

Raja Ali Haji's Wisdom in Conveying Islamic Jurisprudence: The Issue of Women's Beauty in *Syair Siti Sianah*

*Kearifan Raja Ali Haji Dalam Menyampaikan Perundangan Islam:
Isu Kecantikan Wanita Di Syair Siti Sianah*

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ABSTRACT

Women are often intertwined with the notion of beauty, leading to a gender stereotype that links women with an obsession for beauty and adornment to enhance their attractiveness. This issue also colors the history of Islamic society in the Malay World, notably explored by Raja Ali Haji in his work, *Syair Siti Sianah*. In this poem, Raja Ali Haji addresses the gender stereotype, relating these behaviors to the cultural practices of the Malay community and the tenets of Islamic teachings. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the issue of women's beauty as addressed in *Syair Siti Sianah* from an Islamic perspective. To achieve these objectives, this qualitative study employs the method of reflexive thematic analysis to analyze *Syair Siti Sianah* and the method of Islamic jurisprudence analysis to interpret Islamic jurisprudence regarding the permissible limits of beauty in Islam. The findings reveal that Raja Ali Haji addressed several issues such as *tabarruj* (excessive display of beauty) and *tasyabbuh* (imitation of other cultures). In this regard, Raja Ali Haji ultimately challenges the gender stereotype that equates women's worth with physical attractiveness and excessive adornment. Instead, he firmly asserts that true beauty lies in the harmonious integration of outward appearance with moral integrity, modesty and spiritual virtue, thereby redefining women's beauty within an ethical and Islamic framework.

Keywords: Beauty; gender stereotypes; Malay poem; *tabarruj*; *tasyabbuh*

ABSTRAK

Wanita sering dikaitkan dengan konsep kecantikan sehingga wujud stereotaip gender yang menghubungkan wanita dengan obsesi terhadap kecantikan dan perhiasan bagi meningkatkan daya tarikan mereka. Isu ini turut mewarnai sejarah masyarakat Islam di Alam Melayu seperti yang diketengahkan oleh Raja Ali Haji dalam karyanya berjudul *Syair Siti Sianah*. Dalam syair tersebut, Raja Ali Haji membincangkan stereotaip gender dan mengaitkannya dengan amalan budaya masyarakat Melayu serta prinsip ajaran Islam. Sehubungan itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis isu kecantikan wanita sebagaimana yang diketengahkan dalam *Syair Siti Sianah* dari perspektif Islam. Bagi mencapai objektif tersebut, kajian kualitatif ini menggunakan kaedah analisis tematik reflektif untuk meneliti *Syair Siti Sianah* serta kaedah analisis *fiqh* bagi mentafsir batasan kecantikan yang dibenarkan dalam Islam. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa Raja Ali Haji membincangkan beberapa isu seperti *tabarruj* (pendedahan kecantikan secara berlebihan) dan *tasyabbuh* (penyerupaan budaya lain). Dalam hal ini, Raja Ali Haji mencabar stereotaip gender yang menyamakan nilai wanita dengan kecantikan fizikal dan perhiasan yang berlebihan. Sebaliknya, beliau menegaskan bahawa kecantikan yang sebenar terletak pada kesepaduan antara penampilan luaran dengan integriti moral, sifat malu dan keutamaan spiritual, sekali gus mentakrifkan semula konsep kecantikan wanita dalam kerangka etika dan Islam.

Kata kunci: Kecantikan; puisi Melayu; stereotaip gender; *tabarruj*; *tasyabbuh*

INTRODUCTION

Beauty is a crucial element in human life. Every individual is attracted to beauty, often willing to spend both money and time to attain it. Among women, beauty is considered an essential aspect for enhancing self-confidence, personality, and identity, especially when interacting with the general public (Robertson & Kingsley 2021). Fundamentally, beauty for women is a complex and elusive concept. This complexity arises from the abstract nature of beauty, which cannot be objectively measured, and its relative interpretation, which depends on cultural and temporal contexts (Umar & Yusra 2020).

At the same time, discourses surrounding beauty are often entwined with gendered stereotypes, reflecting broader patterns of social differentiation between men and women (Laderman, 1982). Such inequalities frequently manifest in negative labelling and discriminatory practices that constrain women's opportunities and social mobility (Ramli et al., 2024). Within this framework, women are commonly associated with the pursuit of physical adornment as a marker of attractiveness, a phenomenon that Raja Ali Haji critically engages with in his poem entitled *Siti Sianah*.

Despite extensive discussion on the concept of beauty, studies focusing on Raja Ali Haji's perspective on women's beauty in the Malay-Islamic context remain limited. Most previous research has concentrated on general notions of beauty or its cultural interpretations, without analysing how literary works like *Syair Siti Sianah* convey moral, religious and social guidance on the proper expression of women's beauty. For Raja Ali Haji, true beauty tends to refer to the beauty of the universe, physical appearance, and bodily forms. When contemplated with a sound mind, this beauty serves as a sign that it is created by Allah with His wisdom, without deriving any benefit (Haji 2010). This close relationship illustrates the presence of religious values that educate or contain instructional elements for the reader. This is clearly reflected in his poem *Syair Siti Sianah*, where he aims to harmonise the concepts of inner and outer beauty, teaching that physical beauty should be complemented by inner virtues (Omar 2014). The poem suggests that a balanced approach to beauty, where external appearance is enhanced by inner qualities, is essential for a woman's overall well-being and societal harmony.

This perspective differs significantly from prevailing constructions of women's beauty across various cultures and historical periods. For example, in 16th-century Europe, women wore corsets made of whalebone and stiffened canvas to attain a slender waist, which was widely regarded as an aesthetic ideal. This standard contrasts with the 20th-century European conception of beauty, which privileged slim legs and hips as well as medium-length hair as markers of attractiveness. Similarly, in Mauritania, larger female body types are socially constructed as beautiful, whereas in Japan, beauty is commonly associated with fair, smooth skin and straight hair (Situmorang et al., 2019). Within the context of the Malay Archipelago, conceptions of Malay women's beauty are characterised by distinct cultural indicators. According to Manan (2012), Malay beauty is associated with specific characteristics such as dimples, red lips, and courteous behaviour. This beauty is also expressed through modest attire like Baju Kurung Pesak Buloh, Cekak Musang, and Potong Riau, all of which signify a demure appearance (Ismail et al. 2019). Conversely, excessive or provocative clothing is considered less attractive and improper (Yaasin 2019). Additionally, Malay society often associates beauty with elements of nature, as seen in proverbs with various motifs such as plants, animals, natural elements, celestial bodies, objects, and geographical features. For example, the proverb "*bunga tengah kembang di taman, baunya merebak ke mana-mana*" (a flower blooming in the garden, its fragrance spreading everywhere)

describes a woman's beauty through the metaphor of a flower symbolizing a beautiful face. The flower's fragrance implies the virtues or advantages of a woman that make her well-known, symbolizing her family's good name (Mohammed & Radzi 2020).

These variations underscore the culturally contingent and historically situated nature of beauty standards. In contrast, Raja Ali Haji advances a conception of beauty that transcends purely physical attributes by integrating outward appearance with moral refinement and spiritual consciousness. His perspective situates beauty within an Islamic ethical framework, wherein physical attractiveness attains meaning only when harmonised with inner virtues such as modesty, piety and proper conduct. Accordingly, beauty is not merely an aesthetic category but also a moral and didactic construct that functions to guide individual behaviour and sustain social harmony. This integrated understanding is articulated in his poem *Syair Siti Sianah*, which serves not only as a literary work but also as a medium for ethical instruction. Therefore, this study seeks to analyse Raja Ali Haji's views on women's beauty as expressed in his poem entitled *Siti Sianah*.

RAJA ALI HAJI AND SYAIR SITI SIANAH

Raja Ali Haji was a prominent figure in the history of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate (1824-1911), born in 1808 and passing away in 1873. He served as an advisor to the Yang Dipertuan Muda of Riau for nearly four decades, encompassing the reigns of Raja Abdul Rahman (1831-1844), Raja Ali (1844-1857), Raja Abdullah (1857-1858), and Raja Muhammad Yusuf al-Ahmadi (1858-1899) (Noor 2021).

Raja Ali Haji was not only an expert in politics but also a respected religious figure on Pulau Penyengat, the island that served as the administrative and cultural capital of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate. His mastery of Islamic knowledge came from studying under several prominent scholars in the Malay Archipelago, such as Shaikh Daud bin Abdullah al-Fatani, Shaikh Ismail bin Abdullah al-Minankabawi, and Sayyid Abdul Rahman al-Misiri (Kasa & Abdullah 2022). Additionally, he studied with Habib Shaikh al-Saqqaf, Shaikh Ahmad Jabarati, Shaikh Isma'il bin Abdullah al-Minkabawi, and Shaikh Abdul Ghafur bin Abbas al-Manduri (Abdullah 2014). Raja Ali Haji was also recognized as an expert in the thoughts of major scholars like al-Ghazali, Zakaria al-Ansari, and Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, establishing him as an important religious figure in the Malay world (Sham 2017).

Raja Ali Haji's literary prowess is evident in his works, which are rich in religious values (Kasa & Hamzah 2023). In the realm of prose, he produced significant works such as *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (history), *Thamarat al-Muhimmah* (mirror for rulers' literature), and *Bustan al-Katibin* and *Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa* (language). These works embody religious values both explicitly and implicitly. For example, *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, a work mirror for rulers' literature, discusses the fourteen spiritual attributes that leaders should avoid, based on teachings in Sufism (*Tazkiyah al-Nafs*) (Kasa & Abdullah 2022; Malik et al. 2020). In *Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa*, Raja Ali Haji introduces the basics of Islam by explaining the meanings of the first seven words starting with the letter "alif," which include Allah, Ahmad (Prophet Muhammad S.A.W), *ashab* (companions), *akhbar* (scholars), *insan*, *al-awali* (human virtues and vices), and hereafter (*akhirat*) (Van der Putten 2002).

In poetry, he created renowned works such as *Gurindam Dua Belas*, *Syair Kitab Nikah*, and *Syair Hukum Fara'id*. According to Sham (1987; 1993), *Gurindam Dua Belas* is a phenomenal work by Raja Ali Haji. This poem provides advice grounded in Sufism, as seen in the first chapter,

which emphasizes knowing four things: Allah, oneself, the world, and the hereafter. Additionally, the third chapter advises on maintaining bodily purity, while the fourth and eighth chapters discuss the importance of avoiding negative traits, particularly those related to the heart. The alignment of Raja Ali Haji's works with Islamic teachings, especially ethics, positions him as a talented and influential author in the Malay world of the 19th century (Nordin 2022). His literary talent is further evidenced by his emphasis on moral values upheld by Malay-Islamic society in his poetry (Malik 2015).

One of Raja Ali Haji's poetic works that incorporates religious elements is *Syair Siti Sianah*. This allegorical literary piece is rich in Islamic jurisprudence. Chee and Karim (2015) outline that the poem structurally consists of 574 stanzas, including two repeated stanzas, with two to five words in each line. Sham (1993) notes an addition of 25 stanzas, bringing the total to 599 stanzas. The poem's content covers topics such as ablution, fasting, almsgiving, menstruation, and postpartum bleeding, as well as Sufism, discussing the roles and misuse of the eyes, ears, tongue, and private parts, and etiquette in daily life, such as respect towards parents, a wife's duties to her husband, and the conduct of servants.

Sham (1995; 2017) states that the poem portrays a dialogue among a group of housewives discussing religious laws. The main character, Siti Sianah, is married to Muhammad Zahid, a nobleman and scholar. Other characters include Siti Afifah, Siti Sianah's mother, Siti Dianah, her sister, and supporting characters such as Dang Sendari and Dang Lela. The narrative method in this poem aims to engage readers in understanding fundamental religious issues (Abdullah et al. 2019).

In addition to providing lessons on religious knowledge, the poem serves as a specific example for women. It reflects Raja Ali Haji's commitment to elevating the status of Malay women through intellectual empowerment. According to Raja Ali Haji, this empowerment can be achieved by strengthening religious values, ethics, and manners, as a solution to the syndrome of ignorance, moral crisis, and loss of shame among Malay women (Abdullah et al. 2019; Omar 2014). He emphasizes the need to replace these attitudes with the characteristics of a pious woman, such as obedience to her husband, maintaining social decorum, and possessing knowledge to uphold her dignity (Omar 2014).

Although previous studies provide extensive biographical information on Raja Ali Haji and detailed descriptions of his literary works, including *Syair Siti Sianah*, they largely focus on historical, linguistic, and structural aspects of his writings. Few, if any, have critically examined the specific issues addressed in the poem, particularly concerning women's beauty, gender norms, and the interplay between moral, religious, and social guidance. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding how Raja Ali Haji's works engage with gendered stereotypes and articulate an Islamic framework for understanding women's beauty. Therefore, this study is significant in exploring how Raja Ali Haji challenges gendered stereotypes and articulates a conception of women's true beauty through the harmonious integration of outward appearance, ethical conduct and Islamic values.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employs the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) method, a technique for analysing and interpreting texts to develop an understanding of themes based on events, experiences, ideas, and past views. This method reflects on the interpretation in data analysis,

considering three aspects: (i) the data itself, (ii) the theoretical assumptions of the analysis, and (iii) the analytical skills or resources of the researcher (Byrne 2022). Unlike the predefined theme approach, themes in this method are created through the researcher's interpretation of the data, not sought through codes (Braun & Clarke 2019). The themes formed must meet the criteria of relevance in the study's context (Campbell et al. 2021).

For this study, the text of *Syair Siti Sianah* was first segmented into individual stanzas. Each stanza was read multiple times to identify both explicit and implicit references to women's beauty, behaviour, and moral guidance. The researcher generated initial codes inductively from the text, capturing key ideas such as alteration of natural features, excessive adornment (*tabarruj*), and deliberate attention-seeking (*tasyabbuh*). These codes were then reviewed and grouped into broader themes, such as "Altering the Creation of Allah" and "*Tabarruj*" which directly address the research objective. Latent coding was employed to uncover implicit meanings in the poem, ensuring that the thematic analysis reflected not only what was said, but also the moral and religious messages conveyed.

To interpret the ethical and religious implications of the identified themes, the study applies principles of *Usul al-Fiqh*. Specific Quranic verses and hadiths relevant to issues of women's adornment, modesty and ethical conduct were systematically referenced and analysed. This process allowed the researcher to align the thematic findings with Islamic law, clarifying the boundaries of permissible beautification and highlighting the moral critique embedded in the poem (Rosele et al. 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight two main themes presented by Raja Ali Haji in his poem regarding women's beauty. The first theme relates to human alterations to original creation, such as shaving eyebrows and hair extensions. The second theme revolves around *tabarruj* (excessive display of beauty) which involves excessive adornment and deliberate actions to attract men's attention. According to Raja Ali Haji, both actions contradict Islamic law and are considered inappropriate behaviours. He uses poetry as a medium to convey this message, emphasizing the oddity and criticism of women who practice *tabarruj*, portraying them as individuals who excessively adorn themselves and intentionally draw attention. This approach illustrates Raja Ali Haji's unique method of integrating Malay cultural elements with Islamic teachings in his works.

In general, there are two themes related to women and beauty that are highlighted by Raja Ali Haji in this poem. They can be seen in the following table.

TABLE 1. Analysis of *Syair Siti Sianah*

Theme	Code	Text	Source
Altering the creation of Allah	A1: (<i>Al-Nams</i>)	<i>Setengahnya perempuan terlalu janggalnya, Roma di muka pula dicukurnya, Seperti taji berendam di keningnya, Kemudian memakai dengan selengkapnya.</i>	(Haji 1993: 437: stanza 545. ii)
	A2: (<i>Al-Wasilah</i>)	<i>Setengah perempuan perangnya cela, Habis dipenuhi rambut kepala, Rambut yang sikit disiputnya pula, Memakai cemara berjela-jela.</i>	(Haji 1993: 440, stanza 559. i)

Tabarruj	B1: (Excessive adornment)	<i>Setengah perempuan sangat pesolek, Berhias berdandan berpakai molek, Di dalam cermin muka ditilik, Kanan dan kiri dibekek-belek.</i> <i>Meskipun tiada berapa eloknya, Ada yang setengah kembang hidungnya, Serta pula kepik batangnya, Seperti buaya besar mulutnya.</i> <i>Ulang-ulang pula dibubuhnya, Berbagai bunga disuntingkannya, Penuh pepak atas kepalanya, Seperti joget pula rupanya.</i>	(Haji 1993: 437, stanza 545. ix) (Haji 1993: 437, stanza 545. x) (Haji 1993: 440, stanza 559. ii)
	B2: (Deliberately attracting the attention of non- mahram men)	<i>Setengah perempuan yang makan angkat, Memakai gelang bertingkat-tingkat, Memandang laki-laki matanya lekat, Dengan jantan suka berdekak.</i> <i>Suara laki-laki apabila didengari, Segeralah ia bangkit berdiri, Menerkam jantan berlari-lari, Menampakkan muka lengan dan jari.</i> <i>Kaki dan tangan dihinaikan pula, Pura-pura dikatakan ubat segala, Hakikatnya diketahui Allah Taala, Supaya laki-laki berhati gila.</i>	(Haji 1993: 441, stanza 559 viii) (Haji 1993: 441, stanza 559 ix) (Haji 1993: 441, stanza 559. x)

The first theme highlighted by Raja Ali Haji in his work is the alteration of God's creation. He portrays the act of plucking eyebrows as unusual and conspicuous within society. This oddity is likened to painted eyebrows after plucking (*alis kiliran taji*), giving an appearance similar to artificial ornamentation on fighting cock's legs. The focus then shifts to women's hair, referring to the practice of modifying hairstyles, such as creating a snail-shaped bun, as an attempt to cover up hair deficiencies. In this context, some women wear hairpieces or extensions to enlarge their buns, concealing their natural hair's shortcomings or length.

Raja Ali Haji also highlights the theme of *tabarruj*, which refers to excessive adornment. He views this behaviour as inappropriate because it involves spending excessive time in front of mirrors and using various ornaments solely to appear beautiful, thus neglecting other aspects of life. Concerning attracting men's attention, he criticizes women who are willing to use various types of adornments solely to attract men, which he considers as improper and unsuitable.

In the context of Islam, a religion aligned with human nature and instincts, there is no specific prohibition against women dressing fashionably or adorning themselves. Islam acknowledges beauty as an important aspect of life, encouraging its followers to present themselves neatly and attractively in a modest manner. Beauty in Islam is not only valued but also seen as a way to respect oneself and others, provided it is practiced within the limits of moderation and not excess. This is emphasized in a hadith which states:

“God is beautiful, and He loves beauty”

(Hadith narrated by Muslim: 275)

Furthermore, Islam also encourages women to adorn themselves, as reflected in the following verse from the Quran:

“Say: Who hath forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of God which He hath produced for his servants and the things clean and pure (which He hath provided) for sustenance? Say: they are in the life of this world for those who believe (and) purely for them on the Day of Judgment. Thus, do We explain the signs in detail for those who understand”

(Surah Al-A’raf 7: 32)

This verse indicates that clothing and adornment are firmly grounded in Islamic law. Fundamentally, Islamic law permits and allows dressing fashionably and adorning oneself for beauty (Al-Khin et al. 1992).

However, some women’s obsession with adornment sometimes leads them to engage in practices that involve altering God’s creation. Altering God’s creation refers to absolute modifications, whether physical or otherwise. Essentially, Allah prohibits humans from modifying His creation except for purposes of treatment or restoring the original function of body parts (Hamdan & Ramli 2023).

In the context of this poem, two examples of altering God’s creation discussed are eyebrow plucking and hair extensions. Eyebrow plucking, or *“al-nams”* in Arabic, involves the removal or plucking of eyebrow hairs and has been a trend since the early days of Islam and remains popular in contemporary society. The prohibition of eyebrow plucking is emphasized in several hadiths, such as:

“The Messenger of Allah cursed the woman who does tattoos and the one who has them done, and those who pluck their eyebrows and file their teeth for the purpose of beautification, and those who change the creation of Allah”

(Hadith narrated by Bukhari: 2125)

“The Prophet cursed the women who practice tattooing and those who seek to be tattooed, the women who remove hair from their faces seeking beautification by changing the creation of Allah”

(Hadith narrated by Tirmidhi: 2706)

It was narrated that Abdullah said: *“The Messenger of Allah cursed the women who do tattoos, those who have their teeth separated and Al-Mutanammat who change the creation of Allah, the Mighty and Sublime”*

(Hadith narrated by Nasa’i: 5253)

Based on these hadiths, several actions categorized as altering Allah’s creation and considered cursed include (i) tattooing, (ii) seeking to be tattooed, (iii) eyebrow plucking, (iv) requesting eyebrow plucking, and (v) gapping the teeth. The use of the term “curse” here indicates that these five actions are regarded as major sins (Hamdan & Ramli 2023). The rationale (*illah*) for these actions, as mentioned in the hadith, is altering Allah’s creation for the sake of beauty (Al-‘Asqalani 2001). Such acts are deemed reprehensible due to their deceptive and fraudulent nature (Al-Adawi 1999). However, there are exceptions if these actions are performed for medical purposes. This is stated in a hadith narrated by Ibn Mas’ud:

“I heard the Messenger of Allah forbid plucking the eyebrows, filing the teeth, adding hair extensions and doing tattoos, except by way of treatment”

(Hadith narrated by Ahmad: 5107)

Meanwhile, hair extensions refer to the Arabic term “*al-wasilah*.” It involves a woman attaching hair from another woman to make her own hair appear longer. The prohibition of hair extensions is evident in the following hadith:

“The Messenger of Allah cursed the woman who fixes hair extensions (to another) and the woman who has them fixed for her, and the woman who does tattoos and the woman who has them done for her”

(Hadith narrated by Muslim: 5687)

According to Hamdan and Ramli (2023), there are several reasons (*illah*) that lead to the prohibition of hair extensions, as follows:

- i. The inherent reason for the action of hair extension itself. This means that the act of extending hair is considered absolutely forbidden without exception.
- ii. The potential for deception. In this context, hair extensions are permissible if they do not create an element of deceit and use permissible materials.
- iii. The reason related to maintaining human dignity. When hair from another woman is used in the extension process, it is considered to undermine the dignity of the original hair's owner.
- iv. The reason that hair extension is considered a form of altering Allah's creation. However, using animal hair that is considered pure as a substitute for human hair is permitted.

Essentially, using human hair for extensions is unanimously considered haram. However, if a woman uses materials other than human hair, such as pure animal hair, this requires further examination. Firstly, if an unmarried woman uses hair extensions, it is considered haram. Secondly, if a married woman uses hair extensions without her husband's permission, it is also considered haram due to the element of deception. Thirdly, if the husband's permission is obtained, there are differing opinions; some view it as haram based on the generality of hadith, while others consider it permissible through *qiyas* (analogy) due to the lack of specific prohibition (Hamdan & Ramli 2023).

In addition to the issue of altering Allah's creation, Raja Ali Haji also discusses the obsession of women with adornment. Generally, Islam prohibits excessive display of beauty that attracts non-mahram men, known as “*tabarruj*.” *Tabarruj* refers to the exposure of one's beauty, body parts, and adornments to non-mahram men. *Tabarruj* has two main interpretations:

- i. The exposure of facial beauty and sexually attractive body parts such as the chest and calves (Al-Razi 1981; Al-Zuhailiy 2003; Syamsudin 2008).
- ii. The exposure of adornments or jewelry worn by women, such as gold, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets (Al-Zuhailiy 2003; Syahrur 2000; Syamsudin 2008).

The prohibition of *tabarruj* is derived from Allah's command in al-Quran:

“And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former times of ignorance; and establish regular prayer; and give regular charity; and obey God and his apostle. And God only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless”

(Surah Al-Ahzab 33: 33)

The concept of *tabarruj* encompasses all forms of adornment, whether related to the body, such as the face, hands, and feet, or to clothing. The act of adornment must be assessed based on its original intent. According to al-Qurtubi (2006), any form of adornment displayed by women with the intention of attracting non-mahram men is considered *tabarruj jahiliyyah* and is prohibited in Islam. However, if a woman adorns herself to attract her husband, this is permissible (Karim et al. 2018). Regarding clothing, Islam does not prohibit women from wearing coloured garments as long as they are not excessive (Othman et al. 2016). Coloured clothing is not considered an act of worship with specific regulations (Noor 2015). Conversely, Islam encourages women to dress neatly and avoid worn-out clothes. Prohibited clothing in Islam is that which reveals the body's shape, such as the chest, waist, and calves (Al-Qaradawi 1977). Several forms of *tabarruj* are explicitly described in the Qur'an and Hadith:

- i. Wearing clothing that is ostensibly revealing and styling hair in an elaborate manner. This is explained in a Hadith: *"Two are the types of the denizens of Hell whom I did not see: people having flogs like the tails of the ox with them and they would be beating people, and the women who would be dressed but appear to be naked, who would be inclined (to evil) and make their husbands incline towards it. Their heads would be like the humps of the bukht camel inclined to one side. They will not enter Paradise and they would not smell its odour whereas its odour would be smelt from such and such distance"* (Hadith narrated by Muslim: 2128).
- ii. Using excessive fragrance to attract the attention of other men. This is detailed in a Hadith: *"Any woman who puts on perfume then passes by people so that they can smell her fragrance then she is an adulteress"* (Hadith narrated by Abu Daud: 4173).
- iii. Displaying body adornments to non-mahram men. This is stated in the Qur'anic verse: *"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty ; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof ; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex ; and that they should not strike their feet In order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye believers! Turn ye all together towards God, that ye may attain bliss."* (Surah al-Nur, 24:31).

According to Umar and Yusra (2020), the prohibition of *tabarruj* aims to eliminate sinful behaviour, purify oneself both outwardly and inwardly, and preserve the dignity of women by elevating them as respected individuals without unwanted attention from others.

THE WISDOM OF RAJA ALI HAJI IN CONVEYING ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE THROUGH MALAY POEM

Raja Ali Haji demonstrates profound wisdom in addressing and challenging gendered stereotypes that equate a woman's value solely with her physical appearance and adornment. Through his poem *Siti Sianah*, he critiques culturally normalized practices such as excessive beautification (*tabarruj*) and deliberate attention-seeking (*tasyabbuh*), emphasizing that true beauty is not merely outwardly aesthetic but must be aligned with inner virtues, including modesty, ethical conduct and spiritual refinement. By doing so, he directly confronts societal expectations that confine women to superficial ideals of beauty. Raja Ali Haji's conceptualization of beauty (1996; 2010) reinforces this stance. He distinguishes between true beauty (*keindahan hakiki*), which refers to aesthetically pleasing appearance, and metaphorical beauty (*keindahan majazi*), which encompasses qualities of appearance, behaviour, and speech that reflect moral and spiritual excellence. This distinction challenges the reductionist view that a woman's worth is determined by her looks alone, asserting that moral and spiritual qualities are integral to beauty. By expanding the notion of beauty beyond the superficial, Raja Ali Haji implicitly challenges gendered assumptions that judge women primarily by physical attractiveness. In his view, a woman's worth and beauty are inseparable from her character, manners, and piety, effectively subverting societal norms that prioritize external appearance over ethical and spiritual development.

However, the construction of the concept of beauty is embedded in Raja Ali Haji's poetry because poetry in Malay culture is deeply intertwined with intellectual and moral expression. Poetry combines the aesthetic beauty of language with profound reflections on society and human conduct. Al-Attas (1972) argues that language and writing reflect the intellect and thought processes of the societies that create them. This view is supported by Braginsky (1993), who considers that the peak of Malay culture rendered the world as a book represented by its literature. Intellectuals and writers who create these works are known as "*pekerjaan kalam*," dedicated to producing works grounded in their responsibility to the Creator (Allah), integrating knowledge, particularly in relation to Islam. One of the responsibilities of these poets is to critique actions or values that contradict Islamic teachings, serving as a manifestation of their approach to conveying legal rulings. Generally, the delivery of Islamic legal rulings by Malay scholars has been through writing works on Islamic jurisprudence. These works reflect the wisdom and dynamism of scholarly culture in Malay society, reinforcing the role of Malay scholars in creating works in Arabic and Jawi as a medium for the dissemination of Islamic jurisprudence. This phenomenon has led to the rapid development of Islamic jurisprudence within society, ensuring that every activity is grounded in solid Sharia principles (Ramli et al. 2016).

In this development, Raja Ali Haji stands out by adopting a different approach, using poetry as a novel method for delivering legal rulings (Sham 2017). This method aligns with the concept of "*taysir al-Fiqh*," which refers to the facilitation provided by Sharia to ease the responsibilities of Muslims in fulfilling their religious duties (Mansor et al., 2023). Al-Qaradawi (2008) defines this concept as "the effort to ease the understanding of and implementation of Islamic jurisprudence for Muslims." According to Mansor et al. (2023), easing the understanding of Islamic jurisprudence involves explaining it in a way that is easily understood while considering contemporary changes. Facilitating the implementation of Islamic jurisprudence refers to making it easier for Muslims to practice.

Thus, Raja Ali Haji's approach to delivering Islamic jurisprudence through poetry represents a form of wisdom that facilitates the understanding of Islamic jurisprudence. The advantages of using poetry as a medium for this delivery include:

- i. **Functionality:** Poetry not only conveys knowledge but also includes elements of entertainment (Hussain 2023).
- ii. **Dense Language:** Poetry employs language that is rich with symbolism, metaphors, and comparisons that accurately convey intended meanings (Hussain 2023).
- iii. **Expression:** Poetry contains elements that express the author's thoughts, feelings, aspirations, and hopes (Saludin 2013).
- iv. **Musical Elements:** Poetry has musical qualities that make it easy to remember and transmit orally (Hussain 2023; Saludin 2013).

This approach aligns with the principles of ease and simplicity. Legal explanations are delivered in a language that is easy to understand and memorize (Al-Qaradawi 2008). Additionally, this method is straightforward and non-complex, which helps engage the community with religion.

From the researcher's perspective, this method of delivering legal rulings addresses social issues that plagued the local society at the time. During Raja Ali Haji's era, the Riau-Lingga community was influenced by Western lifestyles (Taslim 2016). Interactions between the Riau community and Singapore, which was more exposed to Western culture, indirectly pressured the values of Malay Islam. This influence gradually spread through conversations and clothing styles (Munshi 1932). Moreover, cases of moral and religious decline in the Riau Archipelago were documented by Raja Ali Haji's grandnephew, Raja Ali Kelana (1847-1927), in his travel notes to the seven islands of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate. These included neglecting Friday prayers, ignoring mosque activities, theft, gambling, and the prevalence of unrecognized marriages according to Sharia (Kelana 1983).

Therefore, Raja Ali Haji's critiques focus on educating the society to adopt a sense of modesty. In the context of beauty, modesty should be practiced by Malay women as a symbol of decorum and high moral standing (Muhammad et al. 2019). In Malay culture, there are three types of modesty: modesty towards Allah, towards fellow humans, and towards oneself (Susanti 2014). This sense of modesty is reflected in polite language, actions, and clothing. Practicing modesty functions as a mechanism for self-restraint against actions that could damage one's image and honour (Zakaria et al. 2017). Furthermore, Raja Ali Haji noted that qualities of a wise person include knowledge, intellect, and modesty. Although humans share basic instincts with animals, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, and procreation, these three elements are absent in animals. Thus, the absence of these traits in a person renders them comparable to animals, which lack modesty (Abdullah et al. 2017; Muhammad et al. 2019).

In his poetry, Raja Ali Haji has contributed an Islamic perspective on beauty and attire that encompasses not only physical aspects but also adherence to religious values. Through his poetic works, he emphasizes the importance of beauty that does not exceed religious boundaries, delivering this message in a form that is both appealing and easily understood by the Malay community. However, he does not reject beauty as an inherent quality of human beings, especially women. Thus, Raja Ali Haji's efforts to critique actions that contravene Islamic jurisprudence represent a form of wise da'wah. It not only meets the requirements of Sharia and Islamic ethics but also preserves the legacy of Malay women's decorum, using a method of delivery that was well-received by the society of his time, ensuring that the da'wah effectively reaches its target

audience. By highlighting metaphorical beauty (*keindahan majazi*), beauty of conduct, speech and moral disposition, Raja Ali Haji directly challenges the gendered stereotype that women's social value derives primarily from physical appearance. He positions inner virtues as inseparable from outward beauty, undermining societal norms that objectify women.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between women and beauty, often narrowly associated with physical appearance, has frequently given rise to negative stereotypes portraying women as excessive consumers of clothing, cosmetics and accessories in their pursuit of self-confidence. Within Islamic teachings, however, beauty is neither rejected nor trivialised; rather, it is recognised as a natural inclination that must be governed by ethical and spiritual boundaries. Islam permits women to enhance their appearance, provided that such practices remain within the framework of moderation (*wasatiyyah*) and modesty (*al-haya*). In *Syair Siti Sianah*, Raja Ali Haji articulates principles of Islamic jurisprudence concerning beauty and female conduct. These principles are transmitted through poetic expression, reflecting a pedagogical strategy that integrates aesthetic form with moral instruction. By embedding juridical and ethical guidance within verse, Raja Ali Haji demonstrates both his sensitivity to prevailing social issues and his intellectual acumen in contextualising Islamic teachings for the Malay-Muslim community of his time. Thus, *Syair Siti Sianah* should not be regarded merely as a literary composition, rather, it functions as a didactic text that delineates the boundaries of permissible beautification in Islam. The work underscores that Islamic conceptions of beauty extend beyond physical aesthetics to encompass spiritual integrity, moral discipline and social responsibility. In this regard, Raja Ali Haji's contribution remains relevant, offering contemporary audiences a framework for understanding beauty as a balanced, ethical and meaningful practice rooted in Islamic values.

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