

# Pre- and Post-Colonial Malaysian Community in Samad Said's *Salina*<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Literature has a historical base and literary works are not the products of a single consciousness but by countless social and cultural forces. In order to understand literature, one has to take recourse to both culture and society that gave rise to it in the first place. The process of commemorating the history and deciphering memory in fiction gives a colossal territory of talk in the literary field. The aim of this paper is to examine post-colonization as depicted in *Salina*, a verifiable fiction of the 21st century which appropriates the historical backdrop of colonisation in Malaya. Despite the ambitious content, Samad Said had never burrowed deep enough into his characters, or far enough into the social complexity of the times and the historical aspect which hinder readers from different social background to comprehend the story. This study will examine the pre and post-colonial community to unwind the significance of the content by considering the work within the framework of prevailing ideas and assumptions in its historical era. With respect to these relations, in this study textuality, intertextuality, historicity and contextuality have been attempted to be put forth to interpret the connection between these writings and author history which they were composed. In this exploration, I will likewise utilize this masterpiece to highlight the ways in which the history colonisers in Malaya are being represented through the lens of social memory to show how a contemporary Malaysian writer still remembers afresh the traumatic memory of our war in our history.

**Keywords:** *Post-colonization; Pre-colonization; Historicity; contextuality; intertextuality*

## INTRODUCTION

Literature has a historical base and literary works are not the products of a single consciousness but by countless social and cultural forces. In order to understand literature one has to take recourse to both culture and society that gave rise to it in the first place. A literary work which use retrospection as an insightful contraption, the conduct by which an occasion is recalled, perceived or retold, named as a recurring re-visioning, voice, space and rights to the untold testimonies while maintaining up the functions of history, as an knowledgeable facts of the request of the event in history. As per literature critic Hayden White perceived:

*Historical narratives are not only model of past events and processes, but also metaphorical statements which suggest a relation of similitude between such events and processes and the story types that we conventionally use to endow the events of our lives with culturally sanctioned meaning.*  
(White, 2002)

Malaysia is a rich country with its plural ethnic background taking baby steps into the literacy world. Malaysia is made up of the Malay Peninsula, known prior to 1963 as Malaya, and the two states Sabah and Sarawak on the Borneo Island. 'Malaysia', an independent constitutional monarchy, was established on September 16, 1963 when, Malaya

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united with Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah. In 1965 Singapore withdrew from Malaysia and became a separate state. In 1966 Sarawak and Sabah were, designated East Malaysia and former Malaya was named West Malaysia.

In 1972, West Malaysia was renamed Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia became Sarawak and Sabah. The Malay Peninsula and the islands surrounding it, did receive sporadic attention in some writings by the colonialists, namely the British. Many who served in Malaya's administrative services wrote of the adventures and misadventures in the jungles of Malaya and Borneo.

*Salina* (1961) by the Malaysian author A. Samad Said which is set after the British colonization and the Japanese occupation, tells the story of a multi-cultural people living in the same residence owned by an Indian immigrant who wishes to go back to India. The story doesn't focus on one single character but moves around showing different people and their lives. The story is named *Salina* after the main female character Siti Salina who works as a prostitute after she lost her home and family in a bomb during the war, she is living with her lover Abdul-Fakar who verbally and physically abuse her until she find her strength. The story also has different female characters and roles such as Nahidah and her step mother Zarina, there is also the new arrivals Katijah a widow and her son Hilmy. The story is being told from different perspectives each characters tells us something new or a hidden factor at that time, hence each character expresses an ideology or a belief that was found at that time.

This study will examine the pre-colonial Malaysian community in the selected literary text and the social value such as peaceful multiculturalism, family values and political stability. Furthermore, this study will investigate the post-colonial Malaysian community in the selected literary text such as corruption, broken family values and educational-political and social turmoil.

This study will provide the first outlook at the Malaysian community pre and post-colonial periods limited to the literary text and focusing on the main plot actions and the main characters. This paper will be textually limited to the Malaysian text *Salina* by Samad Said. Furthermore, this study will be theoretically limited to cultural criticism and post-colonial theory.

### **SAMAD SAID BIOGRAPHY**

A. Samad Said which is known also by the name of Abdul Samad Bin Mohamad Said, he uses the name of A. Samad Said in his literary publication as a pin name. He is born on April 9 of 1935 in Durian Tunggal set in Malacca Malaysia.

He finished his primary studies during the time of WWII in Singapore, during the Japanese occupation on Malaysia he attended the Sekolah Jepun high school for only three months only but later on he finished his studies at Victoria school which is located in Singapore during the years of 1940-1956. He graduated with a senior certificate from Cambridge University branch which is found in Singapore.

His worked at first as a clerk in a public hospital but his passion and impassion were toward writing. He became a full time author during his time in Utusan Melayu where he wrote several poems and short stories. His first poem *The Dead Crow* which was later on translated into English became part of the Malaysian education system; his poem is being taught at the secondary schools of English/Malaysian literature class from 2000 until 2009.

He spends his time writing literature and teaching creative writing, one of his most notable literary works which is *Salina*. *Salina* tells the story of a prostitute in the pre independence Singapore which was also being translated into English.

During May 1976 he was elected and named by the Malay Literature communities and many of the country's Linguists as the Pejuang Sastera which means "Literary Exponent" within the same years he was awarded with The Southeast Asian Writer Award and in 2015 he declared his participant in the 'DAP' which is the Democratic Action Party as an activist where he mentioned that they represent the "truly Malaysian Party which is clean, focused and with a genuine Malaysian Dream"

It said that he spend his time in the Malaysian KTM "subway station" looking and watching people living their lives and from them he can write different stories about their identities and what is their hopes and dreams.



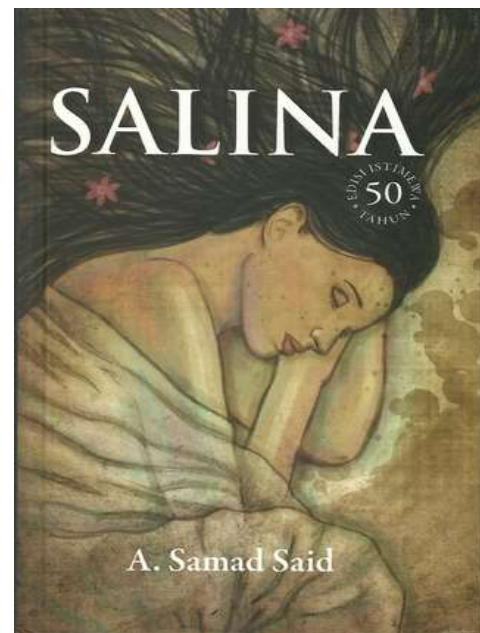
### SUMMARY OF SALINA

This powerful and moving novel revolves around generations of women who encounter love, war, duty and hope. A beautifully-woven novel that portrays an intense feminine figure that holds the cradle of life in her hands through its story title; this already forecasts to us that the story will primarily revolve around the courage of the women who handles life's shortcomings in time periods.

Salina is a beautiful piece by A. Samad Said which shows the short coming of a society who just got their independence after a terrorising colonisation. Siti Salina is a lady who lost everything in the war and forced to become prostitute. She is a woman with money who is kind and generous and quick to help. She has a lover, Abdul Fakar who is a womanizer and glad to live off Salina. He mistreats Salina who genuinely loves him.

Salina finally frees herself from Abdul Fakar's ungrateful clutches and starts a new life. Sunarto is a trishaw-puller, and out of gratitude to his late adopted father, he supports the dead man's off springs Mansur and Nahidah, along with their avaricious step-mother, Zarina who finds fault with the family, frustrated with the little income Sunarto brings in and she forces her step-daughter Nahidah to become a waitress. Nahidah is raped, and, unable to live with her disgrace in the village, she run away to Penang. Hilmy went looking for Salina but she had moved away, until he finally finds her and discovers that Salina is in love with him

The setting of the story spans through the post Japanese Occupation period, around the year 1947 to the year 1957, in Malaya, currently known as Malaysia. A crucial yet colourful period of the Malayan history, the author has chosen a very appealing setting in which he exploited to his advantage.



“The social drama and the community is one of the most interesting aspects in the novel, which is why it was such popular for more than half a century. In a way through the characters, community and the setting readers can feel a form of realism and surprisingly also the feminist element” (Syahira Sharif, 2014)

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysia had witness restorative, social, political, religious change near to its great nature and homes the nation over. Before the division Malaysia was joined as one country under one nationality. All the assorted ethnic had lived under toluene course of action with each other, such multicultural occasions could make their own national identity inside a comparable country.

At the start Malaysia or more customarily ensured as Malaya is driven by Sultanate. In the pre-colonial period, Malaya was isolated into little districts which were represented by different Sultanates in perspective of their vitality. The chronicled setting of Malaya in a general sense begins with Malacca which was gold cost of Asia. Malaccan Sultanate set up his inheritance and extend his regime over the land with port of Malacca on the west cost of Malay Peninsula which turned into the start of Malaya and besides the beginning of colonizers' favourable position.

The pre-colonised Malay was about profound quality, confidence, and craftsmanship. The degree and nature of the progression of articulations of the human experience, especially in model and configuration had said to be the most brilliant and supernatural and ever been found. Pre-colonised Malay society was dealt with essentially around agrarian age. The Malays were indeed accomplished seafarers and this is reflected in their certainty adrift as the transportation at the time are huge boats which may not ready to achieve the port without appropriate guidance and navigation aid. It is similarly a likelihood that the typical geographical territory of the land pull in dealers and merchandisers all around the world.

All of the Malay custom and norms are the formal structure of the state have their beginnings in fifteenth-century Malacca. Indeed, the political structure was designed according to the fifteenth century Malacca Sultanate. Malacca additionally added to the dissemination of Islam in the entire locale. The Malay History "Sejarah Melayu" sees the acknowledgment of Islam as a motivated occasion which affirmed the kingdom's predominant status. Malacca also contributed the clothing regulation, music, dance and diversions and empowered the far-reaching utilization of Malay as a dialect of various courts. It set extraordinary accentuation on correct behavior, fitting discourse and learning of Malay custom or 'adat'.

However, as the well-developed Malaya opens up for more opportunity, the colonisers slowly stake their claim in Malaya. The claim of Malacca by the Portuguese flagged the start of Western impact. Pioneer arrive enactment which brought the land under state or private control demonstrated a major hit to moving development and obviously made the conditions for landlordism and laborer tenure. The best land came to be utilized for British business and other entrepreneur interests. However, when the Japanese came and claimed control of Malaya from the British, it turned into a period of incredible hardship and terror for Malaysians. The Occupation upset the intensely trade arranged Malayan economy and tossed the firmly requested, racially compartmentalized frontier business framework into chaos.

Colonialism got imbalances terms of riches, ethnic foundation and class. Malays were limited to the country regions, where they worked in the fields and were limped by neediness, while the individuals from the exchanging class, who were to a great extent Indians, Arabs, Persians, Europeans and Chinese, lived sumptuous lives. Disparity was an installed highlight of that framework. The interest for work in the Malaysian domains expanded significantly in the mid-twentieth century when world markets requested gigantic supplies of tin and rubber for the car and other motorized businesses.

Empowered by British colonialism, mass relocation of Chinese and Indians occurred in the mid-nineteenth century. These settlers were permitted to enter the nation's assets. They came as a substantial work power to make every necessary step the Malays couldn't do. The Indian relocation of fundamentally incompetent workers, who were from the low stations in southern India, was arranged and coordinated by the colonisers and turned into the principle ranch for rubber and palm oil work compel. Indians from different parts of India came as agents and semi-skilled laborers and to work in paramilitary administrations. They carried alongside them their religion, traditions and dialects. The ethno-etymological structure of the Indian populace is exceptionally mind-boggling.

Chinese relocation, on the other hand, was colossal. The agitated conditions in southern China and the incident of the Taiping resistance in 1852 went about as a boost to Chinese movement. Some paid their own entries, subsequent to bribing neighborhood authorities to get a leeway. Numerous went under the credit-ticket framework where the sinkeh or 'new man' bound himself to a Chinese boss as a by-product of his section from China. The business acquired full ideal to his work for a specific timeframe amid which the sinkeh was sustained, dressed, housed and given a little stipend.

Nineteenth century British approach had changed Malaysia from a gathering of Malay states into a plural, multi-ethnic culture. The unhindered movement of Chinese and Indian labour for the tin-mines and rubber estates had proceeded with until 1921, however by then they as of now dwarfed the indigenous Muslim Malays. The British colonisers, for the most part, respected the Chinese and Indian migrants as workers who, generally, had little goal of making a home in Malaya. Evidently, war and the Japanese occupation (1942-1945) changed the whole concept with the outcome that the non-Malay people group moved toward becoming pilgrims.

Educated Malays from a non-elite foundation, especially the individuals who had been chosen as educators, were profoundly frustrated by the state of rustic Malays whom they saw as in reverse and mistreated. They were concerned additionally that the next generation of Malay's, the customary gentry whom the British had kept up as leaders of the peninsular states and were instructing at the prestige Malay College to keep on ruling the Malays, appeared to be nearer to the British than to their own particular individuals.

At that point, Malays trusted British approaches had added to the destitution and backwardness of the Malays and they faulted the vast scale movement of Chinese and Indian laborers into the nation for taking occupations from the nearby populace. They didn't take note of a further actuality which ended up evident just considerably later that by urging Malays to cultivate rice and farming as a job, the British were confining them to the minimum lucrative of interests and one which fixing them to a rustic and limited financial presence.

The statistics prove added to the uneasiness of the individuals who were stressed over the situation of the Malays. The statistics figures for 1921 uncovered that together, Chinese and Indians topped Malays population. The first speculation of British that Chinese and Indian immigrants would return to their homeland was undermined by the way that expanding numbers were changing their occupations as workers start to wind up retailers, assistants, and little scale lenders, with resources that were not promptly versatile. It illustrates a clear picture that they were making their homes in the towns of the Peninsula and their kids were being ingested into the lower levels of the colonial organization.

Malay's who turned out to be exceptionally stressed over their situation in a multi-racial nation requested that the Malay dialect ought to be the National dialect of the nation. The financial success of the Chinese caused the Malays to request certain assurances as to keep up their political and social position after Independence and the formal amazement of their dialect was one intends to accomplish this.

The economical setting of the ten years after independence saw no different between racial grinding, aside from incidental Malay daily paper reactions of Chinese and Indian migration and the developing monetary inconsistencies amongst Malays and non-Malays. However, in the election of 1969, an upheaval of ethnic and racial brutality stunned the country and detonating the myth of Malaya as an amicable plural society is broken. The uproars began between the Malays and Chinese however included every other gathering all the while. The pre-and post-May 1969 decades were two noteworthy times of national improvement following Malaysia's autonomy in 1957.

In 1969, a terror and violent riot broke out and shook the peace and harmony that develop over years. Despite the fact that the event has not been given a place in the official rendition of national history, the pressures which prompted

them have formed the government's political, social and economic strategies right up until the present time. An immediate aftereffect of the uproars was a noteworthy program to devise a national belief system of unity. It was trusted that if the Malaysian felt they had a common ground and past and a stake in a future together, at that point the ethnic strains which had fuelled the riot would be reduced.

Prime factor affecting the portrayal of national history is the colonial experience of British run and the accentuation on patriotism. While perceiving the provincial past, a country wishing to stress its freedom needed to build up its own particular style, the act of building a multi-racial society into one nation society. It has been seen that the 'upkeep of divisions in a society is to a great extent because of collective instability', which result from a feeling of continual exploitation or the threat of exploitation. It is just when this sentiment of danger is evacuated that between ethnic will supplant strain and viciousness. Occupation by the British, intrusion by the Japanese, reoccupation by the British lastly, freedom from British lead, achieved real changes in the lives and world perspective of the considerable number of groups in Malaysia.

### THE MALAYSIAN COMMUNITY IN SALINA

Samad Said's Salina is regarded as one of the best Malaysian literary work for its detailed description regarding the statue of the Malaysian society in the pre and post-colonial periods; Samad Said utilization of various literary techniques to create his vision of Malaysia and his dream for a superior and positive future. This part will be divided into two main sections: the pre-colonial Malaysian society regarding their education, social and political perspective and the post-colonial Malaysian society which will be focused on the traumatic experiences of death, lost, social corruption, and the moral decay.

As it was mentioned earlier that the literary text is focusing on different people from different backgrounds and ethnic groups existing in the same building Kampung Kambing; initially, the story starts with the post-Japanese occupation time where the people at Kampung Kambing display their suffering and hardship after losing everything they possess. The story begins with two new people moving to the building (Hilmy and his Mother Katija) and the people at Kampung Kambing were displeased at first for their arrival as their identity and intentions were unknown to the rest

“Some of the residents looked disgusted; because they knew that the arrival of new people in Kampung Kambing always brought all sorts of issues” (p.6)

Katija and Hilmy same as the people living in Kampung Kambing were the victims of the war “They were Victims of the Second World War: the war that had seized everything from them, family, home, and personal belongings” (p.7)

Hilmy represent the youth of Malaysia that was mostly got effected by the war, as a teenager he had witness the horror of the warfare and with it he grieved for his father that was killed at a young age and for their childhood house that was bombed during the war. Pre-War Hilmy was a different individual with different psychological and physical personality, however, resulting from the war he had turned into his mature self and started to realise the cruel reality impose on him

““Not ill, bombed. The shelter where we were hiding was hit” said Hilmy the words had weighted down by the heaviness in his heart” (p. 44)

Hilmy also desired to be a teacher, before the war and such dream was provided for him by the social and political environment; however such academic dream became impossible post-war Malaysia resulting from the political and social corruption. Mansur same as Hilmy had always wanted to be a teacher and for that he had work his best efforts to achieve such goal, Mansur was the bright student in his school and he the best marks which can immediately qualify him to be a teacher. However, because of the educational and social corruption it was very much impossible to achieve that hence Mansur was unable to get a teaching job despite his qualifications because

“Apart from marks, the most important consideration was the letters of recommendation and testimonials from “important” teachers (p. 268-269)

Even the settings of the story which is ‘Kampung Kambing’ is the place where many families lived, it is a very unstable building, with no healthy supplies, changeable rental fair and lacking its key structural foundations such as a strong

roof to protect the people from rain and the bad weather also there are no bathrooms available. The bathroom in the building can't be used since there are no water supplies hence, the people in Kampung Kambing need to get the water and use the bathrooms far way without the police permission. Furthermore, the building itself Kampung Kambing is not a legal state it was just founded by an Indian immigrant that started to charge people for cheap living in it so that he could go back to his home country India

““Ohooo,” said the Sikh watchman; “How much is the room rent now? What, going up again,hah?”  
 “Ya. Now bit more going up. Before, Paliamah with five people staying, her rent be eighteen ringgit. But now I heard Kurupaya Samy be raising price up again. Now it be twenty ringgit one month,”  
 “Oh dear! This damn Kurupaya. Already got so much money, now wanting much more,” (p. 3&4)

Furthermore, one of the main characters in the novel is Salina herself, pre and post war Salina were completely different people. Samad Said had made the focus of his novel on a female character that was the mostly affected individual by war and displacement; as a result she has become a prostitute. Before the war, Salina was living with her family and her younger brother whom she loved very much. Salina by far was the most damaged character in the story, she had lost her family, her brother, her house, her memories, her dreams and her identity within leaving her displaced and suffering from psychological and identity crisis.

Salina felt compassion to Hilmy since he reminded her with her brother that died, she keeps remembering the past as it was simple and peaceful time for her unlike her current nightmare

“Siti Salina became silent when she heard this. She felt sadness in her heart at not having a father or a family they had all been killed in the WWII. Their big beautiful home had been bombed and completely destroyed” (p. 43)

Salina's character is considered as an unusual Malaysian woman in the strict Muslim Malaysian community, she is working as a prostitute and in the same time she is living with her boyfriend without marriage Abdul-Fakar. Consequential to her own war trauma she had tolerated living with an abusive and misogynistic Abdul-Fakar for the reason that he holds a matching appearance as Salina's former lover that had deceased while fighting in the war. She cared and assisted Abdul-Fakar deeply since in him she saw her past and the possessions that she has lost such as the fragmentary romance and the vanished dreams.

Salina before the war she had always desired to be a doctor and to finish her academic studies and have a successful career, Samad Said had used Salina to establish the reality of the Malaysian community and its women after the war. The Malaysian social and political structures were destroyed hence; Salina represents Malaysia itself and its higher achievements pre-war yet its decay and hopelessness post-war.

Samad Said had also utilized his characters to demonstrate the notion of broken values, as War forces everyone through a rough life which held reasoning in creating people whom are materialistic, indolent and in need. Such examples is Zarina, she is the step-mother of three young man and female (Mansur, Nahidah, and the adopted son Sunarto). Zarina like many others dislike her like of constant poverty and unfulfilled needs, she wishes to wear more expensive clothes, drive her own car and buy her own house, yet she doesn't want to work for any of it. Furthermore, her unfulfilled needs left her with only rage and madness which she releases upon her own children. The kind of life she desire is the contrast of what is she actually living “She felt bored. They were old things - all of them. Must it be like this forever?”(p. 223). Zarina had hated her poor life so much so that she forced her step daughter (Nahidah) to work as a hostess, she sold to please other men and consequently she got raped by Abdul-Fakar “She looks at her step-daughter and knows that ‘men will surely go crazy over Nahidah’” (p.241).

Samad Said had mainly focused on his female characters by giving them unusual characteristics, the mother, the daughter, the wife, the widow and the prostitute, each of his female character represent a different type of psychological and physical Truman of what they have seem and lost during the war; yet also what they needed to become in order to survive post war. Samad Said brings to the readers' notification the moral degradation of an urban society, as it's still under the grip of western colonialism. Throughout the novel, corruption is portrayed through those who have the power and authority. Many lines in the literary text which demonstrates the methods used by the rich people to deal with their problems using money and power, Said writes' about the migrant Indian population, and their enterprise and the influence of possessions Indian on the local population. In Salina, we are acquainted with migrant

Indians who exploit the Malay for money. Also the Chinese were represented as the wealthy ethnic group that controls the lands and employ the Malays to work for them. Such social unstably and economic corruption can be easily seen while reading Salina for instance when the people of Kampung Kambing are filled with anxiety and worry about their houses being demolished, because they built without permit or , a plan, they are asked to rest their fears as one of the residents tells them:

"Do you know why our houses will not be demolished?" ... "Because ... the man who examined our houses before wanted money. And Kurupaya Samy bribed him." "What if the person were to come again, then what happens?" asked Haji Kalman . The man who had just spoken gleefully explained, "Kurupaya Samy will bribe him again"(p.219).

The social corruption had reached every ethnic group there is in Malaysia, the men were sitting for years without any job or work hence, the women were the one that were cleaning and providing pleaser for others just to remain a life.

Samad said with Salina had really painted the image of "what we were and how did we become" by using the settings and the characters also the natural description and conversations to create his own lifelike Malaysian image. As the pre-colonial Malaysia it was described as a "Unit" where all the different ethnic groups had lived under toluene policy with one another, such multicultural groups were able to create their own national identity within the same country. Yet the image of Post-colonial Malaysia according to Said was filled with social corruption, political confusion, broken family values, and besmirched educational system.

## CONCLUSION

In general, Malaysia has successfully held the balance between its different ethnic communities while maintaining its economic growth. In Malaysia, the astonishing variety of race, cultures, traditions, religions make it a unique nation of contrasts. Yet, the cultural borrowing has always been a feature of cultural contact in Malaysia. As Malaysia was united under one national identity for all the groups making one of the outstanding counties on earth; however, such any country the war will set its own rules and changes. After suffering from WWII, the Japanese occupation and the British Colonization Malaysia became parted and the struggle for its nationality and maintains was broken.

In Salina, Said exposes the evils of the society but shows the triumph of the human spirit where good people retain their sense of values, stay human in an inhuman world and survive even when survival is cheapened. Using different literary methods Said was able to create his own vision of Past-present and futuristic Malaysia by showing how they were and how did they become, with minor hints for his own vision of brighter Malaysia.

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