



THE POETRY OF A. SAMAD SAID AND CECIL  
RAJENDRA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN  
ECOCRITICISM

BY

MUHAMMAD SYAUKAT BIN MUSTAFA KAMAL

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to compare and critically analyse selected works by two Malaysian poets who are A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra, using the theory of ecocriticism. This research investigates the awareness of two Malaysian literary figures on environmental issues and the importance of the ecosystem. I will focus on selected poems from A. Samad Said's *Ballad of the Lost Map* (1992) (*Balada Hilang Peta*, 1991), translated into English by Harry Aveling and Cecil Rajendra's *Broken Buds* (1996) and by *Trial 'n Terror* (2004). I intend to look at both the poets' attitudes in expressing their thoughts and emotions towards environmental issues and Nature. Poetical devices, including imagery, metaphor, symbolism, diction, word choice and tone will be used as part of the analyses of the poems.

## ملخص

تهدف هذه الرسالة إلى المقارنة و التحليل النقدي للأعمال المختارة لاثنين من الشعراء الماليزيين ، عبد الصمد سعيد و سيسيل راجيندا ، باستخدام نظرية الانتقادات البيئية. يستكشف هذا البحث وعى اتنين من أعلام الادب الماليزى من خلال الموضوعات البيئية و أهمية النظام البيئى. سوف أركز على القصائد المختارة من عبد الصمد سعيد (بلد الخريطة الضائعة – 1992) المترجمة للانجليزية بواسطة هارى أفلينج ، و سيسيل راجيندا (البراعم المكسورة – 1996 و بالمحاولة والرعب – 2004). أنوى النظر فى اتجاهات كلا الشاعرين للتعبير عن أفكارهم و مشاعرهم تجاه الموضوعات البيئية و الطبيعة . وجدير بالذكر أن الأدوات الأدبية متضمنة الصور و الاستعارات و الرمزية و الأسلوب و اختيار الكلمات و النغمة سوف يتم استخدامها كجزء من تحليل القصائد.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (English Literary Studies).

.....  
Mohammad A. Quayum  
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (English Literary Studies).

.....  
Umar Abdurrahman  
Examiner

This dissertation was submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (English Literary Studies).

.....  
Zahariah bt. Pilus  
Head, Department of  
English Language and  
Literature

This dissertation was submitted to the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (English Literary Studies).

.....  
Mahmood Zuhdi Ab. Majid  
Dean, Kulliyah of Islamic  
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Muhammad Syaukat Bin Mustafa Kamal

Signature:.....

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COMPARATIVE STUDY IN ECOCRITICISM**

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For Allah S.W.T

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In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

All praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds. Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Master of the Day of Judgment. You do we worship, and Your aid we seek. Show us the straight way. The way of those whom You have bestowed Your Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The study of environmental values in literature is currently gaining popularity. People have become more aware about environmental and ecological issues as shown in the media today. Many literary works have been written, movies produced and songs composed to create awareness on the importance of Nature and the environment. According to Cheryl Glotfelty, ecocriticism, in short, is the: “study of the relationship between literature and physical environment.” (1996: xvii). This is the theory that I will use in the thesis to analyse A. Samad Said’s *Ballad of The Lost Map* (2009) and Cecil Rajendra’s *by Trial ‘n Terror* (2004) and *Broken Buds* (1996).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the planet earth has faced so many disasters either caused by human negligence or natural causes. Human beings have seen a rapid growth of modernisation where technologies and development are designed to help them live a better life. Even though the true purpose of modernisation is to make life better, human beings forget that there are other aspects of Nature that need to be taken care of, regardless of whether they are living or non-living things. In making the world a better place for human beings, plants have been destroyed, animals have faced extinction, the earth faces global warming and even humans themselves are being affected by the environmental and ecological problems that they themselves have created.

I will study selected poems by Malaysian poets, A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra using the theory of ecocriticism. This comparative study will look at both of

the poets' themes or issues related to the environment as found in their selected poems. I will also analyse the tone of the poems to reveal the attitude of the poets in expressing their thoughts and emotions towards environmental issues and Nature.

The main purpose of this study is to highlight the environmental awareness of the Malaysian literary figures. This is to indicate that Malaysian poets are also aware of the environmental problems that are affecting the world today.

### **1.1.2 Introduction on A. Samad Said**

In introducing the poet, A. Samad Said, I will use the biography written by Awang Abdullah published in 2001, *Biography Sasterawan Negara: A. Samad Said* (The Biography of a National Laureate, A. Samad Said). Abdul Samad bin Muhammad Said was born on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1935 (despite the dispute regarding his real date of birth and name since his birth certificate was actually destroyed by Japanese bombing) in Kampung Belimbing, Melaka (Awang Abdullah, 2001: 11). Six months after his birth, his family moved to Singapore (Awang Abdullah, 2001: 12), where he began his education at Sekolah Melayu Kota Raja in 1941 (Awang Abdullah, 2001: 20). During the Japanese occupation, he went to a Japanese school, Shihan Gakko, where students were trained by the military force (Awang Abdullah, 2001: 14-15). Later, he moved to the Monk's Hill School, followed by Victoria Institution in Singapore (Awang Abdullah, 2001: 20). However, he had to change school once again as his age exceeded the age limit of the school. He continued his education at the Beatty Secondary School and passed his Senior Cambridge in 1956 (Awang Abdullah, 2001: 20).

He started writing in the 1950s when he joined ASAS 50 (Awang Abdullah, 2001: 26), a group which promoted literature in the pre and post independence period.

His writing career never stopped and after years of being in the literary scene, he was awarded the 4th Malaysian National Laureate in 1985, the highest recognition for literature in Malaysia (Awang Abdullah, 2001: 59).

### **1.1.3 Introduction on Cecil Rajendra**

Cecil Rajendra was born in Penang and spent most of his childhood in the fishing village of Tanjong Tokong (Fadillah Merican, 2004: 86). “He received his formal education at the St. Xaviers Institution, Penang, the University of Singapore and Lincoln’s Inn, London where he was qualified as a Barrister-at-Law in 1968” (Fadillah Merican, 2004: 86).

According to Keith Addison, although Cecil Rajendra is a lawyer by profession, he is active in literature as his poetry is part of a total commitment (1982), and has until now published 19 poetry collections. His poetry voices out Third World issues, awakening people on social problems and the environmental crisis. He is one of Malaysia’s best and most published poets as his poems can be found in all sorts of media, anthologies, newspapers, journals, cassettes, records cantatas, radio, T.V, and even in the UNESCO forum (Fadillah Merican 2004: 97-98).

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The world has seen so many forms of crisis as a consequence of the drive for modernisation. Most of the pollutions are caused by humans, contaminating Earth’s environment and interfering with the natural functioning of the ecosystems (Engelking, “Pollution”, 2008). It is not only human beings who are affected by these devastations, but plants and animals are also facing extinction at an unprecedented rate. Michael Zimmerman explains in his article “Environment” (2008) that an

estimated of 4,000 to 50,000 species become extinct every year mostly due to the destruction of their habitats, particularly the world's richest ecosystems, the tropical rain forests and coral reefs.

War has also been a great factor in destroying the environment. The weapons that are used in war not only affect or kill humans but they also cause destruction to non-human beings. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6, 1945 by the United States Army killed 60,000 to 70,000 people and destroyed more than 10sq km of the city areas, completely destroyed 68% of Hiroshima's buildings and left 24% damaged ("Hiroshima", 2008). War can also be seen as a major cause of ecological destructions.

Corruption is another factor that leads to environmental problems. The wrongdoings of those in special positions of trust, such as politicians manipulating power only to their own benefit, can cause harm to society. Both A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra express their protests against political corruptions that have caused harm to the environment in their poems.

### **1.3 SCOPE OF STUDY**

This thesis will analyse the issues of environmental awareness and Nature in selected poems by A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra. The selected poems of A. Samad Said will be taken from the book *Ballad of the Lost Map (Balada Hilang Peta, 1991)* which has been translated by an Australian academic, Harry Aveling. The selected poems include: "A Cry from Shanty Number 72", "A Glance from the Past", "The Winds of Sematan", "A Village of Scorpions", "Shadows", "The Dead Crow", "Dialogue in a Shanty Town Toilet-Block", "Our Land", "Twilight of Conscience", and "Sons and Daughters of Palestine".

On the other hand, the poems by Cecil Rajendra will be taken from two books. The first book *Broken Buds* (1996) will include the poems “The Morning After”, “No Change” and “Dead-end For A Streetkid”. The second book by *Trial ‘n Terror* (2004), will include the poems “Liberators”, “Keeping Promises”, “The Curse & the Cure”, “Aquarian Connection”, “Damn the Dams”, “Slums”, “ME-A-SAT”.

#### **1.4 OBJECTIVE OF STUDY**

The first objective of the study is to identify and examine the issues concerned with the environment that are found in the poems of A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra. The issues are related to those prevalent in Malaysia, as well as the society at large.

Secondly, I will look at the manner in which these issues are expressed or developed in their works. Here, I will examine the poet’s mood in articulating the issues.

#### **1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review will be developed in three stages. First, I will discuss on the history of Malaysian poetry. Following that, I will provide a discussion on Malaysian poetry in general. Finally, I will discuss the criticisms that are available on the poetry of A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra.

##### **1.5.1 Background of Malaysian Poetry**

As both the writers I have chosen are modern Malaysian writers, it is best to first look at the background of modern Malaysian literary culture. Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir in her book, *Modern Malay Literary Culture: A Historical Perspective* (1987), explains the history of modern Malay literature. It is important to study the book as

the collection of poems by A. Samad Said, *Ballad of the Lost Map* (1991), was originally written in Malay and later translated into English.

According to Ungku Maimunah, the Malay literary scene in the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be traced from the group called “Penulis Agama” (religious writers); Middle-Eastern educated Malays who were influenced by the Islamic reformation of Turkey and Egypt (Ungku Maimunah, 1987: 21). This group wrote and discussed religious matters and adapted the Middle-Eastern literature in their work. The British who came to colonise Malaysia brought in their education, teaching it to the Malays and introducing translated Western literary works such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Treasure Island* (1883) (Ungku Maimunah, 1987: 12). These works were responsible for bringing Western influence in Malaysian literature.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1950, a group of young men, mostly journalists and teachers formed “Angkatan Sasterawan 50” or ASAS 50 (Ungku Maimunah, 1987: 35). They grouped together to unite literary writers and promote the Malay language as they believed that the English language was responsible for retarding the growth of Malay language (Ungku Maimunah, 1987: 38). ASAS 50 was the group responsible for promoting new forms of poetry; free verse or “sajak”, rejecting the classical heritage of literature as well as “pantun” and “syair” (Mohd. Taib Osman and Abu Bakar Hamid, 1978: 303). ASAS 50 still retains the traditional “pantun” stanza and rhyme scheme but, it has revolutionised the spirit and approach of the often romantic mood and the devious suggestiveness meaning; indirect connotation of the actual meaning, of the “pantun” in expressing its message (Mohd. Taib and Abu Bakar, 1978: 304). In the 1970s, Malays have become more vocal after the racial riots of 13<sup>th</sup> May 1969, demanding a greater share of the country’s wealth (Ungku Maimunah, 1987: 56).



The history of Malaysian literature in English can be found in Dudley De Souza's essay "The Roots of Malay[an] Literature in English" (1984). According to Koh Tai Ann, the development of local poetry in English may be traced through its models and influences, from the celebrated 17<sup>th</sup> century poets such as Jonathan Swift and Fitzgerald of the 'Omar Khayyam' (De Souza, 1984: 3). In attempts to produce literary works, especially in English, Malaysian writers usually stumbled upon problems related to their national identity. There are two main ways in which the writers responded to the dilemma of finding their own national identity; first writing in their own mother tongue and, secondly, using the English language with a degree of sophistication (De Souza, 1984: 4). Even though there were attempts to promote the Malay language by ASAS 50, in the end when the two countries separated, Singapore has adopted the English language as its main language while Malaysia has adopted the Malay language.

### **1.5.2 An Overview of Malaysian Poetry in General**

The essay by Muhammad Haji Salleh, "Some New Values of Contemporary Malaysian Poetry" (1981), discusses the new values that can be found in contemporary Malaysian poetry. According to Muhammad Haji Salleh, Malaysians have learnt a lot from other traditions including taking works from Persia, India and Java (1981: 349). Malaysians have continued to be open to cultures that they have come into contact with, for example, Malaysians have absorbed the free verse genre from the West, transforming it to suit the ethos of the race (1981: 349). He further explains that the change of environment has also changed the general value of literature as the Malaysian environment itself has been created by many events and attitude (1981: 350).

Muhammad Haji Salleh also discusses the concept and structure of poetry which traditionally had always been about society and religion, but now has become more personal (1981: 351). He added that:

The latest works of Malaysian poets illustrate this. Written by younger men and women who have to deal with personal survival, physically, emotionally and intellectually, in a world no longer homogeneous and easily understood, and not bound together by national struggles against the colonial or fight for independence, which have been carried out by their fathers and older brothers or sisters, they naturally concentrate on themes closest at hand or heart (1981: 351).

The mode of expression in poetry is also discussed, where Muhammad Haji Salleh says that traditionally, poems used to be more verbal in terms of rhythm and music, but has now become more visual, catching at first the eye of the reader (1981: 359-360).

The discussion of Malaysian poetry in the light of ecocriticism can be found in the works of Agnes Yeow Swee Kim. Her essay “An Ecocritical Approach to the Poetry of Ee Tiang Hong” (2007) analyses Ee Tiang Hong’s poems using ecocriticism. Agnes is fully aware that Ee’s works focus on postcolonial concerns of society and culture, but they also reveal the elements of ecocriticism, especially in the representation of the non-human world. Agnes also highlights that “The key underlying assumption of [her] essay is that Ee’s personal, moral, social and political preoccupations do not float amorphously above ground level but bear a visceral and physical connection with place, dwelling and landscape” (2007: 1).

Agnes’ essay “Greening the Exotic in Malaysian Poetry: Literary Strategies for an Endangered Postcolonial Land” (2009) is another analysis of poems on ecocriticism. This essay examines the element of exoticism found in the poems of Muhammad Haji Salleh and Shirley Geok-lin Lim. The focus of discussion is mainly

on the treatment of tropical flora, including tropical wilderness which is part of the concepts of ecocriticism mentioned by Greg Garrard.

### **1.5.3 Criticism on A. Samad Said**

Siti Aisha Murad's collection of essays, *A. Samad Said dalam Esei dan Kritikan* (2007), offers a wide range of criticism on the poet that I will discuss in this thesis. Criticism of A. Samad Said's poetry can be found in the essay by Rahman Shaari "A. Samad Said sebagai Penyair" (A. Samad Said as a Poet) (1993) that gives a brief introduction to A. Samad Said as a poet. Like other poets in the 1950s, A. Samad Said used to give focus on rhyme (1993: 41). Rahman Ashaari analyses a few of Samad's poems including "Di Bawah Bintang Mengerdip" (1960), saying that the poem was not highly praised as it tells a love story without touching on any religious matters (1993: 42). Other poems that were analysed include "Pada Tanah yang Indah" (1956), which has the theme of nationalism, and "Kita Ini Tetamu Senja" (1956) that talks about religion (1993: 43). One of A. Samad Said's greatest achievements was to include foreign words in his poems. For example, in the poem "Arah" (1956), he included the words 'sinemaskopis' and 'stereoponis' (1993: 44). Originally, these two words are from the English language; 'cinemascope' and 'stereophonic', but A. Samad Said has it naturalised, changing its pronunciation to agree with the Malay language phonology, while maintaining its meanings.

Ahmad Kamal Abdullah's essay, "A. Samad Said dan Lingkaran Kepenyairannya" (A. Samad Said and His Life as a Poet), is an analysis of A. Samad Said's life as a poet. Ahmad Kamal Abdullah divides the analysis into six parts. The first part of the analysis explores the year 1954-1962, on the early poetry of A. Samad Said and the influences of Mansuri S.N and Tongkat Warrant, who were then ASAS

50 members. The second part shows A. Samad Said's transition, in the year of 1958-1962, where he joined the group of poets who produced obscure poems; poems with vague lines and ambiguous meanings, as a result of leaving the principles of the ASAS 50 poets (n.d: 60). During the period of 1963-1973, A. Samad Said was seen as a poet who was not involved in any groups or factions of poets. He had his own philosophy and experimental techniques, addressing the socio-political economy of the society without using the way of expression commonly used by poets of ASAS 50 (n.d: 68). The fourth part of the discussion is about the line between A. Samad Said's narratives and ballads. A. Samad Said is known for his novels *Salina*, *Hujan Pagi* and *Daerah Zeni*, and when he wrote his poems, he tends to use a narrative style (n.d: 69). In the next part, Ahmad Kamal Abdullah discusses A. Samad Said's creed and the metaphors found in *Balada Hilang Peta* (1991). Some of A. Samad Said's poetic creeds are that poetry is supposed to be felt, not interpreted and that if a poet is too concerned with the right form of grammar, there will be no creativity (n.d: 75). Ahmad Kamal Abdullah then discusses the metaphors that are found in *Balada Hilang Peta*. Among the poems discussed are "Jerkah Setinggalan 72", "Kenyit", "Lagu Bunga II" and "Balada Hilang Peta".

Finally, the essay, "Citra Manusia dalam Puisi A.Samad Said" (Human Qualities in the poetry of A. Samad Said) by A. Rahim Abdullah discusses the human values found in the poems of A. Samad Said. He explains that, among the human qualities found in the poem "Menambat Rakit" (1985) is submitting to God's will and also friendship and bond among humans (n.d: 91). Another example of human qualities can also be found in the poem "Ke Tempat Lahir" which shows human's love towards the environment (n.d: 96).

#### **1.5.4 Criticism on Cecil Rajendra**

The article by Keith Addison, “Cecil Rajendra: A Third World Poet and His Works” (1982) discusses Cecil Rajendra as a poet. In the article, Addison said that Cecil Rajendra’s poetry can be seen as historical in the way he expresses his anger by ridiculing the modern security laws and criticizing the old monarchic rules. Addison also mentions in the article the issue of cultural corruption, one of the constant themes of Cecil Rajendra’s work.

The paper by Peng-Khuan Chong, entitled “Voices of Protest: Political Poetry from Three English Educated Poets of Malaysia and Singapore” (1984), for the 6<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Asian Studies, talks about three educated poets from Malaysia and Singapore who voice their protest in poetry. Those three poets, Edwin Thumboo, Ee Tiang Hong and Cecil Rajendra, were the focus of the Peng-Khuan Chong’s research. In the paper, Peng-Khuan Chong discusses the poetry of these three poets and explains how they had voiced out their protests in their work.

A book by Fadillah Merican, *Voices of Many Worlds: Malaysian literature in English* (2004), offers introduction to a number of Malaysian literary figures who write in English. She gives a brief introduction to Cecil Rajendra’s life as well as his interest in writing. According to Keith Addison, “Rajendra probably does not believe in art for art’s sake because he judges his works on the effectiveness in awakening people to the burning social issues that affect Malaysia and the Third World such as oppression, injustice and exploitation, corruption and greed, want, hunger and poverty, ecological ruins” (Fadillah Merican, 2004: 88). Fadillah Merican further says that A. Samad Said’s and Cecil Rajendra’s views on environmental problems are very similar (2004: 88). Cecil Rajendra, moreover, is also said to be very interested in the issue of ecological ruins and environmental issues of indiscriminate land clearing,

emission of hazardous gases, land reclamation and the importance of safe guarding Nature (2004: 90-91). This book does not give an extensive analysis on the poetry of Cecil Rajendra but instead provides a brief introductory discussion on the issues expressed in them. Even though Fadillah Merican has discussed the poetry of Cecil Rajendra in terms of environmentalism, but she has not analysed them using the concepts of Greg Garrard.

The essay by Agnes Y. S. K, “Visions of Eco-Apocalypse in Selected Malaysian Poetry in English: Cecil Rajendra and Muhammad Haji Salleh” (2008), examines eco-apocalyptic (one of the strands of ecocriticism pointed out by Greg Garrard; apocalypse) visions in the poetry of Cecil Rajendra and Muhammad Haji Salleh. She comments, “Rajendra’s vision highlights human accountability and the ethical aspects of environmental destruction while underlying Muhammad’s vision of fragmented earth is the gradual loss of the Malay’s unique ecological consciousness and inheritance.” (2008: 1). This thesis, on the other hand, will analyse poems by Cecil Rajendra, using other the concepts of ecocriticism.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

This research aims to contribute as to works that address environmental values in Malaysian literature, and to complement other research as on literary works in general.

This research will analyse A. Samad Said’s work from an eco-critical point of view. Even though other analyses have been done on the works of Cecil Rajendra on ecocriticism, my research will provide a perspective analysis using the different aspects of ecocriticism of Greg Garrard, and on other poems by this poet.

The significance of the study also lies in my attempt to present A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra as poets who are concerned with the current environmental and

ecological problems. Their concern towards the environment deserves appreciation as they express what is vital for the future of mankind.

### **1.7 METHODOLOGY**

My research will employ the qualitative approach based on observations, analyse and applications of the ecocriticism theory in relation to the poems by A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra. Further reading on books, journals and research papers found in the ASLE (American Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) website and also other materials on ecocriticism are used to understand the theory of ecocriticism.

Articles, mostly taken from the Microsoft Student with Encarta Premium 2009 encyclopedia, will be used to identify and further understand the different forms of pollutions. Newspaper articles and environmental reports will be used to strengthen my analyses.

### **1.8 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

The focus of this thesis will be on the comparison of the works of two prominent Malaysian poets, A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra, in the light of ecocriticism. Studying the poems using the term “ecocriticism” in general will generate a discussion that is too broad. I am therefore using several concepts of ecocriticism that include: pollution, positions, pastoral, wilderness, and animals, by Greg Garrard, to narrow down the scope of my discussion.

A. Samad Said wrote his works in Malay. However, most have been translated into English. For this thesis, I will focus only on A. Samad Said’s poems that have been translated into English by Harry Aveling. I will also only look Cecil Rajendra’s

poems found in two books, out of his 19 collections of poetry that have been published.

The works that have been written on these two poets are numerous and can be found in books, articles, dissertations and essays. However, there exist only a few that focus on these two poets in the light of ecocriticism. The limited number of research done on Malaysian literary works that emphasise on ecocriticism is probably due to the fact that this is a new literary theory that has gained popularity only recently.

## **1.9 ORGANISATIONS OF CHAPTERS**

The first chapter of the thesis will introduce the topic, providing the background of the study and literature review. This chapter will give a brief introduction to Malaysian poetry and the background of the selected poets.

The second chapter will provide a more detailed discussion of the theory. I will discuss the theory of ecocriticism in relation to the points of views of several other writers who have also written about the theory. In addition, I will explain in detail the concept of ecocriticism by Greg Garrard.

The third chapter will focus on the poetry of A. Samad Said. Here I intend to point out the issues of pollution that are highlighted in his poems. Analysing the tone, metaphors and other poetical devices will help determine the poet's thoughts and attitude towards Nature and the environment.

The fourth chapter will examine the poetry of Cecil Rajendra. The same methods of analyses will be used in this chapter to analyse the poems.

The fifth and final chapter will conclude the thesis with a comparative study of the works of the two poets. I will also include an Islamic understanding on the