

The Concept of Nur Muhammad in the Malay Islamic Literary Tradition: A Comparative Study between *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* and the *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* (Al-Barzanji)

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Abstract: Malay Islamic literature has served as a crucial medium for the dissemination of religious and spiritual values within society. One prominent concept frequently explored is *Nur Muhammad*, the belief that the Prophet Muhammad saw (peace be upon him) was the first creation of God in the form of light. This study aims to examine how this concept is represented in two key texts: *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* and *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* (Al-Barzanji). Employing a qualitative descriptive method with a literature study approach, the research applies intertextuality theory as proposed by Julia Kristeva and Gérard Genette. The analysis reveals that *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* conveys the concept of *Nur Muhammad* through metaphysical and Sufi narratives, while *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* presents it through emotional and liturgical praise poetry. Through the lens of intertextuality, a dialogical relationship between the two texts emerges in their articulation of the spiritual essence of the Prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, the application of hypertextuality and paratextuality demonstrates that *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* is a development of the ideas found in the earlier text, adapted into a more popular and accessible form for the wider community. This study affirms that both texts function not only as tools for religious propagation but also as integral parts of the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Malay Islamic community.

Keywords: *Nur Muhammad*, *Hikayat Nur Muhammad*, *Kitab Ad-Diba'i*, Intertextuality, Malay Islamic Literature.

1 Introduction

Malay Islamic literature plays a vital role as a medium for disseminating Islamic teachings and spiritual values to society. Through communicative and accessible forms such as stories, *hikayat*, and poetry, this literary tradition has served as an effective vehicle for cultivating religious consciousness among the people. One of the prominent themes that frequently appears in this body of work is the concept of *Nur Muhammad*—the belief that the Prophet Muhammad saw (peace be upon him) was the first creation of God, formed from divine light, prior to the creation of the universe.

The concept of *Nur Muhammad* originates from Sufi traditions and has been widely transmitted through various religious texts passed down across generations. In the

context of the Malay Islamic tradition, two central texts serve as important references for understanding this concept: *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* and *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* (Al-Barzanji). *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* is a classic Malay prose work that presents a cosmological and metaphysical narrative of the Prophet's creation. Meanwhile, *Kitab Ad-Diba'i*, written in Arabic, offers praise of the Prophet in poetic form and is especially well known in the ritual practice of *mawlid* recitations throughout the Malay Archipelago.

This study aims to analyze how the concept of *Nur Muhammad* is represented in these two texts and to explore the intertextual relationship between them. By employing Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality along with Gérard Genette's concepts of hypertextuality and paratextuality, this research seeks to uncover the relational meanings, forms, and cultural functions of both texts. Through this approach, the study intends to demonstrate the contribution of classical Islamic literature in shaping the collective understanding of the Malay Muslim community regarding the person and spiritual essence of the Prophet Muhammad saw (peace be upon him).

2 Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach to analyze classical literary and religious texts, specifically *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* and *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* (Al-Barzanji). The focus of the analysis includes the content, structure, and intertextual context of both texts in portraying the concept of *Nur Muhammad* within the framework of Malay Islamic literature.

2.1. Data Sources

Primary data consists of the two main texts, while secondary data is obtained from academic literature such as books, journal articles, dissertations, and relevant theses.

2.2. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through close reading and classification of narratives related to *Nur Muhammad*, review of both printed and digital literature, and the documentation of key elements such as language style, symbolism, narrative structure, and poetic features.

2.3. Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis is conducted using an intertextual approach based on the theories of Julia Kristeva and Gérard Genette. Kristeva asserts that every text exists in dialogue with other texts, while Genette expands this idea through the concepts of hypertextuality (the relationship between a new text and a previous one) and paratextuality

(supporting elements such as titles and introductions). This approach is used to examine how the two texts borrow from, modify, and build upon one another to construct narratives and symbols that reinforce the collective understanding of the Prophet Muhammad as the primordial light created by God.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1. Representation of the Concept of *Nur Muhammad* in *Hikayat Nur Muhammad*

Hikayat Nur Muhammad portrays the Prophet Muhammad saw (peace be upon him) as the first being created by God in the form of light (*nur*), which becomes the source and essence of all creation. This narrative not only addresses the physical origin of the Prophet but also conveys profound metaphysical and spiritual meanings, reflecting the influence of Sufi teachings, particularly the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (oneness of being). The narrative style is rich in symbolism, utilizing imagery of light, grandeur, and eternal existence, inviting readers to contemplate the Prophet's position as the primordial creation and the center of existence within the Malay tradition.

3.2. Representation of the Concept of *Nur Muhammad* in *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* (Al-Barzanji)

In contrast to *Hikayat Nur Muhammad*, *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* employs the form of *madīḥ* (devotional poetry) that is both liturgical and emotionally expressive, focusing on praise and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad saw (peace be upon him). Although the concept of *Nur Muhammad* is not explicitly articulated, the text uses symbols such as light and nobility to convey the Prophet's spiritual essence. The recitation of this text during *mawlid* ceremonies reinforces the emotional bond and love of the Muslim community toward the Prophet as the bearer of divine light and mercy.

3.3. Intertextual Relationship Between the Two Texts

Based on Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, both texts engage in a dialogical relationship despite their different forms and approaches. *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* offers a deep metaphysical explanation, while *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* communicates a similar meaning through emotional and symbolic expression. Using Gérard Genette's concept of hypertextuality, *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* can be viewed as a hypertext that adapts and simplifies the metaphysical ideas found in *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* into a more popular and accessible form. From the perspective of paratextuality, elements such as titles, introductions, and oral traditions in *mawlid* recitations enhance the meaning and social function of the text within Malay culture.

Table 1. (Comparative Table) Representation of *Nur Muhammad* in the Two Texts.

Aspect	<i>Hikayat Nur Muhammad</i>	<i>Kitab Ad-Diba'i</i>
Text Form	Narrative-descriptive (classical Malay prose)	Poetic-devotional (Arabic verse)
Language Style	Symbolic, metaphysical, philosophical	Emotional, praiseful, liturgical
Narrative Focus	Origin of <i>Nur Muhammad</i> and creation	Life, character, and miracles of the Prophet
Concept of <i>Nur Muhammad</i>	First creation, divine light	Symbol of light and nobility
Social Function	Spiritual and theological education	Reinforcement of love for the Prophet, ritual use
Intertextuality (Kristeva)	Dialogue with Sufi texts and new meanings	Simplification of metaphysical values in praise
Hypertextuality (Genette)	Hypotext for devotional texts	Hypertext of earlier metaphysical concepts
Paratextuality (Genette)	Minimal, focused on narrative content	Strong, seen in oral recitation traditions
Cultural Context	Sufi Malay literature	Popular communal recitation tradition

3.4. Cultural Context and Dissemination

Both texts play significant roles in shaping the Malay Muslim community's perspective on the Prophet Muhammad saw (peace be upon him), both in terms of his origin and attributes. *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* provides a theological and philosophical narrative of the Prophet as the first light created by God, while *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* fosters love and admiration through emotionally engaging praises that are widely accepted in *mawlid* traditions. The two texts complement one another: one offers deep metaphysical understanding, and the other strengthens emotional and spiritual ties. Within the Malay Islamic tradition, both serve as essential tools for disseminating Islamic teachings using language and approaches that are contextualized and easily understood by local communities.

4 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that both *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* and *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* significantly contribute to the dissemination of the concept of *Nur Muhammad* among Malay communities. *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* presents the theme in a metaphysical and Sufi context, while *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* conveys it through emotional praise that is more accessible within the framework of *mawlid* traditions.

Through Julia Kristeva's intertextuality approach, it becomes evident that the two texts engage in a dialogical and complementary relationship in portraying the nobility of the Prophet Muhammad saw (peace be upon him). Meanwhile, based on Gérard Genette's theories of hypertextuality and paratextuality, *Kitab Ad-Diba'i* may be understood as a development or transformation of concepts previously introduced in texts like *Hikayat Nur Muhammad*, rearticulated in a more collective and popular form.

These works serve not only as vehicles for transmitting Islamic teachings but also as mediums for the cultural inheritance of religious values within the Malay context. The concept of *Nur Muhammad* in these texts transcends theological significance, becoming an integral part of the community's spiritual and cultural identity. These findings affirm the importance of intertextual approaches in understanding the dynamics and contributions of classical Islamic literature to the shaping of Islamic cultural heritage in the Malay Archipelago.

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