

**TELLING TALES, PRINT AND THE EXTENSION OF MEDIA:
MALAY MEDIA STUDIES BEGINNING WITH ABDULLAH
MUNSYI THROUGH SYED SHAYKH AL-HADY AND
MAHATHIR MOHAMAD**

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*The representation and embodiment of Malay identity are certainly complex. How we know ourselves and how we have selected that knowledge determine the facts accumulated about us. What do the Malays make out of media? One assumption says that the Malays are averse to print and more attuned to orality and aurality. There is nevertheless also the category of *baca, membaca and cerita* which may not fit within the understanding of the European mind. Locating the categories of communication and media in the contexts of meaning, culture and thought may illustrate that the Malays do not share Euro-American presuppositions; at the same time, however, efforts to localise and indigenise the *minda, concepts and practices* only reattach them to the matrix of globalised modernity. Who represents what? Who represents media to Malay thought? What is being represented and at what levels?*

Keywords: *Budi*, Extension, Eurocentrism, Print, Technology

INTRODUCTION

This article is a preliminary attempt at exploring, identifying and constructing a corpus on Malay media studies. The frame of reference may be problematic because we live in a world outside of us – strangers to ourselves and alien to our being. I am talking about the Malays, bounded by the rationality of a plural society within the nation-state of Malaysia. I am examining media studies and the Malay as both objects and subjects. My argument is that there is a body of discernable literature and epistemic construct to identify a peculiar identity to media

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studies counter to Eurocentrism but at the same time reattaching itself to an Occidental past, rationality, worldview and trajectory. And I am looking at the problem of attempting to appraise the Eurocentric approaches and views inherent in how the Malays see themselves.

Identity and mind are Western constructs, imposed by the Other. Nothing terribly wrong with the process. But it would be problematic in assessing the issue of identity, culture and practice if the discourse on mind inadvertently articulates the worldview of the Other. The presence of the Malay is the absence of the Malay of non-Occidental thought. In that absence, there is a subsequent problem of consciousness as to the location in the geographical and abstract sense, in how the Malays produce, mediate and represent their thinking (read culture, meaning). Hence, the Malays misunderstand themselves by not knowing it. Worse, they become strangers to their own being. I would emphasise here that I am not rejecting western constructs of thought systems. What we should advocate is to embrace what is complimentary to that construct in that mind and thought are contextual.

In comprehending what we may call Malay media studies, it is first of all significant to recognise that there is not so much the Malay "mind" as a category – but there is *Budi* – as embodying a network of Malay thought operating within the Malay *weltanschauung*. There is not one mind, but many minds and rationalities. Similarly, there is not one medium, but many media and modes of conceptualising media. We have all this while assumed the mind as rational and logical, and would find attachment to media use and concepts as natural. There is such a category to the mind that can be constructed as "arrational" and "alogical" as opposed to "irrational" or "illogical". The Malays, like any other people in the world, are united by the media. Globalisation has even further imposed the media construct upon us that it becomes second nature. The agenda is the media. And the media form the environment. While I am not invoking things McLuhan, you may have felt the resonance.

How would the Malays "respond" to McLuhanism? Of course, concerns of McLuhanism are only evident in the advent of the electronic age and the resulting concept of media which have enabled us to begin to appreciate the workings of earlier media and the significance of the shift from the oral through the chirographic and typographic to the electronic

(or perhaps fashionably the digital). Or is the terminology I am using more like an imposed discourse on media studies? But what do the media actually do, or have done to the Malays, or to the Malays as imagined by such identities as Abdullah Munsyi and Mahathir Mohamed? And by quite a diverse lot in between? And yes, we are appreciating media in that sense.

What concepts of the media are held by the Malay, and in the Malay world? How do we merge media and Malay culture? How do the Malays represent themselves? Or how do they represent the media? What minds, thought, rationality and culture do the Malay/media matrix represent? Are the media embedded in the Malay psyche in the first place? What presuppositions do the Malays have of the media? Or are the media used to persuade, dissuade, unite, ignite, control or represent? Have the Malays represented the media, or have the media represented the Malays? What kinds of cultural and political life have the media affected in the Malays? How do the Malays produce, read, watch and evaluate what is in the media? What is the relevance of media to the Malay and what is the relevance of media studies to the modern Malay?

Why I have asked the barrage of questions is because the conditions on the coexistence of media and the Malay has been understudied and ignored. It was never in the minds of dominant social scientific thought, nor of the Malay mind (*budi*), the Malay intellectual or the Malay social scientist. There does not seem to be a Malay media culture – as we label that supposition – bearing in mind that to the Malay, "media" and "culture" and "media culture" do not exist as identifiable and conscious categories of thought and action. I am assuming that Malay media culture presupposes a significant degree of coherence and homogeneity, and significantly, a knowing Other, ambivalent or distinctly within that culture, giving coherence and reason to thought and practice.

Media existence in the Malay world and the Malay Peninsula is not a new phenomenon. My premise is the modern era – the period which ushered Malay modernity beginning with Abdullah Munsyi. Given the conditions that existed and that continued through the time of Mahathir Mohamed, my reference is that of meaning. In that respect, it is not a coincidence that media studies emerged from cultural studies. To the Other, and given that the Malay has the Other embedded subconsciously, the word "culture" is so ambiguous and polysemic that

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there is the distinct risk that what passes for analysis is simply slithering between usages. It has been argued also that culture is an unnecessarily hegemonic, idealistic and ethnocentric way of articulating highly diverse practices (Hobart, n.d.). To the Occidental intellectual, the word "culture" is convenient because it is ineffable and inscrutable to all but the privileged Euro-American knowing subject, whom the idea licenses to interpret their supposed objects, i.e., the rest of the world. The emergence of such journals as *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* and *Asian Journal of Communication*, and the like, manifests the presumption of "global" intellectuals purportedly challenging the hegemony of Euro-American thinking but in actual fact, reinforcing and reproducing in their captive minds (*budi*, from the Malay-centric position) the façade of diversity and the "globalised" non-Occident. This paper addresses the minds of storytellers conscious of media – Abdullah Munsyi, Syed Shaikh al-Hady and Mahathir Mohamad. All three have internalised the expressive use of technology and its cultural ramifications. Abdullah, al-Hady and Mahathir were theorists of media concepts and practices and cultural engineers, par excellence.

ABDULLAH MUNSYI: PRINT AS EXTENSION OF MALAY IDENTITY

Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi (1796–1854), born in Melaka of mixed Arab and Tamil-Muslim parentage, may have inspired many scholars and educators of Malay studies. As a language teacher and writer, Abdullah was mainly working for European and American administrators, merchants and missionaries in Singapore and Melaka. Inspired by the teachings of his masters when he prepared his primers and textbooks for the newly founded educational institutions in the Straits Settlements, Abdullah made it clear in his own writings, that, in the name of progress and coherence, the time had come to define the "real Malay", which should be made the solid standard for everyone who used the Malay language.

Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi lived at the beginning of what we now call the colonial period, which started around 1850. It was the time when, on the Malay Peninsula as well as on the island of Singapore, scholars and administrators began a search for terms and categories to systematise and classify the discursive network they found in active use

all over the Malay archipelago (Maier, 2004: 17). It was the beginning of Malay printing in the peninsula centred in Melaka and Singapore. In the initial stages, Malay printing was intertwined with the mission presses. This could be due to the association between Abdullah as the pioneer of Malay printing to the activities of the mission presses when he moved to Singapore in 1822. In his *Hikayat Abdullah*, he describes his experience thus:

Mr. Medhurst taught me how to arrange the letters, how to hold the block and how to set the pages so that the printed sheets could be folded properly one after the other. After three or four months of practice in all these steps I could do the work on my own without his assistance. As time went on, I became more and more conversant with the technique of printing, and knew how to avoid slips when operating the press itself or in setting the type, or in using too much or too little ink (Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, 1970: 124)

What is significant to note is that Abdullah found it self-evident that a more intensive use of print opened up the road to development and progress. Abdullah conceptualised that print and progress demanded the establishment of the "real Malay" (Maier, 2004:13).

Abdullah realised the power of print. To Abdullah, print created the capacity of society to narrate, to tell stories and to organise itself around an identity. This can be seen in Abdullah's preparation and edition of *Sulalat as-Salatin*, "Genealogy of Rulers". In its oldest known manuscript form, *Sulalat as-Salatin* represents a seventeenth-century collection of tales about the rulers of Melaka. The way *Sulalat as-Salatin* was treated could very well serve as yet another example of how tradition is invented and imposed; in successive reprints, Abdullah's publication became widely available in schools and colleges under the title of *Sedjarah Melaju* – Malay history and *Malay Annals*. To a European (and ironically stated by a European too), the *Malay Annals* was in many ways a strange name for a series of tales without any date or year. Europeans (see, for example, Raffles and Winstedt) as well as Malays, tended to regard it as the most important and most representative work of truly Malay literary genius.

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Seen in the context of media studies, the *Malay Annals* is an example of the most elegant form of written Malay, and as such, it was to serve the basis of efforts of European linguists to construct a grammar to account for the hotch-potch of discursive forms they brought together under the term Malay. Abdullah's personal notes, added to his edition of *Sulalat as-Salatin* by way of an introduction, are revealing:

Firstly, the gentlemen who are headmasters of the places where Malay and other languages are taught in Singapore as set up by Mr. Raffles, should look for books in Malay that are famous or known to Malays so that they can be taught to children, good and refined Malay that is, so that they become more familiar with their own language so that they will no longer be confused and communicate by way of a language that is a hybrid (*kacukan*) of the languages of the numerous peoples who use the Malay language. ...When Malays come from Java, we hear that their wording is mixed with Javanese and Dutch words. If children learn the correct Malay (*Melayu betul*), like that of the *Sejarah Melayu*, they will then certainly be able to separate the trade (*dagang*) and rude (*kasar*) words from the correct Malay (*betul*) words. That is why we wish to teach the correct (*betul*) language to the children so that Malay will retain its beauty, without being scattered here and there (Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, 1970)

Abdullah aspired that Malay discourse be rearranged around a standard for the sake of education, progress and print. In fact, print was the medium and the technology for that standardisation. One must bear in mind that Abdullah might not have been the first to advocate for establishing *bahasa Melayu betul*, but his words had a great reach among Malays who read his publications in their formative school years, and subsequently developed the notion of a *bangsa Melayu* – "Malay race, Malay nation" with its own language, its own religion and its own traditions (Milner, 1995, in Maier).

If media studies presumes the category of literacy, then Abdullah's concern on "language consciousness" expressed among the Malays is

telling. In *Hikayat Abdullah* (1970), a collection of stories that, first published in 1849, we find Abdullah lamenting that:

It is a matter of wonder and astonishment to me to see how the Malays remain unaware of themselves, living in ignorance because they will not learn their own language or have schools where it may be taught. It is an insult to the intelligence to suppose that a man with no education can become clever by his own effort. It is not a fact that all races of this world, except the Malays, learn their own language? The Malays say, "what is the good of learning Malay, for its us our own language?" Moreover, it is useful only in this world, let us rather learn Arabic, which will be useful in the world to come (Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, 1970: 56).

How can we access Abdullah's concern? How can we measure it? Are the Malays really indifferent to their language? Perhaps Abdullah was wrong about the people whom he so much liked and at the same time disliked. After all, he was not really one of them; he may have talked about "we Malays", but being of mixed Arab-Tamil descent, he was an outsider of sorts, just like his British masters were and he did not really try to become a perfect relative. Unwilling to assimilate completely (Maier, 2004: 15), speaking and writing in a kind of Malay that was different from what local people were used to, he was an outsider and an outsider at once, and thus a fine example of the very *kacukan* he so despised. Abdullah's lack of playfulness, according to Maier (2004: 16), could explain why his famous contemporary, Raja Ali Haji, did not think him worth mentioning in the writings he produced on the island of Penyengat, in the very centre of Riau, which Europeans tend to proclaim as the cradle of Malayness.

For such reasons, it became clear to Maier why and how Abdullah became a hero for the first generation of locally born journalists and writers in the Straits Settlements, many of whom were of mixed descent just like him. Abdullah could clearly claim that the right to speak out about the Malays was to become a point of discussion in the twentieth century when feelings of belonging to the Malay nation (*bangsa Melayu*) were taking shape around a growing awareness among the

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Peninsula population – that there is a shared distinct language along with a set of behaviours.

Interestingly, Abdullah's stance could serve as a good illustration of the Bakhtinian thesis (Bakhtin, 1981) that concepts such as authenticity, purity, identity and order tend to become issues only when outsiders actively interfere in a language that they do not use as their first language – while at the same time, refusing to fully familiarise themselves with that language and everything it stands for. Abdullah was confronted with forms of behaviour and ideas whose supporters, playing relatives, kept him at a certain distance. But they could not stop Abdullah from trying to define their Malayness. Just like his Occidental colonialists, Abdullah was eager to understand the rules and regulations of the discursive configuration of the society that he was *in* (but *out of place*) and how order was manifested in their speaking, writing and acting, without members of that society being aware that the core of the configuration could (or should) serve as the basis of a common identity, a shared culture, an ethnicity, a nation (Maier, 2004: 16).

The milieu in which Abdullah lived and worked, in which philology and hermeneutics were core disciplines, established writing as a stable form of language. The manuscript was preferred over spoken forms, hence, the unresolved status between what was spoken and what was written. From a Eurocentric perspective, there was confusion. The confusion was organised around a distinction between Malay as a "language of culture" – expressed in manuscripts; and Malay as a "language of communication" – expressed in speaking and later in print in the margins of the Malay world and beyond (Maier, 2004: 19).

One of Abdullah's legacies created an environment of printed materials in Malay. The number and variety of periodicals, pamphlets and books that spread over the Peninsula and the island were amazing (Proudfoot, 1993). There was much excitement over the visual word. Printed materials made Malay writing more public, more visible and more lasting than it had ever been before by letters, manuscripts and oral performances, the three most prominent manifestations of Malay writing that had conferred feelings of communality.

Clearly, Abdullah was aware of the advantages of print. His reflection on the subject is not the only reason why Abdullah is usually presented

as one of the fathers of modernity in the Malay-speaking world. In his writings, he also tried to wake up his readers from their slumber, inciting them to fight the declines of Malay culture. Abdullah was convinced that European civilisation offered the tools needed to bring this decline to standstill. In Abdullah's view, the adoption of European thinking and techniques could move the Malays forward.

Abdullah's praise of print is embedded in a set of paragraphs in which he tried to convince his readers how important reading and writing are for understanding a language: "when someone wants to understand his own language, he should scribe for books that are famous for their beautiful composition, for the correctness of their language, and for the praise that people bestow upon them". Maier (2004: 212-213) noted that writing and reading Malay, nor speaking and hearing Malay, is the basis for understanding the essence of a language in Abdullah's view; and the more people know how to write and read, the better.

To the text of *Sulalat as-Salatin* proper, Abdullah added an introduction in which he explained the advantages of print. Titled "These are words for all of you in the land of Singapore who want to make the Malay language famous", it may well serve as a summary of the considerations that for the next hundred years or so were to run through Malay writing in defence of the efforts to resist "Malay poverty" and fight "Malay backwardness" by way of the printed word. According to Maier (2004: 212), it read like a master plot, which deep in the twentieth century, was to be reiterated and rehearsed on the Peninsula time and again, in newspapers and journals, in short stories, poems, essays, and an important weapon in the struggles being fought on the Peninsula for the sake of the "Malay people", a term, which Maier contended, has never been given a definite and uncontested definition.

SYED SHAYKH AL-HADY: PERIODICAL JOURNALISM AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR REFORM AND CHANGE

Efforts in search of the Malay, this time, with a different orientation, were found in the periodical *al-Imam* and Syed Shaykh al-Hady. Writings about Syed Shaykh al-Hady (1867–1934), the journal *al-Imam* (1906–8) and on the early Malay periodicals are not new. Many have captured al-Hady as a reformist and a modernist, and also have been

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written about the man in terms of his literary contributions, as well as in referring to him as an advocate of education through the many schools and *madrasahs* he started. (Fadhullah Jamil, 1998; Ibrahim Abu Bakar, 1994; Talib Samat, 1990; Marina Merican, 1961). A well known but little explored facet of al-Hady – that of his conceptualisation of journalism in the context of Malay society during the colonial – makes pertinent materials in our exploration of Malay media studies. The intellectual influences upon al-Hady informs us on his concept of journalism, specifically his belief and deployment of journalism as cultural and political expression. In imitating the Egyptian reformist journal *al-Manar*, *al-Iman* manifests itself as a continuation of the European reformist movement of Martin Luther on the Malay world, centred upon the Enlightenment. In many ways, *al-Iman* demonstrates the dissemination of values similar to the pamphlet journalism in early-modern Europe. Based on the trajectory of arguments in the journal, rather than seeing al-Hady and *al-Iman* as modernist and reformist, it can be argued that al-Hady, and the Malay reformers and their literature during the first 30 years of the 20th century were in essence apologists for European thought.

Syed Farid Alatas (2003) noted that nineteenth century Malaya had been, for the most part, an intellectual desert, failing to produce original thinkers leading to social movements challenging colonial capitalism. Al-Hady, although not original in his views of the problems of Muslim society, made a conscious effort to reflect on the question of backwardness, drawing very much upon the ideas of contemporary Muslim reformers in the western part of the Muslim world. Noting that al-Hady played a major role in the emergence of nationalism in colonial Malaya, the intellectual ideas in which al-Hady made his pleas for reform never resulted in the formation of an intellectual stratum like that in Indonesia. Syed Farid Alatas (2003) argued that unlike his contemporary, H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, whose ideas and organisation were in the context of a mass movement in Indonesia, al-Hady had no such effect in Malaya. Nationalist and other ideologies that were to develop after al-Hady's time never had the intellectual content that was al-Hady's, whose death in 1934 was universally lamented. Indeed, Zainal-Abidin Ahmad (1941), known as Za'ba, in writing on Malay journalism in Malaya, described al-Hady as a powerful and uncompromising critic of Malay life and a strong advocate of social and religious reformation for Muslims.

Like Abdullah Munsyi through his *Hikayat* and *Pelayaran Abdullah*, al-Hady, through *al-Imam* and other periodicals founded by him, has made journalism an instrument of criticism. In fact, apart from Abdullah and Pendeta Za'ba, al-Hady can be described as the other significant figure in Malay society before the formation of Malaya, to have openly criticised the mankind (*umat*), the nation (*bangsa*) and the government (*kerajaan*) of the day through his writings. What did al-Hady hope to achieve through his journalism? How was he influenced by the reformist and modernist thought in the Arab world at that time? How was that to affect his views of the significance of journalism? How has al-Hady's journalism been similar to that of the craft in Malaya and elsewhere in the world? Was he influenced by the journalism of Europe through the Arab world? What were his attitudes toward Europe and the colonising powers, and how were these expressed in relation to Islam and the Malays? This paper does not intend to answer all the questions. Suffice to say that al-Hady was incited by print – by the belief that print extends ideology and leads to reformation.

In his role as a journalist, al-Hady's greatest success was in using his milieu and his ideology through the periodicals he founded and led. He created a public sphere and an audience during the formative years of Malay society under British rule. Through journalism, he enabled new ideas and new values to be introduced against the orthodoxy of the *ulama* and Malay society. By doing so, he gave the Malay Muslim community a sense of identity, unity and new directions to overcome the problems of belief and domination by the colonialists and western civilisation. However, he fell short of creating a mass intellectual movement through journalism and his other ventures. Even if that were to happen, it could be argued that it would only perpetuate colonial capitalism in that the ideological bearing of al-Hady merely reinforced the structures of European civilisation upon the Malay Muslims.

His journalism calls for measuring and rationalising Islam as modern and progressive – placing the social evolution of Malay society, even though he was critical of social Darwinism – features which were embraced by the Enlightenment and later to be integral concepts of modernity. Al-Hady had in fact, as asserted by Shaharuddin Maaruf (1988: 64), accepted that change in Malay society was desirable and proceeded to justify it in religious terms. In that respect, it may be interpreted that he was inspired, through the Muslim reformists, by

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Martin Luther and the French Revolution, which used all the means of the printing press in mobilising society.

MAHATHIR MOHAMAD: THE WAY FORWARD IN THE MALAY MCLUHAN

Unlike the times of Abdullah Munsyi and Syed Shaykh al-Hady when Malay writing was already embedded in social and cultural space, the post-1969 period followed by the era of Mahathir Mohamad as Prime Minister of Malaysia for 22 years from 1981 saw an unprecedented increase in that space through various forms – media and technology. In the first instance, Mahathir himself evokes a McLuhanist resurrection in terms of extending himself and projecting an environment. In turn, he has become an unwilling "media theorist" – articulated through Vision 2020. Mahathir's consciousness of media goes back to his student days at the King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore. His ability as an ideologue surfaced in the pseudonym of Che Det, where he published the first of his reflections on Malay affairs and Malay politics in *The Sunday Times*. Khoo Boo Teik (2003: 1) contended that since then, no Malay intellectual or politician has written or spoken more extensively on what might be regarded as the Malay social condition and its relations to the rest of Malaysian society and polity, or the "Malay dilemma", as Mahathir popularised in 1970.

Beginning especially in the early 1980s, and mainly within the Malay polity, a new wave, construct and paradigm were emerging which would determine Malay thought, belief, dignity, life and future. These were first planted in Che Det's pieces and *The Malay Dilemma*. Mahathir is a man of the media environment he has created, the visual imprint that he has implanted in the national consciousness. Some of his ideas are derived from such figures as Abdullah Munsyi and Syed Shaykh al-Hady.

But credit must be given to the man in giving life to the role of science and technology, and information communication technology. Mahathirism hegemonised Malay thoughts, both within and outside of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). Some may argue that Mahathirism is not more than an extension of the mental revolution (*revolusi mental*) evoked during the time of Tun Abdul Razak and Tun

Hussein Onn. Mahathir went further in instituting change in all forms of life, essentially in forms of discourse, communication, values, intellectual frameworks and perspectives. In short, Mahathir calls for a new mode of storytelling based on rationalism, objectivism, scientism and materialism (Hairudin, 2001: 55).

Such a dimension and level of thought have never existed in any Malay polity throughout history. One argument is that Mahathir has made Islam as no more than a subset of legalistic and scientific logic excluding the higher spiritual and metaphysical realm in Malay life (Hairudin, 2001: 56). It can be argued that to set context and motion toward what Mahathir visualised immediately upon taking over the helm of the nation, he brought forward the official time to 30 minutes earlier.

While many may see it as standardising time between the Peninsula and Sabah and Sarawak, what Mahathir had done was symbolic and more than that. He signaled a new era, new medium, new image and new history. It also denotes that Mahathir was not bounded by tradition – Malay or otherwise. He has dismantled Malay thought, yet again. The Malay epistemological space was invaded by that all-consuming environment of time. Mahathir has become the all-new McLuhan – an image imprinted onto Malaysia's public imagination – precisely a concept that would not linger away. The *cerita* continues.

CONCLUSION

For Abdullah, Al-Hady and Mahathir, telling tales took many forms. All three ran counter to the *hikayats*. To them, stories appeared from a world of fragments, so it seems, that helped tellers and their audiences to make sense of the confusing world in temporary and discontinuous ways, fluid and flexible, slipping and sliding, with one eye on the past, one eye on the present and a third eye on the future. What they have created is a world of writing and reading, meaning and action which can be encapsulated under the rubric of Malay media studies. One senses the visibility of tension, interaction and convergence. In the first place, there has been a constant interaction between voice and pen, a tension that should make us aware that "writing" in using whatever technology, refers to activities of all at once. Mahathir, as evident from his earlier writings, appreciates that compositions on paper have a greater

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sophistication and authority than compositions by mouth; and Abdullah realised that print offers more authoritative and relevant forms of discourse than do manuscripts and performances. What we have encountered are voices on paper and cyberspace through pens, typewriters, computers and the printing press.

All three dabbled with the Malay *budi*. All might have been antithetical to the *budi*. It is time that *budi* as Malay mind be advanced at all levels. In the first place, the Malay word *minda*, derived from the English word "mind" be changed to *akal budi*. I have advanced this idea in some of my papers and publications. In several meetings and seminars, I have also suggested that Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka considers changing *minda* for *akal budi* as denoting the Malay mind, and the meaning of the word "mind" in *bahasa Melayu*. What has this got to do with Malay media studies? In the Malay media environment, we find the playful evocation of language, words and reality. All this while, Malay intellectuals and scholars have been measuring Malay thought through literature, journalism and commentary based on the wrong measurement centred on the *minda*. If we use the wrong measurement, we get the wrong answer. If we attempt to understand and comprehend Malay thought and culture, we cannot begin with the word *minda* and all its ramifications. For the word *minda* assumes an objective, rational, logical view of the world, sanitised of its metaphysical, cosmological and cultural bearings. Mind has assumed a mechanistic and positivistic mode of existence as encapsulated in western consciousness over the past 2,000 years. Science and modernity have given it a *carte blanche* in investigating consciousness and behaviour. But the *avatar* (manifestation) of the Malay psyche is averse to the historical experience and periodisation of modernity.

To the Malay, material and non-material substances coexist in one consciousness on a sacred plane. The Malay *atma* (soul/spirit) is embedded in the *budi*, which is surrounded by the substance of *jiwa*, *rasa* and *rupa*. And primary to that *budi*, in the exercise of logic, dialectics, and behaviour is *akal* – hence, *akal budi*. *Akal budi* becomes the quintessence of the *atma* of Malay philosophy. It goes beyond culture. While *akal budi* is a Malay construct, that construct transcends the realm of culture. It represents the crucible of Malay philosophy, for it links two modes of existence – man and God – the relations between the Creator and the created, and that among man in his intelligence and

the cycle of indebtedness. Abdullah, al-Hady and Mahathir were all too aware of this.

The ultimate question is: who represents our mind (*minda*)? If we continue to categorise our *minda* within the reference of mind, we will never discover our *budi*. When we represent our *budi*, we create an order, an objective sense of being. We have to take cognisance that different cultures and societies have different references conditioned socially and historically. The word and our world are mediated by mind and therefore meaning gets lost if that mediation takes on a false interpretation. We are not able to know how our *budi* works. We cannot reflect on our *akal budi* by measuring it against the mind. We have been having the problem of exposing the mind to the measurement of the *minda* itself. If the mind reflects on itself, than we have an anomaly – a misfit. We have allowed the *minda* to take over the *budi*. By using mind as category, we create a code by killing the context. If so, is Malay media studies too, an anomaly of thought?

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