

# The Malay Conception of Heroism in *Geran* (2019) through the Lens of Syed Hussein Alatas

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## ABSTRACT

The hero concept explored in this article serves as a representation of Malay culture, which is vividly portrayed in the film *Geran* (2019). The film, also known as *The Deed of Death* for the international market, achieved a historic milestone when its Malaysian director was honored with the Daniel A. Craft Award for Excellence in Action Cinema at the 19th New York Asian Film Festival (NYAFF) in the United States in 2020. This Malay action drama effectively addresses the controversial issue of land, which has long been a distinguishing feature of Malay civilization. This research emphasises the significance of film as a cultural apparatus that showcases the concept of Malay hero in the film *Geran* (2019). Using textual analysis, the research attempts to explore the idea of the Malay hero in the film *Geran* (2019) and to connect with the concepts of Syed Hussein Alatas. The ideas of Syed Hussein Alatas emphasize that heroes are influenced by custom as a conventional Malay value system that underlines the importance of respect for life, integrity, and individual boundaries. Syed Hussein Alatas (1972) suggests three imperative components in the concept of hero specifically: the nobility and loftiness of the ideal towards which the particular actions of the hero are directed, the courage, dedication, ardour, and determination with which the deeds are accomplished, along with success and accomplishment. In this regard, this paper examines the relationship between the ideas of Syed Hussein Alatas (1972) and the notion of a Malay hero in *Geran* (2019), which exemplify Malay philosophy of life and culture.

**Keywords:** Hero concept, Malay culture, Malay polemic, *Geran* (2019), *The Deed of Death* (2019), Syed Hussein Alatas

## INTRODUCTION

Md Azalanshah Md Syed et al. (2022) argue that film is an effective medium for representing the image of Malay society due to its influential function. Through various popular platforms in the modern world, Malay films serve as a medium to highlight the significance and debates surrounding land (Siti Normala Hamzah et al., 2018). In addition, film functions as a mirror of civilization and culture, as well as a medium of social change (Siti Normala Hamzah et al., 2018). Similarly, Mahyuddin Ahmad (2008) regards film as a channel of communication and cultural expression that is interconnected with economic and social structures. He further contends that films portray aspects of society as tangible social relationships, given that many films reflect sociocultural values and ideologies.

*Geran* (2019) portrays Malay society as one that upholds traditional ethos such as courtesy, kinship, and neighborliness, while simultaneously engaging with modern ethos such as materialism, hedonism, and individualism. The interplay of these values creates a narrative of social conflict rooted in Malay philosophy and culture. This cinematic work marked a significant milestone when its director received the Daniel A. Craft Award for Excellence in Action Cinema at the 19th New York Asian Film Festival (NYAFF) in the United States. NYAFF is a prestigious film festival that celebrates the development of art and culture through global cinematic networks (Ministry of Communications and Multimedia Malaysia, 2020). As an action-drama film, *Geran* foregrounds land as an ideological force that drives the narrative.

The scenic imagery of Kedah's paddy fields, combined with the use of local dialect, enhances cultural authenticity and representation of the Malay community. The theme of struggle—whether individual, familial, or communal—for the preservation of fundamental rights is manifested through the authenticity of the *Seni Silat Gayong* martial art sequences. In her article *Geran Sarat Aksi Falsafah Melayu* (*Geran and the Cinematic Soul of Malay Philosophy*), Siti Normala Hamzah (2020) also emphasizes that the film reflects the philosophy of struggle and Malay cultural values. Viewed as a cultural mechanism, *Geran* (2019) can therefore be considered a significant medium for engaging with the concept of the Malay hero.

The concept of the hero has been widely discussed in various studies. Kohen et al. (2017) note that heroes must be shaped to consistently consider ways of helping society; they should embody empathy, skills, and experience. Allison et al. (2019) assert that a hero is an individual who successfully overcomes deficiencies by being self-aware, socially conscious, autonomous, and adaptive to growth and change. Ross (2019), however, highlights the interrelation between transformation and heroism, suggesting that heroes inspire, guide, protect what is valuable, and exercise self-control.

From another perspective, Monin et al. (2008) argue that individuals may be regarded as social heroes if their struggles and impacts succeed in leading communities away from conflict while instilling new values with the potential to foster constructive change. Nevertheless, they also caution that rebellion based on moral foundations may not necessarily compel societal acceptance of the struggle. Franco et al. (2011) further suggest that such individual struggles, whether short-term or long-term, may eventually be acknowledged by society and elevated to heroic status.

Within the context of Malay scholarship, Syed Hussein Alatas (1972) also deliberates on the concept of the hero and the motivations underpinning their actions. According to him, a true hero is driven by ethical principles, moral values, a sense of obligation, and the teachings of Islam. The hero's purpose is to uphold justice, defend the oppressed, and safeguard societal well-being. He further emphasizes that heroes are also shaped by *adat*, the conventional Malay value system, which underscores respect for life, integrity, and individual boundaries.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Syed Hussein Alatas's Perspective

In his book *Modernisation and Social Change*, Syed Hussein Alatas (1972) explores several key aspects of the hero notion. Syed Hussein Alatas (1972) refers to the contemporary Malay notion of a hero as a driving force in the process of social transformation in society, as symbolised in the historical image of the Malays, which is further appraised from modern, humanitarian, and Islamic views.

There are usually three constituent elements in the conception of a hero. The first is the nobility and loftiness of the ideal towards which the particular actions of the hero are directed. The second is the courage, dedication, ardour and determination with which the deeds are accomplished. The third is his success and accomplishment. The three elements have to be present together in order to classify a person as a hero and his deeds heroic. In the absence of one of these the person is not a hero. (p. 116)

According to Syed Hussein Alatas (1972), there are three elements within the concept of a hero. The first is the nobility and purity of the ideals being pursued. The second is the courage, perseverance, spirit, and determination that accompany the struggle. The third is success and achievement. He asserts that all three elements must coexist in order for an individual to be classified as a hero. The absence of any one of these elements disqualifies an individual from being regarded as such. Syed Hussein Alatas also discusses the matter of bravery.

Feats of bravery alone are not sufficient qualifications to be a hero. If that be the case, we should consider many pirates, kidnappers, robbers and many other criminals who are bold and courageous as heroes. A hero, in the Islamic and the modern humanitarian sense, is not a person who blindly follows the command of his master irrespective of whether he is right or wrong. [...] the Islamic conception of hero as exemplified in the persons

of Ali, Abu Bakar, Omar, Khalid ibn Walid, Zaid bin Harith, and a host of others. The bravery and action of these personalities were directed towards an ideal. Their conception of loyalty was firmly rooted in ethical principles and moral law, not in the subservience and attachment towards an individual ruler. [...] The philosophy of absolute loyalty irrespective of the ethics involved violates the Islamic religion. It is also not to be considered as the representative of the general Malay system of values. The traditional Malay system of values did not approve of murder, kidnapping, deception and wanton destruction of the sanctity and security of the home. (p. 117-118)

In classifying an individual as a hero, Syed Hussein Alatas (1972) emphasizes that the nobility and purity of the ideals pursued are crucial elements alongside bravery. He stresses that courage alone is insufficient to qualify an individual as a hero. Syed Hussein Alatas further explains that obedience to authority devoid of ethical consideration undermines the essence of heroism, instead highlighting the importance of actions rooted in Malay cultural values and Islamic beliefs. This ideology contributes to the maintenance of social structure and cohesion within society. The concept of the hero, he argues, also becomes particularly salient during times of crisis, as he states:

Exigencies and crises in the political situation intensify the interest in heroes. 'Whoever saves us is a hero; and in the exigencies of political action men are always looking for someone to save them. A sharp crisis in social and political affairs – when something must be done and done quickly – naturally intensifies interest in the hero. No matter what one's political complexion, hope for the resolution of a crisis is always bound up with hope for the appearance of the strong or intelligent leadership to cope with difficulties and perils. The more urgent the crisis, the more intense is the [...] The quest for heroes is not confined to the present but embraces the past. A dismal present may intensify the yearning for the past. In the case of the Malays, this yearning for the past can follow two channels, the Islamic and the feudal. All over the Muslim world the yearning for the past focuses on the period of the Khulafah al-Rashidin, The Righteous Caliphate, during the 7th century A.D., or the subsequent periods of grandeur (p. 118-119).

According to Syed Hussein Alatas (1972), heroes are particularly needed during times of social or political crises, serving as saviors capable of effectively resolving pressing issues. Whether through prayer or active pursuit, society's desire for heroes grows in proportion to the threats posed by crises. He further notes that the search for heroes is not confined to the present but also extends to history. In the Malay context, the search for heroes often refers to two historical channels: feudal and Islamic. Within the Islamic context, heroes are frequently associated with prominent figures, particularly those from the period of the Khulafah al-Rashidin (Alatas, 1972).

Rashidah Abdullah (2013) found that academic studies on the concept of the hero were relatively limited and stressed the need for research on the Malay hero. Meanwhile, Md Azalanshah Md Syed et al. (2022) argued that narratives frequently referenced the Malay hero, as reflected across various popular media genres in Malaysia, such as newspapers, magazines, television, social media, and film. Among these, film most vividly illustrated the concept of the hero through its visual medium (Md Azalanshah Md Syed et al., 2022).

In line with this, Trotsuk and Subbotina (2021) emphasized the importance of sociological approaches in academic textual analyses of the hero concept in film. According to them, film played a significant role in shaping societal perspectives of the hero, reflecting cultural values and norms. Therefore, this study focuses on the concept of the Malay hero in *Geran* (2019) through the lens of Syed Hussein Alatas (1972), a sociologist who examined the idea of the hero in the context of social change within Malay society.

### **The Malay Hero as Conceptualised by Syed Hussein Alatas**

A number of prior research have been compiled and examined to ascertain deficiencies in the scholarship. A study was undertaken by Wan Roshazli Wan Razali (2023) in his work titled *Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II, Hero of the Palembang Community*. The researcher analysed the heroism of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II in the text *Syair Perang Menteng*, utilising Bowra's (1952) theory of heroism, complemented by Shaharuddin Maaruf's (2014) interpretation of Syed Hussein Alatas's (1972) notions about the concept of the hero. Wan Roshazli asserts that Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II's valour transcends literary confines, continuing to

motivate modern generations in the defence of national sovereignty. Utilising Shaharuddin Maaruf's citation of Alatas, the researcher identified three attributes of a hero: (i) the nobility and purity of the ideas pursued, (ii) the fortitude, tenacity, spirit, and resolve inherent in the struggle, and (iii) success and accomplishment. The attributes exhibited by Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II signify his merit as a community hero, as he was prepared to sacrifice his life to achieve success, especially in safeguarding the homeland, protecting the populace, and promoting Islam.

A pertinent study is Muhammad Jailani Abu Talib's (2018) PhD dissertation at Nanyang Technological University titled *Gestalt Analysis of Wiraism in Puteri Gunung Ledang* (2004). Muhammad Jailani contended that cultural and national identity have historically been linked to the notion of the hero, fostering pride and confidence within a community. The portrayal of Hang Tuah as a hero has often been utilized as a symbol of 'Malayness' and remains a prevalent topic of examination among Southeast Asian scholars (Muhammad Jailani Abu Talib, 2018). His research concentrated on the significance and depiction of the hero through language, culture, and colour in the film *Puteri Gunung Ledang*. Muhammad Jailani utilized Gestalt theory to examine the development of Hang Tuah's persona and heroic image in the film. Alatas (1972) assessed Hang Tuah as a hero in the film by employing the concept of 'wiraism', which denotes a type of heroism that integrates Malay traditions and Islamic values in behaviour.

Furthermore, Shaharuddin Maaruf (2014), in his work *The Concept of the Hero in Malay Society: Embracing Decadent Romanticism*, analysed specific facets of the intellectual discourse among the Malay elite in Malaysia. He examined historical characters like Umar al-Khattab, José Rizal, and General Sudirman as revered heroes in the Malay context. To substantiate their heroism, Shaharuddin utilized the three fundamental components of heroism delineated by Syed Hussein Alatas (1972): (i) the nobility and purity of principles, (ii) courage, perseverance, spirit, and determination in the struggle, and (iii) success and achievement. Rooted in Malay culture, shaped by tradition and Islam, Shaharuddin expanded Alatas's definition of the hero to encompass further attributes, including "love of knowledge, social justice, ethical integrity, effective leadership, honesty, respect for the rule of law, and dedication to reform" (p. 9).

## Malay Cinematic Heroes

Wan Aida Wan Yahaya (2024), in *Myth of a Nation: The Post-War Formation of Modern Malaysia*, within the compilation *Malaysian Cinema and Beyond: Genre, Representation and The Nation*, analysed historical events, cultural narratives, and national identity through the depiction of Malay heroes in prominent national historical films. The author examined the topic of Malay heroism as portrayed in films like *Sarjan Hassan* and *Leftenan Adnan*. In *Sarjan Hassan*, the protagonist, Hassan, is depicted as an orphan nurtured by his deceased father's employer, encountering difficulties within his adoptive family. His participation in the military and evolution as a leader were exemplified by his valour in battle, saving relatives and locals from Japanese troops. Hassan, as a hero, was ultimately embraced by his family and stepbrother Aziz after demonstrating his valour during the Japanese invasion of Malaya. The film depicted the British as allies, indicating a collaborative relationship. In contrast, *Leftenan Adnan* offered an alternative viewpoint, depicting the British as a vehicle for attaining larger goals. Adnan's ideology included the concept that Malays should strategically "utilise" everyone who could aid in the quest for independence. His role was portrayed as embodying traditional Malay values, including religion, ethnicity, and nationalism. These ideals directed his activities and decisions, highlighting his profound commitment to cultural legacy and obligation to the nation. National historical films portrayed the Malay hero as valiant, astute, and devoted to Malay cultural principles.

The article *Pencitraan Keris sebagai Kiasan Keindahan Budaya Melayu dalam Filem Rahim Razali* (The Representation of the Keris as a Cultural Metaphor in Rahim Razali's Film) by Siti Normala Hamzah et al. (2020) utilised a qualitative methodology and adopted a sociological perspective on literature to analyse the depiction of the keris as a metaphor for the aesthetic of Malay culture in Rahim Razali's films *Puteri* (1987) and *Anak Sarawak* (1989). The analysts indicated that these two films depicted social protest concerning class strife between the elite and the populace. The protest was symbolically embodied by the *keris*, serving as a native emblem that encapsulated belief, myth, and ritual as the cornerstone of Malay tradition and culture. Rahim Razali was known for chronicling Malay societal norms, emphasizing the primacy of cultural values in life. Characters like Iskandar and Johan exemplified heroism via their deeds and goals. It symbolises Malay



heroism, epitomizing bravery in the fight against adversaries. The scholars assert that the *keris* symbolizes force, mystical belief, and preparedness for combat, embodying heroic attributes.

Rasuah dan Salah Guna Kuasa: Protes Social Rahim Razali dalam Matinya Seorang Patriot (Corruption and Abuse of Power: Social Protest Rahim Razali in The Death of a Patriot), along with Siti Normala Hamzah et al. (2020), further analyzed social protest, corruption, and the misuse of power. This article employed a qualitative methodology to analyse Matinya Seorang Patriot (The Death of a Patriot, 1984). The film portrayed the integrity of Haji Shahban, a nationalist, politician, and corporate leader who fell prey to unscrupulous machinations. The narrative underscored the battle against white-collar crime and governmental corruption, highlighting the significance of integrity and honesty. Haji Shahban epitomised Malays who championed decency and integrity, rejecting any form of misbehaviour. Rahim Razali utilized this figure to attack corruption and the abuse of power in society. In contrast to the corrupt characters depicted in the film, Haji Shahban's heroics symbolized a successful Malay corporate leader inspired by Islamic principles and integrity.

The article Isu Tanah dalam Filem-filem Terpilih Rahim Razali (Explicating Land Issues and the Malays in Selected Films of Rahim Razali) by Siti Normala Hamzah et al. (2018) emphasises land concerns as a prevalent theme in Rahim Razali's selected films. The scholars contended that Rahim Razali's oeuvre demonstrated his dedication as a filmmaker to advocating for Malay issues, highlighting the principles of sacrifice and Malay rights. The topic of heroism and sacrifice was intricately connected to the sociocultural and political dynamics of Malay society, illustrating the progression of heroism in relation to shifts in local power systems. In Puteri (Princess), female characters are shown as influential figures in society, demonstrating courage and wisdom in the defence and management of inherited land within a patriarchal context (Siti Normala Hamzah et al., 2018). The researchers posited that these representations epitomised the valour of historical Malay heroines, such as Tun Fatimah, Puteri Saadong, Cik Siti Wan Kembang, and Admiral Keumalahayati, celebrated for their leadership in safeguarding their territories and realms. The notion of heroism was associated with land as a representation of Malay honour and uniqueness, underscoring its significance in safeguarding cultural history and identity.

Norfaizah Ghazali and Fazilah Husin (2018), in Bahasa dan Feminisme dalam Filem Shuhaimi Baba (The Language and Feminism in Shuhaimi Baba Films) examined Shuhaimi Baba's inclination to emphasise feminism in her cinematic works. Their research utilised textual analysis and postmodern feminist methodologies to analyse Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam 2004 (Pontianak: The Banshee of the Night-Blooming Tuberose), concentrating on the manner in which language expressed feminist viewpoints. The studies indicated that the vocabulary employed in the film depicted women as formidable and resolute characters. The examination examined how female characters exemplified heroic qualities that contested male supremacy. The character Mariam was depicted as a proficient dancer who triumphed over male competitors, showcasing exceptional skills and garnering acclaim from the Sultan. In Shuhaimi Baba's horror film, the female character presents a novel viewpoint on the hero, as a supernatural entity or "monster" advocates for her rights. From this viewpoint, women possessing skills, assertiveness, and power were perceived as heroines, capable of regaining what was usurped and opposing male dominance.

In the article Ciri-ciri Keperwiraan dan Pemaparan Sihir Melayu dan Thailand melalui Dua Filem Nusantara: Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa dan Queens of Langkasuka (Heroism and Mysticism Across Cultures: Malay and Thai Narratives in Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa and Queens of Langkasuka), Halimah Mohamad Ali (2014) analysed heroic attributes in Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa (2011) and Queens of Langkasuka (2008). The researcher examined the impact of magic on the portrayal of heroes in both films. In Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa, sorcery was depicted unfavourably. The protagonist, Merong, depended on his own valour, aided by the Chinese princess, to vanquish his foes without employing wizardry. In contrast, Queens of Langkasuka portrayed magic as integral to the storyline. The protagonist, Pari, of a Gipsy ancestry proficient in Du Lum magic, was shown as a hero authorized to wield sorcery against her adversaries. The application of magic in combat mirrored overarching cultural and theological principles, influencing heroic deeds and character evolution. Consequently, cultural settings and local standards significantly influenced the conception of the hero in these films.

In *Reclaiming Adat: Contemporary Malaysian Film and Literature*, Khoo (2006) contended that Malay film protagonists were influenced by traditional values and cultural standards, representing a genuine Malay identity. Khoo (2006) asserts that Malay film protagonists exemplified genuine Malay masculinity, frequently shown as proficient in silat, serving as both a ritualistic activity and a repository of cultural information, hence symbolizing a profound connection to history. The notion of amuk was understood as an expression of adat, illustrating societal reactions to turmoil. Amuk epitomised unrestrained violence, whereas silat embodied a disciplined cultural practice, both defensive and offensive, which upholding respect and dignity in the preservation of life. According to Khoo, Malay masculinity in films originates from intensive silat training, which fosters tenderness and civility in conjunction with heroism.

Kueh (2000), in *The Filmic Representation of Malayan Women: An Analysis of Malayan Films from the 1950s and 1960s*, examined the depictions of women in films such as *Semerah Padi*, *Ibu, Ibu Mertuaku*, *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah*, *Pontianak*, *Siti Zubaidah*, and *Sumpah Wanita*. The thematic analysis categorized female depiction into four conceptual domains: motherhood, heroism, determination, and downfall. The discourse indicated that these films mirrored historical contexts, cultural values, and societal ideas of femininity, frequently drawing inspiration from folktales and literary traditions. Heroism was illustrated through female warriors who acted as exemplars, fostering a nationalist ethos. Kueh (2000) posits that virtuous women exemplified discipline and martyrdom. In *Siti Zubaidah*, the Malay heroine partnered with a Chinese princess in the fight for independence, epitomizing solidarity among ethnic groups against British colonial subjugation. Malay films from the 1950s and 1960s portrayed women as heroic heroines dedicated to moral principles and familial honour, symbolizing both family and national unity.

## Research Design

This study aims to elucidate the concept of the Malay hero as depicted in the film *Geran* (2019) through its research questions. An additional aim is to delineate the relationship between the portrayal of the Malay hero in *Geran* (2019) and the philosophical paradigm of Syed Hussein Alatas.

This study utilizes a qualitative methodology to investigate the concept of the Malay hero, drawing on data from *Geran* (2019) as a primary text (Ugwu & Eze, 2023; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Utilizing the qualitative technique established by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), this study employs textual analysis to elucidate the portrayal of the Malay hero in *Geran* (2019), informed by the theories of Syed Hussein Alatas (1972). He delineates three fundamental components of heroism: (i) the nobility and loftiness of the ideals pursued, (ii) the courage, dedication, ardour, and determination in the struggle, and (iii) success and accomplishment. The examination of the Malay hero in *Geran* (2019) entails an interpretive investigation of the perspectives and significances inherent in the text. This technique involves a thorough analysis of content, context, and subtext to explore the underlying ideology depicted in the film (McKee, 2003).

## Analysis

The significance of Syed Hussein Alatas's (1972) thought in this analysis lies in its ability to evaluate the concept of the Malay hero as represented in the film *Geran* (2019). Such an evaluation demonstrates the effectiveness of film as a medium for conveying cultural values and traditions, positioning the hero concept as a point of departure for new discussions in Malay literary studies.

### Nobility and Loftiness of the Ideals Pursued

According to Syed Hussein Alatas (1972), religion and custom teach individuals the meaning of nobility and the purity of ideals worth pursuing. Within this conceptualization of the hero, blind and destructive traits such as killing, kidnapping, incitement, and disrupting social harmony are regarded as antithetical to the values of Islam and Malay tradition (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1972). The film *Geran* (2019) foregrounds the issue of land as a central social polemic within Malay society, presenting it as a thematic focus of struggle. Land ownership thus emerges as an ideal representing the nobility and purity of the struggle within Malay cultural values. In *Geran* (2019), the issue of land functions as a symbol of Malay cultural identity, closely linked to both custom and religion. ALI Our heritage is our dignity. (1:37:08, *Geran*, 2019)

Ali's words illustrate the Malay belief that land embodies personal dignity and social status. Within the modern context portrayed in the film, the land dispute highlights a conflict between individualistic and altruistic orientations in society. This conflict underscores Ali's noble philosophy of defending his inheritance, which stands in opposition to the worldview of Haji Daud and his followers, who resort to violence and oppression.

From the perspective of Syed Hussein Alatas, Wan Roshazli Wan Razali (2023) characterizes the Malay hero as one who is willing to fight in defence of land. Similarly, Siti Normala Hamzah et al. (2018) emphasize the struggle of the hero in safeguarding land as both heritage and identity, serving as a unique marker of Malay dignity and cultural nobility.

The struggle of Pak Nayan's family, however, is not solely motivated by the social status associated with Malay landownership. Rather, it is also accompanied by values grounded in spirituality and kinship.

## Mother

Our family does not live merely for the love of inherited wealth; love for family holds far greater meaning. And when true love comes without being asked, let us protect the bond between us before life reaches its end.(0:55:39, *Geran*, 2019)

According to Mother, beyond land, family also serves as a driving force for struggle. This dialogue explains the background of Pak Nayan's family, who emphasize familial bonds and *tauhid* (faith in the Creator), which subsequently become the source of strength in their resistance. The ritualistic and routine practice of *silat* is portrayed as a manifestation of Pak Nayan's family tradition in nurturing values of custom and religion in order to preserve familial harmony.

## TOK MALIM

Be patient, Ali. Allah is testing us, He wants to see how strong our faith is.

## ALI

So what should I do now, Tok?

## TOK MALIM

Ali, your father... he has more experience. He knows how to solve family matters. *Insyallah*. (God willing).

## ALI

But I don't think that usurer can be reasoned with, Tok Malim.

## TOK MALIM

Some people cannot distinguish between truth and falsehood. [...] Umar Al-Khattab once advised: "You will never feel disheartened, even once, if you know what you are seeking. By the One in whose hand is my soul, if the purpose is for Allah, then Allah's pleasure is what we seek."

## ALI

Now I understand, Tok Malim. Thank you, Tok Malim.  
(0:14:27, *Geran*, 2019)

Fearing the threat posed by Haji Daud, Ali turns to his *silat* master for guidance. Tok Malim instructs Ali on the importance of courage in speaking the truth and rejecting falsehood, drawing upon the example of Umar Al-Khattab, one of the Khulafa al-Rashidin. Through the lens of Syed Hussein Alatas' thought, Shaharuddin Maaruf (2014) asserts that the love of knowledge is a significant value in interpreting the Malay hero. The

depiction of Islamic values embedded in *silat* reflects Malay tradition, which is inherently intertwined with religious beliefs. Muhammad Jailani Abu Talib (2018) further explains that the Malay hero is an individual who consistently embodies custom and syariah in his conduct. Within the narrative context, cultural values and religious teachings influence both the development and representation of the hero in literary and cinematic works (Halimah Mohamad Ali, 2014).

## GANGSTER 1

Timah, don't interrupt when men are speaking, can you? We're discussing something with your father right now! Do you understand?

## PAK NAYAN

It's alright, let us find our own way to resolve this.

## GANGSTER 2

Resolve what? Do you even have money to pay? Let's just go to the land office now and transfer the title. End of story

## FATIMAH

Enough! Return the land grant! Give it back, I said! [...] Bring it here, bring it here, I said give me the land grant!

(0:07:57, *Geran*, 2019)

## FATIMAH

It's true, Haji Daud has long been eyeing our land. But if we hadn't given him the opportunity, if we hadn't opened the way, do you think it would have been so easy for him to prey on us? Now Haji Daud has his chance. And who gave it to him? Our brother, Mat Arip. Are we just going to let that be?

## PAK NAYAN

Do you think I've just been sitting idly by? Silent and doing nothing? Just waiting around? I may be old, but I have my own way of dealing with things. I know what needs to be done!  
(0:11:37, *Geran*, 2019)

This heroic concept is also exemplified by Fatimah, who embodies the noble struggle of a woman in defending rights, dignity, and family. Her assertiveness challenges patriarchal assumptions, as the gangsters dismiss women as unfit to intervene in men's affairs and negotiations. Fatimah voices her dissatisfaction with her brother's recklessness in allowing Haji Daud to seize the opportunity to take over the family's ancestral land. At the same time, she asserts her responsibility as the elder sister not to indulge her younger sibling excessively. As a father, Pak Nayan emphasizes that he has never remained silent but has his own approach to ensuring the safety of his family and inheritance. Both Pak Nayan and Fatimah, therefore, demonstrate unwavering determination in guiding their family toward righteousness.

In the context of Malay society, Shaharuddin Maaruf (2014) states that good leadership qualities also form part of the heroic concept as they embody Malay customs. Similarly, Kueh (2000) identifies the Malay hero as a figure who upholds moral values, representing kinship and communal identity. In understanding the ideals of Malay heroism in *Geran* (2019), conviction emerges as an essential characteristic that underpins the struggle. Practices rooted in religion serve as a source of confidence, protecting the Malay hero from external threats intended to deceive, betray, and undermine the individual, family, and community.



## PAK NAYAN

With Timah and me, you need not worry. The two of us are protected. We recite Ayat al-Kursi after every prayer.

By doing so, we are safeguarded from humans, demons, jinn, and devils. Do not forget also to practice the recitation of the first ten verses of Surah al-Kahf. That will shield us from the tribulations of the Dajjal. God never fails in His promise, Ali, insyaAllah.

ALI

Yes, *pak* (father).

(0:35:04, *Geran*, 2019)

Pak Nayan advises Ali not to neglect the recitation of ayat al-Kursi and the first ten verses of surah al-Kahf after performing prayers. Such practice symbolizes reliance on the Creator as a protector and serves as an indication of the concept of tawhid. This spiritual discipline also reflects the cosmological worldview of the Malay tradition, which perceives the natural and metaphysical realms as interconnected. According to Pak Nayan, these practices shield individuals from the treachery of humans, devils, jinn, and Satan, while also safeguarding against the deception of the *dajjal*. In this context, Ali and his family confront Haji Daud and his followers, who attempt to seize their ancestral land but ultimately fail. This circumstance underscores the concept of the Malay *wira* (hero), wherein faith in religion provides the strength to resist materialism and protection from external threats. As argued by Siti Normala Hamzah et al. (2020), a struggle grounded in religion epitomizes Malay heroism, enabling resistance against corrupt external forces.

Confidence, in this regard, also cultivates individuals who embody moderation and prosperity in life. This reflects the portrayal of the Malay *wira* in *Geran* (2019) as a unique perspective. At the beginning of the narrative, the character of Ibu as narrator emphasizes the connection between land and the life of the Malay community, where land is regarded as a symbol of dignity:

## MOTHER

The land is the origin of humankind. Tread upon it with humility, lest time consumes it. Land, when wisely managed, grants benefits, but mismanagement invites conflict and ceaseless strife  
(0:01:31, *Geran*, 2019)

This dialogue illustrates the Malay cosmological philosophy, which views land as the foundational element of the natural world and of human existence itself. Such a perspective suggests that the shared essence of humans and land forges an inseparable bond between both entities. According to Mother, prosperity depends on humility and wise stewardship of land, which allows it to become a source of benefit rather than conflict. However, she also warns of land's potential to trigger disputes within society. This notion becomes relevant to the struggle of Pak Nayan's family when their ancestral land is threatened by Haji Daud's attempts at seizure.

## KAHAR

I am not worried about Mat Arip. What truly concerns me now is his father. I do not think it will be easy for us to obtain Pak Nayan's land. Consider this—the remaining debt he owes is just slightly over twenty thousand. For him, such an amount is nothing. If things do not go our way, he could simply pay it off within a day or two, and all his debts would be settled.

## RED - SHIRT GANGSTER

There is no point, even though we are holding his land title.

## KAHAR

Hmm, something like that.

RED - SHIRT GANGSTER

We know he is an expert in gambling, which means his weakness must also lie there.

KAHAR

There is a way...

RED - SHIRT GANGSTER

How? (0:36:07, *Geran*, 2019)

Based on this dialogue, Kahar considers Mat Arip to be easily manipulated, unlike Pak Nayan, who remains resolute and uncorrupted by destructive materialism. Kahar expresses concern that Pak Nayan, despite his debts, might be able to settle them quickly, thus hindering their plan to seize the land. Pak Nayan, as a father, demonstrates the importance of moderation and wisdom in managing land to ensure prosperity and protect against external manipulation. This reinforces the unique connection between humans and land as an essential feature of the Malay *wira* concept in *Geran* (2019). Siti Normala Hamzah et al. (2018) also contend that the defence and preservation of ancestral land constitutes an essential characteristic of Malay heroism, symbolizing Malay dignity and identity while safeguarding cultural heritage.

In *Geran* (2019), this ideal is strongly symbolised by the struggle to defend ancestral land. In Malay culture, land holds significance beyond its economic value, symbolising a family legacy, spiritual attachment, and cultural survival. The conflict with Haji Daud, a usurer who manipulates debts to seize land, highlights how threats to land are perceived as threats to identity and faith. Dialogues from Pak Nayan and Tok Malim reinforce this worldview, emphasizing that land is not a commodity but an *amanah* (trust) to be preserved for future generations.

Both Ali and Fatimah demonstrate this noble philosophy by defending ancestral land against Haji Daud's usurious claims. Beyond wealth, their struggle is framed as an act of preserving family, faith, and cultural legacy. Dialogues from Pak Nayan and Tok Malim reinforce the connection between religious devotion and cultural ideals, portraying heroism as inseparable from *tauhid* and custom.

### **Courage, Dedication, Ardour and Determination in the Struggle**

Syed Hussein Alatas (1972) affirms that courage, perseverance, spirit, and determination are essential elements of struggle, intrinsically tied to Malay custom and religion. These values highlight that the ideals of virtue and nobility must always accompany courage to qualify an individual as a hero. Both characteristics must coexist, as heroism in the Malay worldview arises from the integration of tradition and religion. *Geran* (2019) depicts this concept through the characters Ali and Fatimah, who bravely defend their rights while embodying moral responsibility to preserve family and societal harmony.

Ali, for instance, infiltrates Haji Daud's hideouts and defeats numerous enemies in his quest to rescue Mat Arip, who has been kidnapped. His struggle is not merely rooted in defending Malay landownership but also in familial love. Despite constant danger, Ali remains determined, defeating every adversary until he ultimately confronts Kahar. From the perspective of Syed Hussein Alatas, Wan Roshazli Wan Razali (2023) emphasizes that the Malay hero is one who is willing to sacrifice his life for the community. Similarly, Khoo (2006) highlights *silat* as a heroic symbol of Malay resistance and a means of preserving life.

From a social perspective, Ali embodies the practice of *silat* as a defensive tradition that serves as an effective method to counter decadent forces of hedonism and arrogance. His persistence contrasts sharply with the materialism of his enemies, illustrating his intellectual and moral strength. Ali's revolutionary character represents readiness to demand justice without reliance on external intervention. Grounded in tradition and Islam, Shaharuddin Maaruf (2014) views social justice and reform as integral aspects of Malay heroism.

The film also underscores female empowerment through the character of Fatimah, who defends her family and dignity. In two separate scenes, Fatimah fends off Haji Daud's henchmen, using inherited *silat* skills to subdue her attackers. Her courage illustrates the responsibility of a Malay woman in safeguarding family property and welfare. Fatimah's actions demonstrate not only martial skill but also moral restraint, as she avoids excessive violence. As Shaharuddin Maaruf (2014) argues, a hero is shaped by social justice and ethical integrity. Likewise, Norfaizah Ghazali and Fazilah Husin (2018) affirm that women who assert their rights with determination are also considered heroines, as their strength challenges patriarchal dominance and traditional gender roles.

Ali and Fatimah's bravery is thus inseparable from the spiritual dimension of Malay heroism, which prioritizes peace over conflict. The Malay *wira* is portrayed as one who seeks to resolve disputes with dignity and composure, valuing peace to preserve societal harmony and prevent destruction.

ALI

What is the meaning of this?

GANGSTER

We came in peace, yet they treated us like animals

FATIMAH

You almost brought down my house and broke down my door! If I were to retaliate, it would cost me nothing!

ALI

We have our manners and our way of conduct. If there is a problem, it should be resolved through discussion.

GANGSTER

And who is this speaking? Mohamad Arip bin Nayan? Here, take this and read the agreement. (He hands over an envelope, which Ali proceeds to read.) I do not care, nor am I concerned, with who you are. Whether you are the descendant of Panglima Nayan, Megat Dewa, or Raja Bersiong, a debt remains a debt, and it must be repaid. Regardless of circumstance, it must be settled. I am speaking plainly, in Malay. It is simple and straightforward. I am giving you one week only. Remember—one week.

(0:09:41, *Geran*, 2019)

This dialogue demonstrates Ali's attempt to defuse the tension between his family and Haji Daud's men. Ali's politeness, however, is dismissed by those who are materialistic and inclined to antagonise his family. Haji Daud's followers speak rudely and deliver sarcastic remarks towards Pak Nayan's family, who are portrayed as noble yet indebted. Moreover, they issue threats and pressure Pak Nayan's family to settle Mat Arip's debt within one week. In this dialogue, Ali demonstrates courage and firmness by offering to resolve the matter through peaceful discussion. As a Malay, Ali emphasizes the importance of *adab* (proper conduct) and a harmonious approach in conflict resolution. Consequently, Ali's character reflects the cultural values of the Malay community, which prioritise tradition and social etiquette. Wan Aida Wan Yahaya (2024) similarly asserts that the Malay hero embodies traditional values that guide every action as evidence of a deep connection with cultural heritage.

However, *Geran* (2019) also nuances Syed Hussein Alatas's framework by presenting Mat Arip as a counterpoint. His weakness for gambling and quick wealth undermines the family's security, making him vulnerable to Haji Daud's narrative; they also affirm Syed Hussein Alatas's assertion that true heroism requires steadfastness of spirit. His failure underscores the destructive consequences of abandoning familial duty and cultural values.

In this context, *Geran* illustrates that Malay heroism is defined not merely by physical bravery but also by the tenacity to uphold values in the face of greed, betrayal, and violence. The courage of Ali, Fatimah, and Pak Nayan, juxtaposed with Mat Arip's weakness, conveys dynamic tension between resilience and fragility within the Malay family and society.

### Success and Accomplishment

Syed Hussein Alatas (1972) relates the concept of a hero's success and accomplishment to societies in times of crisis. Within this framework, the hero's success is reflected in his leadership in resolving problems swiftly and effectively. In turn, the hero's achievement resides in his ability to confront challenges and threats for the sake of social and political harmony. In line with this, Syed Hussein Alatas (1972) emphasizes that the hero possesses qualities and a distinctive approach that correspond to societal expectations, thereby rendering the concept impartial. The success and achievement of the hero in *Geran* (2019) are portrayed through the character of Ali, whose actions are influenced by tradition and religion as the foundation of Malay culture.

Ali's spirituality as a hero conveys success and achievement through his sense of justice; he refuses to tolerate oppression against himself, his family, and his community. Every action he takes is driven by the pursuit of justice to protect the safety of individuals and the well-being of society that has been violated by cruelty.

PAK NAYAN

Ali, where are you going?

ALI

I'm going to look for Mat Arip.

PAK NAYAN

What's wrong with Mat Arip? Did he call you? Did he tell you where he went?

ALI

I don't know, *Pak*. I'm going to find him now.

FATIMAH

*Pak*, I was attacked at the market earlier. Abang Ali was also beaten at the paddy field. Perhaps Mat Arip has been attacked too.

PAK NAYAN

Go then. Find Mat Arip. Bring him back, okay?

ALI

Alright, *Pak*. I'll go now.

(1:14:31, *Geran*, 2019)

Based on the dialogue above, Ali expresses his intention to Pak Nayan to search for his younger brother Mat Arip after receiving no news from him. Fatimah further reveals that she had been attacked by Haji Daud's men at the market, while Ali himself was ambushed at the paddy field due to Mat Arip's unsettled debts. Realizing what his children are going through, Pak Nayan immediately instructs Ali to find Mat Arip.

The scene in which Ali defeats Kahar, Haji Daud's last henchman at the rice mill, also affirms the justice Ali seeks after enduring repeated betrayal and provocation from Haji Daud's men against his family. Ali's struggle embodies Tok Malim's advice to him regarding truth and falsehood. His courage to face enemies alone highlights the heroism of the Malay man who is willing to risk his life in resisting tyranny and oppression,



particularly in the context of protecting family and rights. This concept resonates with Khoo's (2006) assertion that the authentic Malay man is the product of disciplined training in the *silat* arena, which ultimately shapes him as a hero responsible for protection.

## TOK MALIM

People cannot distinguish between falsehood and truth. What is true remains true, while falsehood will inevitably vanish. (Ali defeats Kahar, thereby rescuing his younger brother)  
(1:34:30, *Geran*, 2019)

## MOTHER

Fall, stand, rise, and run forward. Success is not solely the result of our own efforts, but the prayers of those who love us serve as a stronger force that strengthens our relationship with the Creator.  
(1:37:35, *Geran*, 2019)

The narrator of the *silat* master reinforces the principle of truth and falsehood immediately after Ali defeats Kahar while rescuing his brother. Towards the film's conclusion, the mother underscores the significance of tauhid (oneness of God) and family values as the foundations of success. Pak Nayan's efforts to defend the ancestral land inherited from his teacher are not in vain, as his children also join in the struggle to preserve this heritage. He reflects the role of a father who constantly prays for his children.

During moments when Ali, Fatimah, and Mat Arip face threats, Pak Nayan is repeatedly shown deep in prayer and remembrance of God (*zikir*), transmitting spiritual strength to his children. As the mother states, success is the result of prayers and hopes from those with close ties, not merely one's own effort. Pak Nayan's determination to safeguard the ancestral land and his family's safety carries a deeply spiritual dimension. His calmness and religious devotion in the face of danger portray him as a source of strength and assurance of Ali's success. As Wan Roshazli Wan Razali (2023) argues, a hero's success is also shaped by religious factors as the foundation of Malay culture. In the context of struggle, Wan Aida Wan Yahaya (2024) and Siti Normala Hamzah et al. (2020) likewise highlight religion as a key element in shaping the Malay hero. In *Geran* (2019), Ali's victory in reclaiming the family's land deed is not merely a legal or material success but a symbolic act of restoring dignity and justice to his family. The land, as a recurring motif in Malay culture, signifies heritage, responsibility, and continuity; thus, Ali's accomplishment represents the safeguarding of communal identity against exploitation and moral corruption.

Significantly, *Geran* (2019) also frames accomplishment as collective rather than purely individual. Fatimah's steadfastness, Pak Nayan's guidance, and Tok Malim's counsel all contribute to the resolution. This collaborative success aligns with Malay cultural values that situate heroism within the family and community. Taken together, *Geran* (2019) demonstrates Malay heroism, while resonating with Syed Hussein Alatas's emphasis on success, also expands it to include collective triumph and spiritual resilience. Accomplishment is thus not measured solely in personal victory but in the preservation of values, the endurance of cultural identity, and the strengthening of faith.

## CONCLUSION

The focus on the concept of the Malay hero in *Geran* (2019) represents an attempt to trace the underlying philosophy and ideology of Malay culture. The analysis of the film's text and subtext provides new insights into the notion of the Malay hero. This textual analysis is further supported by the perspectives of local scholars in sociology to discuss and substantiate the representation of the Malay hero in the film.

The film, which is centered on the Malay struggle, depicts sociocultural tensions between communities that uphold traditional ethos and those aligned with modernity. Clearly, land in the film symbolises the essence of Malay society's evaluation of individuals through the dichotomy of spirituality and materialism. Findings from this study suggest that spirituality emerges as the implicit message that shapes a unique perspective in defining the Malay hero in *Geran* (2019). The hero is portrayed through spirituality in the characters of Pak Nayan, Ali,

and Fatimah, which contrasts with other characters associated with materialism. Spirituality here is restorative and progressive, signifying faith, modest prosperity, peace, and justice. Conversely, materialism is destructive and decadent, leading to betrayal, social disorder, hostility, and oppression. In this sense, the hero becomes a medium that reflects the ideology and philosophy of the Malays in *Geran* (2019).

Furthermore, the concept of the Malay hero in *Geran* (2019) is evaluated through the lens of Syed Hussein Alatas (1972), who identifies three essential elements of heroism: the nobility and purity of the ideals pursued; the courage, perseverance, spirit, and determination that accompany the struggle; and the hero's success and achievements. All three elements must coexist to classify someone as a hero; the absence of any one disqualifies such a claim. Ali's actions as a hero are guided by noble aspirations. The issue of land as the central ideal represents a higher moral aspiration. At the same time, Ali demonstrates courage, dedication, spirit, and consistent determination in confronting adversaries. These qualities serve as imperatives that drive him toward his goals. His success and achievements further reinforce his status as a Malay hero. Overall, Ali embodies all three dimensions of Alatas's conceptualization of heroism, thereby affirming that *Geran* (2019) elevates the ideology and philosophy of the Malay hero.

In conclusion, this study underscores the significance of film as a cultural mechanism and contributes to the discourse on the representation of the Malay hero in cinema. Syed Hussein Alatas's (1972) framework serves to support the study's theoretical foundation. Accordingly, this research demonstrates the value of local scholarly perspectives in textual analysis, particularly in film studies. The examination of film as a text highlights its function as a cultural mechanism in representing Malay culture. Thus, this study broadens the perspectives on the representation of Malay culture and serves as a valuable resource for advancing the understanding of Malay film and literary culture.

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