

## Gender Perspective in Malay Proverbs

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**Abstract:** The Malay community is rich in heritage, inherited from race by succession. Proverbs, as an oral tradition, are the result of combining intellect, talent, experience, thoughts and norms held. In accordance with this deeply rooted existence within the Malay community, sayings are loaded with elements that guide the community towards a harmonious life; in accordance with particular social convention. Many gender codes have been recorded to determine the gender pattern desired by the community. Given the strength of the proverb as "a tool of social control", this study will identify the factors that influence the construction of gender and the justification behind the picture of the gender system of society. Thus, the research methodology adopted in this paper is a textual analysis by using the collection of Malay proverbs maintained by Abdullah Hussain (2003). Indeed, it will give meaning to the concept of binary-opposition formed by Malay patriarchal hegemony using local wisdom proverbs as evidence.

**Key words:** Gender • Malay • Patriarchal • Binary Opposition

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### INTRODUCTION

Literature is the result of common sense combined with Malay symbolizing the result of combining intellect, talent, experience, ideas and social norms that the communities hold. The paper was produced the Malay psyche in prose or poetry, oral or written. Proverbs, as one treasure of any race, is deeply rooted in the Malay community as a chain of short sentences and served with symbolism, filled with wisdom, truth, moral elements and presented orally to be inherited from generation to generation [1]. According to Ong, this is consistent with its function as a teaching element that can guide society towards harmonious and polite social settings, such as:

"The law itself in oral cultures is enshrined in formulaic sayings and proverbs jurisprudential, which are not mere decorations but themselves constitute the law. A judge in an oral culture is often called upon to articulate sets of relevant proverbs, but of which he can produce equitable decisions in the cases under formal litigation before him [2].

In accordance with this definition, many social codes have been recorded in proverbs to determine the gender pattern desired by the community. This means that the ideal community relations between men and women and how culture affects the construction of gender is clearly illustrated by the proverb. Ong's positive legitimization of opinion on the strength of a proverb as 'a tool of social control' [3]. This study uses the Malay proverb maintained by Abdullah Hussain [4] to identify the factors that influence the construction of gender in society. Does the Malay proverb give a fair view of the social codes of Malay men and women? What is the justification behind such a gender system for the Malay community? Consequently, this study will prove that the proverbs is an optimistic genre of oral tradition which still intact and used by the society to this day in order to study of gender system of society [5].

**Gender as a Terminology:** The study of 'gender' was originally called the 'sociological study of women' [6]. According to Firth, over thirty years ago, the term 'gender' was not found in the index of any scientific paper;

but now it is widely used in discussions of feminist anthropology [7]. Furthermore, research on gender perspectives in Malaysia have taken about three decades to arrive by several scholars. This may be due to the refusal of the idea that radical feminists fought for equal rights, as in the West. When examining the use of the term 'gender', it was first used by Oakley in 1972, in his book "Sex, Gender and Society", when she distinguished between the terms 'sex' and 'gender' [8].

Accordingly, 'gender' is a term that has both psychological and cultural connotations [9]. If the exact classification of gender (sex) is men and women, then 'gender' refers more to the nature of being 'masculine' and 'feminine'; whereby the second term is said to be free from the bondage of biology [10]. This is consistent with the opinion of Wood on the growth of gender in society, namely "[...] gender grows out of a society's values, beliefs and preferred ways of organizing collective life. A culture constructs and sustains meanings of gender by investing biological sex with social significance [11]".

Research on the Malay community finds that there are certain terms in the determination of gender within the community. For example, the use of the term 'male' (man-masculine) and 'female' (woman-feminine) very clearly show a 'binary- opposition' between the sexes. 'Male' (jantan) implies strength and courage to be owned by every man in determining the scale of manhood and 'female' (betina) just gives a negative to women. This means that the woman dubbed 'female' (betina) are women that undergo sexual life negatively, or avoid violating social norms prescribed within the community. This phenomenon explains the existence of a contrary relationship to the meaning of sexuality in relation to men and women. Men are encouraged to have a 'strong sexual drive,' while women have 'strong sexual drives' (concupiscence) will be viewed with suspicion and contempt by society, as described by Lim Kim Hui that, "These moral attitudes towards sex seem to represent and symbolize the Malay male's stereotyping and taboos towards their male counterparts [...]. Certain sentiments, in which the emotions of 'male - chauvinism' prevailed and this sentiment discriminates stereotyping against women within certain aspects and the men or guys are worshipped" [12].

**Gender System of Traditional Malay:** The Malay gender system is strongly influenced by the history of religions, customs and cultures. All three of these elements are responsible for shaping their thoughts and viewpoints; especially in the formation of rules or laws, to ensure

harmony in life. Islam came to the region in the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD and brought a dynamic change to the lives of the Malay community; whether in external or internal terms [13]. Islam is considered a guide towards a new era; known as the age of the "modern," because knowledge of reason and rationalism or community systems emphasize individual freedom to be free from the grip of irrational beliefs [14]. The arrival of Islam in the Malay world also marked a paradigm shift to cover the entire life of the Malay's worldview, values, ethics and principles specific to survival.

Consequently, Islam has established the role and status of women as being 'complementary' to men. The creation of Adam and Eve was given a clear interpretation of the Malay community that incidents of men and women are mutually complementary and need each other. Women in Islam are as perfect as man [15]. However, in the Malay community, men hold a dominant position over women. They relate to the origin of the creation of Adam and Eve and the biological nature of both sexes to directly provide a different perspective. For example, men are believed to be more physically strong than women. This is consistent with the gender roles adopted by the Malay community, since they were children. Daughters had to devote part of their time to help their mothers doing domestic work, while men did heavy work in public spaces [16]. 'Binary opposition' forms the roles and responsibilities of children when they grow up. Indirectly, this difference will be the basis of gender relations in the Malay community, as if the 'ruling gender' which violates an individual would be considered 'deviant' to even be eliminated from a family and lose his membership within community groups [17].

The Malay community identifies that women are weak and highly depend on males to lead around domestic spaces. Malays Muslims associate women as defamatory triggers that could discredit the good name of the family. Furthermore, women are considered 'less sweet' if they engage in activities in public spaces. The Malays have a feeling of 'prejudice' against women; especially women who are active in public spaces, where they are defamed as 'aggressive' or 'shameless'. However, there are certain advantages that can only filled by women to allow them out of the domestic domain, if they have specific skills needed by the community. The jobs of midwife and healers for example, afford an opportunity for women to be independent, in accordance with social needs and desires. Wazir Jahan Karim argues that Islam and Malay policies lead males to be empowered; especially in decision-making, whether within the family, village,

or state [18]. Normally, only women are given the opportunity to immerse themselves out of the public eye; when it comes to the role of social norms and customs.

The power-range of Malay community leadership, either formal or informal, often rests on the shoulders of men. They believe that men can maintain good social relationships and are able to suppress the occurrence of defamation, which could undermine moral and ethical values. This is underpinned by the values of Islam that emphasize men as leaders [19]. Furthermore, men are said to be more rational in making judgments than women. Islam is a religion that emphasizes fairness between men and women. This is stated in the Qur'an, such as in Surah al-Baqarah (verses 30 and 282) and Surah al-Nisa (verses 34 and 176). However, Islamic intellectuals use these verses to strengthen the existing gender hierarchy in society. Viewing them successfully strengthens the patriarchal system as stated by Ibn Sina. He was a scholar of Islam that held that a husband should make his wife busy; handling important things in life, such as his family, managing the children and taking care of his servants [20]. If she is not busy with a number of these assignments, then her mind will be blank (empty minded), causing her to be directed towards a prohibited act, like other men (captured using beauty from fashion designers, showing off their clothes and wearing cosmetics). Idris Zakaria quoting Anawati review, argues that according to Ibn Sina, a woman can not think of anything else except beautifying herself, in which this act would demean her [21]. Avicenna's opinion on Muslim women follows a label of lust without rational thinking. This argument is elaborated by Etin Anwar in that the thoughts of many Islamic scholars have actually been influenced by the heritage of the local gender mold, thought to interpret Islam as one more man than women, despite the Qur'an clearly stating that both sexes are the same and equal in the eyes of the Creator [22]. Indirectly, it can be said that Muslim women have lived in centuries of social and cultural systems that do not support their existence. However, Muslim women are not aware of 'self-alienation' in society, as their system of life enjoys a strong silence, until they accept it as a 'truth' [23].

**Gender Perspective in Malay Proverbs:** Klages quoting Derrida, said life cannot 'escape' a reality that has an opposite relationship (binary-opposition) [24]. Such a division would be rated as high culture and part of the primary culture (positive and negative). Accordingly, the Malay proverb 'recording' life 'and' social controls' in the community system will be analyzed to establish what the hegemony of 'binary opposition' is.

**Positive Perspective of Women:** Malay proverbs positively reflect upon women, particularly those who are often viewed cynically by the public; especially the status of 'widows' (janda). For example, the proverb 'the more you wash clothes, the brighter they will become' means a widower being more beautiful than a young girl. If scrutinized, this proverb's element of "sexual" commends the widow who is more beautiful and decoratively clever than during the days of her virginity. A similar phenomenon was also found in the proverb that says, 'like a new widow that wakes, is attached to a scale that assesses a woman's beauty'. Conducting a new 'awakening' reflects the realities of the natural beauty of women; especially when linking as belonging to 'widow' (sijanda) always keep herself in a state to manage and capture every moment. Indirectly, this proverb is capable of lifting the 'self esteem' of widows to remain valued and needed within communities and families.

#### **Negative Perspective of Women**

**The virgin is not married:** Already at the door saying 'load' clearly demonstrates how the Malay community view their daughter as a 'burden' to be paid for as long as she is not married. 'Load' is an inconvenience to bear or incur without any economic or social benefits. They believe that daughter just sits at home or does domestic work, but boys can contribute their strength in agriculture; and eventually be able to generate income. It's even more sad if no one is willing to propose; a daughter will continue to be labeled 'dishonored'; like something that has no worth. A young lady will be considered 'bad luck' to a family, because they have to support until the end of their life. Hence, they are referred to as 'a burden on the door' just waiting to be taken by those who are interested in marrying, in order to escape the responsibility of the parents, who are struggling to care for them until adulthood.

A greater impact is given to elderly virgins (andartu). A child will continue to be treated as a burden, either economically or socially. Therefore, a specific proverb was created for a spinster who will not be spoken of, as 'a wilting flower does not create desire'. 'Wilting flowers' are waiting for the time to fall and cannot contribute anything to their owners. That's why virgins practically woo 'to her flower, yet desire beetles'. Such was the strength of patriarchy within the Malay community, to put 'man' as the key in the lives of women, regardless of the happiness factor or the destruction of a woman's life,

if she chose wrongly after marriage. This is a clear case of a binary concept in the Malay community. Thus, the advantage is given to men as being nice, strong, the best and flawless creation of Allah. Families who still have old maids as senior citizens continue to look at people as a great error for continuing to 'save' them. A spinster's presence will continue to burden a family; especially if the mother and father have died. The responsibility of caring for their sisters as direct family continues to be a burden on a family until the end of their lives. That binary concept continues as long as they do not undertake marriage and are able to build their own life.

**Lassie Daughter:** The proverb 'like a virgin already married' and 'like a virgin daughter' signifies that the virgin is lazy and dirty. The Malay community is very concerned about the personal perfection of girls in the family. Perfection, in terms of behavior and manners, is emphasized for when they get married as a wife and a mother, who is ideal for the family. However, if there are girls who are lazy, they will be vilified; as per the proverb above. This is because the society's gender system sets women as household managers, who need ideal personal behaviors. Thus, if they can not manage themselves, how could they bear the perfection of the certainly greater responsibilities as a wife and mother. However, there is no public censure for being a tad lazy or dirty. Lazy men is something that is not taken seriously by Malays; while the man is the head of the family he will have to prepare himself with a variety of skills to be the best example in the home he has built. However, the provision of gender weighs more on women than men for every weakness or downside.

**Women:** The proverb 'picking the mala flower' means a man who wants to marry an older woman. The Malay community is very concerned about the age range in marriage between husband and wife. The ideal marriage (in the eyes of society) is a marriage where the husband has overcome age. This is because the maturity of a person is often associated with the age; not to mention that a husband should be wise and not just the master of the household. Malay society look down upon men who want to marry women older than them; especially when it involves a very long distance. Symbolism of 'mala flower' like marriage is insulting. This is because the 'mala flower' or 'frangipani flowers' (*Plumeria Acuminata*) are a flower that is frequently found in Malays cemeteries, which represent human death. Thus, 'mala flower' means a married woman who just counting their days until death.

The Malay community is concerned about sex in marriage, because older women face menopause, which will affect their fertility and health. Accordingly, sexual satisfaction is the only precedence of men, without regards to their purpose of claiming a marriage bond.

**Women Who Have Lost Their Chastity:** Patriarchal hegemony results in powerful men determining women's dignity. The proverb 'like sugar cane swallowed water, the rest discarded', (*i.e.*, discarded when useless or blooming flower beetles, that have flown already from wilting flowers) means a woman who has lost her virginity, then left without charge. This fate must be accepted by women as a result of their negligence to 'lose their virginity without the bond of marriage'. They are thought of as 'not needed' or without value. Removed without taking into account their services or sacrifices; especially by men who play freely without any punishment. If caught and convicted, their error does not reflect badly on family men like it does on women. Western scholars, like the psychoanalyst Freud, also glorify 'patriarchal domination' in life by classing women as being jealous of "male genitals" (*i.e.*, penis envy). He also lamented the 'penis' as being a symbol of powerful and creative people (power and creativeness). Andro-centric hegemony continues to put power in the hands of men, as being the most powerful gender in society. The issue of the 'Healthy Sex Life' of a daughter is very important when reflecting the dignity of her family over 'virginity' of a son. Hence, the term virgin 'chaste' arises; specially created to show the youth of a daughter, but not for young children. Furthermore, the Malay community's annoyance at a daughter's 'loss of virginity' out of wedlock should be viewed as 'easier to keep the buffalo ilk of a virgin'. Family honor scratched from his daughter will be borne by the family until the very end. They will not only be condemned, but also ostracized by society. It is unfair to punish the whole family, but this is a reality that must be borne by Malay families receiving this disaster. Thus was born several other idioms of the social issues of a daughter, such as 'rations already licked by a lizard', 'oil drilled by a squirrel', 'topped flower bud, fruit eaten or drunk', 'be fruitful first and blossom later', 'rarely eaten by the fruit of the apes', 'punched rat' and others. All women are the key to the preservation of the self-esteem of a family. A man is thought of as a coward if he marries a woman who is not a virgin anymore. The title 'pack willing' was given to another man who was willing to marry for the sake of saving family face. This group may be paid or married without difficulty; providing a dowry

(marriage free), which is common in Malay wedding customs. It is clear that the concept of a 'Healthy Sex Life' is important for the Malay community is lost without the bonds of marriage and will give lasting shame and destroy the self-esteem of every family member.

**Woman as a Prostitute:** The Malay community signifies street girls or prostitutes as 'well on the street' that can be inhaled or enjoyed to get rid of thirst by anyone. This is where Malay sexuality is visible when the community is concerned about women voluntarily being engaged in prostitution without counting the men who subscribe to it. Degradation will continue to be thrown at women, while men are free to wreak their desires without social punishment. The use of 'well' reflects upon a person's ability to deliver continuous service to the droplets of water (life). Furthermore, the well owners say no (publicly owned) and are able to quench their thirst of anyone in contrast to the well wearer 'petted', just giving back to the family who built it alone. Thus, the low status of women who sell themselves as prostitutes are considered distasteful and abhorrent by society and are to be blamed as one of the main causes of social and moral decadence. The Malay community blames the weakness of women; but men who visit prostitutes are not labeled despite the fact that an act does not happen, if 'only one hand is clapping'. In reality, men still miss the social impacts of this disease, while women continue to be afflicted with accusations and insults; without having the causes investigated that result in them slipping into the social abyss.

**Women in the Shadow of Their Husband:** Islamic morality is very important among people, whether male or female. However, women are looked upon as the source of all human desires, as claimed in Surah an-Nur verse 31, that "Say O Muhammad to the believing women, let them hold views and preserve their genitals and do not display their ornaments except what appears". Based on the evidence in the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet about lust and women, Malay society has published a number of gender-specific codes that must be adhered to by women. Those who violate these provisions will be labeled as a 'whore', which is a term that is not only demeaning but also takes away the woman's self-esteem. Other idioms also give a negative connotation of a woman as a master of the Big Dipper 'two' and 'Catfish two-hole', which means that she duplicates her daughter. For example, saying 'Catfish two hole', which clearly reflects her physical genitalia (two catfish, two penises) and female

genitals (vagina hole-a), because of the reality of how two catfish can compete in getting a mud hole. This is one of the proverbs that contains overt sexuality to describe the refusal of society to an act of disgust and contempt.

**Women Seeking a Partnership:** The proverbs 'like mortar searching for pestle', 'find the well bucket' and 'grass looking for a horse' signifies life balance or perfection in pairs. Women represent the mortar and the male partner represents the pestle. Assuming Malay women as a 'mortar', which is intrinsically static (not moving), instead of men (welcome) who are always in motion (mobile). But if the 'static' tries to find the 'mobile', this indicates an imbalance in Malays gender relations. Therefore, women should be in the domain of 'inactive' (domestic) waiting for him to call (active-public domain) [25]. This statement clarifies how the system can be very influential in determining a gender-dominated domain assigned to men and women. Thus, women in patriarchal society groups must comply. If they leave this domestic domain, thus trying to determine who is the spouse, they will be labeled as having low morals. The Malay community is very concerned when behavior is deemed immoral. The term 'face for shame' or 'no sharp nose-cheek like a wheelbarrow' is often leveled at women due to the 'guts' of this.

**Women Who Are Sick:** Malay women are often portrayed as the most beautiful creation of Allah. Unfortunately, for a woman who has physical imperfections, the society created the proverbs 'like a dog litter of six', 'living bandage hides the bone', 'living bandage skin bones', "bones of the skin", 'if there is no skin on separated bone' and 'like a kobeng lizard'. This is because being thin or obese is linked to a woman's health. Thin as 'lizard kobeng' is just like waiting for the 'day of death'. More people associate proverbs with women, because the perfection of the family is highly dependent on the health of the woman. Factors of infertility, male sexual pleasure and the proper care of children are placed onto the shoulders of women. If women have problems, like the proverbs above describe, this would interfere with her family. Clearly, the proverb 'like a dog litter of six' gives a very negative connotation; applying the symbolism of a 'dog' is demeaning to women. According to Imran Ho-Abdullah, the use of the word 'dog' in a Malay proverb is usually applied to the weak, the despicable, the evil and the unknowledgeable [26]. According to him, this metaphor is based on folklore (folk culture) as being related to a hierarchy of cultures and experience of animal

communities, such as dogs and cats. Thus, like a 'dog that breeds six' describes an individual who is not manageable, has a dirty appearance, lean physique and is disgusting to approach. More so, if this proverb is applied to women, of course the stigma is multiplied over that of men.

**Women Who Are Impolite:** The Malays have a certain perception of women. Women are considered to be ideal as both a wife and a mother and should be gentle and polite when speaking, loyal and maintain a feminine identity that is not considered 'deviant' by society [27]. Consequently, women who fall outside of this gender ruling will be labeled with a variety of negative symbols, using proverbs such as 'screaming like a mother cat'. Where this is the state of a restless cat, often occurring during the mating season; meaning women who cannot control themselves in public, by saying harsh words aloud. However, if a man yells or screams public, it's fine; because men need a strong voice to display their masculinity. However, if women speak out loud, their words will be associated with a loss of civility and moral inferiority [28]. Women who mention vanity and pride in themselves, are labeled as a cat that is not bothered with its surroundings, like marking the arrival of the mating season. Similarly, these women behave cruelly like young tiger cubs. These women are difficult to approach and may cause quarrels or fights if their feelings are hurt. Thus, their behavior is associated with the 'new breeding tigers' *i.e.*, tigers or cats that are ruthless after having just given birth. Her children are protected by not allowing any interference. Therefore, women who can not control their anger or lust is taken seriously by the Malays; enough to produce proverbs that are specific to women, who violate the social settings specified the community.

**Positive and Negative Perspectives of Men:** Most proverbs don't positively about women's issues, but do address men's positive issues. They mostly hover around the shortcomings of both men and women in a society that need to be avoided, are learned and taken seriously by all parties [29].

Several proverbs mention positive attitudes of men who should be emulated and admired. For example, saying 'golden cage, perch amber' which means a man waits for his wife's presence with a perfect home, complete with utensils. This proverb is actually a positive encouragement for men to take being head of the household seriously. Marriage and family requires a great deal of commitment from both men and women. As such, mental and physical preparation should be taken into

account before a wedding is held. This proverb is constructed as a positive motivation for men to be better prepared in every way; before setting foot into the realm of the household. Another proverb, which also characterizes men positively, is 'Like a regular spiked spinning top, not spiked roaming,' which means, a married man that somehow always runs back to his house. This proverb clearly shows that the concept of loyalty is owned by Malay men. This proverb was most likely produced to cover the attitude of distrust of the husband and the wife not being content to sit at home and have a liking for free time. This directly reflects the positive characteristics of Malay men and his family, who keeps returning from his travels. Imagine how powerful this phenomenon is and the importance it gives to Malay community families.

Other Malay proverbs negatively perceive men. For example, 'gem good bonding wrong'. This proverb means that educated women want to marry men low morals. Marriage is a gamble for women. Happiness is depends on the intended husband; especially in terms of background and education. Therefore, Malays are concerned about equality and compatibility; in terms of quality of life, perceptions and the values held by both spouses. As the sayings go 'the same hornbill hornbill, common sparrow sparrow', 'sit low, stand tall', 'like a nut sliced ??in two' and several others. Marriage is not emphasized as an equal guarantee of happiness. If a woman marries a man of low morals, this means that women are willing to gamble on the fate of their marriage. Malays regard the husband as being the master in determining the level of happiness achieved in family life. Religious factors and family background determines the character of an individual. Therefore, if a woman blindly selects a man of low morals, surely her regret will be

reached during their marriage. This is consistent with the above proverb that good gems should be tied to gold or silver tightly when wearing them. This proves that the Malay community; especially the families of women, are concerned individuality about the candidates that their daughters choose to marry.

Malays also respect the rights of house visitors in the saying 'released the child from the lap, fed the monkeys in the wild' and the husband back hunger, cook food for travellers'. These proverbs reflect the great respect that Malays have of their own families. However, there is a proverb that is not taken lightly by those on the 'guest list', that says, 'if keeping chickens, foxes are not tamed; later, at least the wind,' which means if there is a little girl, do not tolerate evil men coming as a guest to

your house. This is the only maxim that demands first examining the background of house guests. What's more, if there are any girls in the house, this would invite disaster if care is not taken to identify guests who visit. Furthermore, this is an example proverb that puts the blame on men as the trigger of a disaster.

Some specific symbolisms in Malay proverbs address men who are cowardly or afraid; especially in defending their rights. For example, 'chicken in hand snatched by eagle' and 'lost badgers turn golden deer', which means the situation of a man who should be strong, smart, or protective of women, has vanished. The above proverb shows that when a wife runs away to other men, the woman would be humiliated enough to married another better man. The Malay community can not accept a man who is timid. This will tarnish his family honor without defense. This is where the term 'male child' (anak jantan) encourages men to maintain courage when concerned with human dignity. If a man's wife has fled to follow other men, should a man (who calls himself her husband) sit idly by and allow this event to happen? He should wake up and defend himself, because his wife symbolizes his values and self-esteem. The title 'cowardly' is given to a man who is scared of women, 'like a cat afraid of jerky', 'turning east to west'. Then calling men who seem to be timid, because they break the gender stereotypes set by society [30].

**Balance of Gender Perspective:** However, in the 'binary opposition' between men and women in Malay society, there is also a saying that demands a balanced perspective between men and women. For example, proverbs depicting men and women together, towards evil or in conjunction, complement one another. Some proverbs portray men and women as triggers of moral decadence and evil, such as 'driver is a dead herring', 'fly of course find yaws', 'meet birah with yams (*i.e.*, see evil men with evil woman)', 'like flies swarming to a wreckage' (men who meet at the shrew house), 'as a dog with a bone (evil men bring evil women)' and several other proverbs. Coat fly-yaws, birah-yam, dead herring, dead flies and dog-carcass, describe that bilateral relations are complementary to each other, but have negative connotations. Animals are used to describe the act of baseness and wickedness of men and women's individual violations of social norms. Thus, evil men are synonymous with the nature of animals or insects [31].

The Malays also constitute a fair number of proverbs that reflect the needs of men and women. However, not many were compared to negative proverbs about women

and this phenomenon illustrates how the Malay community recognizes the importance of equality and mutual need between the two sexes. For example, idioms like 'pestle and mortar', 'sour on land, fish in the sea, also meet in a pot' and 'resistant wedge mule', 'met with a material wedge' and 'like sliced betel nut' are interlaced in Malay proverbs that describe how men and women are still considered equal in the sight of God and faith, where height is the only difference between the two; as in Al Quran in Surah al-Baqarah, verse 30, al-Nahl verse 97, al-Nisa verse 124, al-Dhariyat verse 56, al-Hujurat, verse 13 and verse 165 of al-An'am [to mention but a few].

## CONCLUSION

The terminology of 'gender' often grows inline with human development and culture. The term 'gender' is often confused with 'sex' and 'gender'. There are five categories of gender, which include males and females, bisexual, lesbian and gay. The development of this terminology is a reaction to the living arrangements and social development of society. Western society began fighting for gender equality in the late 20th century. However, for generations, Malay-Muslim community idioms have been against the right to freedom of 'genders'. Through proverbs of thought, culture and a world view of society, the Malays record of gender serves as a guide for present and future generations. It is indirectly evident that many proverbs were created specifically for women, in stating that man as the primary subject. However, even though proverbs use insults and innuendo, this does not mean that women are looked down upon by the Malay community. In reality, the presence of women is considered important, because the self-esteem and dignity of family and the household depends on women. Prestige, in the eyes of the parents, depends on the 'purity' or virginity of the child in care (*i.e.*, leading a healthy sex life). Upholding the love of a husband for his wife means personal and family dignity is upheld. The strength of youth as the pillar of society is concerned with the personal power of women; as mothers within the family. Consequently, many limitations and obstacles contained within Malay proverbs have inspired women, because they act as "determinants" of harmony and the well-being of society.

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