if *adat* is breached. The world would be in jeopardy, according to the *tantagas* (Jeffrey, 1994; Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009).

### 3.2.2 *Libabow*

The *libabow* is not specialized in conducting religious activities, but acts as a spirit medium that could communicate with the supernatural beings in the spirit world through a familiar spirit also called as *libabow* (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009; Pugh-Kitingan *et al.*, 2009). They function mainly as traditional healers that treat illness said to be infected spiritually by using the help of their familiar spirit (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009; DeeJay, 2014). For example, when an individual was believed to lose his or her soul, a *libabow* will undergo a ceremony called *monolibabow* to go into trance and call back the individual's soul back to his or her body (Miyamoto, 2002; DeeJay 2014).

The *libabow* also play a secondary role in some ceremonies using their ability as spirit mediums (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009; Pugh-Kitingan *et al.*, 2009). For example, during the rituals of cleansing the universe called *mamahui do pogun* was held, the *libabow* helped the *tantagas* by communicating with the supernatural beings with the help of their familiar spirit (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). During rituals, a *libabow* may dress up with the ceremonial dress of the opposite gender according to the gender of their familiar spirit

(Ibid.).

Although a *tantagas* could be a *libabow*, a *libabow* could not be a *tantagas* (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009; Pugh-Kitingan *et al.*, 2009). Most *libabow* are women, but a man may also be a *libabow*, though it is rare (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). Hence, the role as a *libabow* in the traditional religion of the Dusun Lotud people is dominantly done by women, and less dominantly done by men (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009; Deejay, 2014).

### 3.2.3 Minor Roles

Minor roles in the traditional religion of the Dusun Lotud people involve two aspects – music and dance. While all rituals need the chanting of the *rinait*, some rituals in the traditional religion require the accompaniment of the traditional music and dance. The Dusun Lotud people have a traditional music and dance that are different according to its context (Pugh-Kitingan *et al.*, 2009). For example, the music and dance performed in marriage ceremonies cannot be performed in a religious ritual but another type of music or dance is used instead (Deejay, 2014).

The traditional musical instruments of the Dusun Lotud people are the *tawag-tawag*, *tanyang*, *kulintangan* and *gandang* (Deejay, 2014). According to Pugh-Kitingan *et al.* (2009), there are two types of traditional music ensemble, which are the *basalon* and the *mojumbak*. The *basalon* ensemble uses the *tawag-tawag*, *tanyang* and the *gandang*, while the *mojumbak* ensemble uses all four instruments (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). Plus, the *mojumbak* ensemble is livelier and more rhythmic compared with *basalon* (Ibid.).

Meanwhile there are basically two types of traditional dance of the Dusun Lotud. The *sumayau* dance is traditionally performed in religious rituals such as the *mangahau* (the *gusi-jar* worship) and the *rumaha* (the skull worship) (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009; Deejay, 2014). However, since both rituals are very rarely done nowadays, the *sumayau* dance is only performed in festive gatherings and celebrations (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). Since the dance is originally performed in religious rituals, the *basalon* ensemble is used for this dance. Another type of dance is the *mangain*, a dance performed by a group of *tantagas* during religious rituals. The dance which uses the *basalon* ensemble involved dancing in a circle to symbolize the shape of the universe and acknowledging the existence of the spiritual world (Ibid.).

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The role of men and women are equally dominant for the roles in music and dance in the traditional religion of the Dusun Lotud. Men and women can all play the musical instruments, as long as they know how to (Blood, 1990; Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2009). The *sumayau* dance can also be performed by both men and women (Deejay, 2014). However, the *mangain* dance can only be performed by the *tantagas*.

#### 4. Conclusion

The dominance of women's role in the traditional religion of the Dusun Lotud people reflects the leadership, significance and appreciation of women among the society. The minimal role of men in the religious rituals compared with women show that women have more power in terms of their traditional religion. Women, especially the *tantagas* are respected as they are experts in rituals, *rinait* and the *adat* as well as having the greatest spiritual power and knowledge (Pugh-Kitingan et al., 2009). Perhaps the declining practice of the traditional religion among the Dusun Lotud people (Deejay, 2014) would also cause the power and respect of women among the society to decline. To confirm this statement, further researches need to be done.

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