

Verifiable Memories of Historical Events in the Malay Classical Literary Sources

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Abstract

There are many texts of the classical Malay literature available for this study. Among the oldest are believed to be *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* and the *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annal) by Tun Sri Lanang. There are also *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, *Hikayat Patani* and *Misa Melayu*. Scholars in the past have dismissed the contents of the books as myths and legends. But scholars such as O.W. Wolters and a few others who studied some of those texts such as the *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* believe that they contain verifiable happenings. Stories such as Raja Suran (Malay Annal), Sri Tri Buana, Demang Lebar Daun and Merong Maha Wangsa are not myths or legends but representative of personalities that really existed during certain periods of the Malay history. *Hikayat Hang Tuah* especially, stresses the importance of the relationships between Melaka and China and India. Those foreign policies practiced by Malay rulers in the past as told in the Raja Suran adventure was the Cola king who left the dated 1025AD Tanjore Inscription and who had belligerent relationship with the king of Srivijaya. Sri Tri Buana was his descendent, the incident on the Bukit Seguntang Maha Meru can be interpreted as the Avalokitesvara's world. The allegiance given by Demang Lebar Daun that he and his descendents (rakyat/people) will not go against Sri Tri Buana (ruler) as long as the ruler remains "just" which reminds us of the Telaga Batu Inscription of Palembang which inscribes about the consequences of being disloyal to the king. Also, the story about Merong Maha Wangsa who liked to drink blood can be equated with the practices in Bhairava Cult practiced by King Adityavarman in Sumatera and also by Kedah's kings in the 12th/13th C.A.D. The most important issue which can be elucidated from the classical Malay literary sources is the foreign policy of the Malay rulers. They established trade and political relationships with India and China because India and China were the most powerful nations in the world at that time, politically and economically. In this 21st century, the world recognizes the fact that these two nations will become great economic power again to challenge Europe and United States of America. Therefore, the memories of the past will become the mirror of the future. The world will clamor for the hands of friendship of those two countries. Southeast Asia will definitely face a bright future.

Keywords: verifiable, Avalokitesvara, Sri Tri Buana, Demang Lebar Daun, Hang Tuah, Adityavarman

1. Introduction

During the traditional society, when the classical literary works were written, there was no such things as constitutional law or customary law. Everything were based on traditions and customs brought down from one generation to another. The issue of governance and authority were also based on traditions and customs. The way the classical Malay literary texts were written also based on literary traditions prevalence during the time the texts were written. *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* is believed to be written in the fourteenth century based on the story in the text. *Sulatus-sulatin/Sejarah Melayu/Malay Annal* was written sometime in 1612 AD by Tun Sri Lanang (Ismail Hussein, 1966). The concept of tradition can be gleaned from the two texts written at two different periods. Other literary texts which were written based on the literary traditions of traditional society are many. Among them are *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, *Misa Melayu*, *Salsilah Kedah*, *Hikayat Patani* and etc.

The texts, even though focuses on society and the history of the ruling class, do not have dates. They are to glorify the ruling class viz-a-viz, the sultan. Even when the sultan did not rule his subjects fairly, the genealogists will try to find excuses for his mistakes. That was to ensure that the texts will not be used by rakyat to rebel against the king/sultan.

The texts in general discuss the genealogy of kings and the legitimacy of kings. Also the texts will discuss the origin of a king and events happening during a particular phase of a sultan's rule and describes how a king was appointed and consecrated.

The traditional society in my opinion originated from the stone age, the Neolithic period. I consider that phase of human history as the beginning of traditional society because that was the beginning of the rise of settled communities. In the Malay World, stretching from Madagascar to Pacific Islands and to Taiwan, archaeology had established that there were settled communities especially along the sea coasts and river valleys during that time. They were living under community leaders and they shared common tradition in terms of belief that was animism. These settled communities evolved into bigger communities during the Metal Age, the protohistoric period and early kingdom period (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi, 1998).

2. Genealogy

The classical Malay literary texts normally will try to trace a particular ruler to a well known personality. As an example, Sri Tri Buana has been traced to Alexander the Great and also Raja Suran whom scholars believe that Raja Suran was the famous Cola King who ravaged the Malay Peninsula in 11th C.A.D.

Among the personalities involved in the consecration of Sri Tri Buana as the King of Bodhisattavas, the Avalokitesvara were DemangLebarDaun and Wan Sendari. Wan Sendari was a special woman. She was the only woman among the forty women who could sleep with Sri Tri Buana without being inflicted by skin disease. Her name is almost similar to Sundari, meaning the most beautiful (Wolters, 1990, 50) and the name of the daughter of Dhaksa (A. Daneliou, 1964, 259). It is probable that the 39 women were the wives of Siva (ibid, 266-7). The historians probably associate Wan Sundari with Tara, the wife of King Avalokitesvara (Wolters, 1990, 149).

Also the ceremony relating to the baptism of Sri Tri Buana reminds us of the ceremony which Avalokitesvara had to undergo before becoming the King of Bodhisattvas. It was also similar to the ceremony which Adityavarman (the ruler of Sumatra) performed to receive Amoghapasa statue from Kertanegara. The ceremony was to enhance the fact that he was the king who had become immortalized by being associated with the religions deity, in this case the Avalokitesvara.

In the case of Demang Lebar Daun, he is believed to represent the Demang in the Javanese Traditional Literature meaning the guardian of the palace during the 14th century (O.W. Wolters, 1990, 149). Demang performed the last part of the ceremony during the consecration of the statue Amogapasa-Rajapani in 1362. Thus it can be said the DemangLebarDaun played important role in the coronation of Sri Tri Buana in Palembang.

In the oath taking ceremony between Sri Tri Buana representing the ruler and Demang Lebar Daun representing the people (rakyat), Demang Lebar Daun promised not to disobey the King (derhaka) as long as the king is fair (adil) towards his people (rakyat). The archaeological evidence of the memory of the promised of allegiance of Demang Lebar Daun to the king in the Malay Annal is in the form of one of the inscriptions of Srivijaya dated to 683 AD found in Telaga Batu, Palembang. The inscriptions were shaded by seven-headed serpents. According to the inscription, all the datu appointed by the king must obey the king. Any datu that took the oath will be rewarded in the form of tantramala. Those who disobeyed or go against the king will be punished by supernatural power. Therefore, during the oath taking ceremony, the datu will have to drink the water of oath coming from the water that bathed the inscription (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi, 1984).

In the Malay Annal, Demang Lebar Daun played similar role of that of Perpatih Dewa Tuhan, during the ceremony performed by King Adityavarman in 1364 when he did the cleansing ceremony of the sculpture of Amogapasa-Lokitesvara (Rajapani) which was sent to Sumatera in 1286 to show the lordship of Java over Sumatera. According to Moens, the DewaTuhan was Dasa (N.J.Krom, 1931, 394).

The role of Dewa Tuhan was to give his daughter in marriage to a Melayu King and thus became a witness in the ceremony (J.L.Moens, 1924, 564-569). Thus Demang Lebar Daun played the role of Dewa Tuhan as he appeared in Sejarah Melayu. He married Wan Sundari to Sri Tri Buana after giving him power and authority. Thus the ceremony enacted in the case of Deman Lebar Daun, his daughter and Sri Tri Buana is the memory of the past that highlighted the role of Palembang (Srivijaya) in the history of Melaka.

Another approach employed by the writers responsible for creating the genealogy of a ruler in traditional society was by giving supernatural origin to that ruler. One way of doing that was by creating a story to relate the origin of the ruler to the "buih" river farm as in the case of Princess Seluwang (Siti Hawa Salleh, 1970) to "bamboo" / buluh betong as in the case of Raja Buluh Betong (Siti Hawa Salleh, 1970).

To the traditional society, a good and solid background is important for someone to be elevated to become chief or king. Therefore, even if that someone belonged to a lower class than nobility, he can still become a king when

given a super natural origin. However, in reality such instance has never been in the history of Malay traditional society.

The tradition of appointing a leader from noble back ground is still practiced in modern society, today. In the case of Malaysia, the nine rulers of Malaysia were appointed according to their royal background. They all belonged to the royal family. Normally, they were the eldest son of that family. The eldest son must have a royal blood. However, in certain cases, the mother needs not be from royalty. In Japan, the same tradition is being adhered. So too in the case of Thailand and in the West. The only difference is the countries in the east which still have not appoint their ruler among the female royalties. But England appointed a female to her throne, the Queen Elizabeth I and II. The ruling state in Malaysia that experienced a female ruler on her throne was Kelantan when Cik Siti Wan Kembang was the ruler of Kelantan. Even that, historians are still debating whether she was ever appointed as a raja of Kelantan or just a chieftain.

3. From Kingship to Deityship

Another memory which can be verified is about kings being elevated from kings to deities. Two instances can be considered as examples. One is about the story of Merong Maha Wangsa. The other is about King Adityavarman, the king of Sumatera. In Hikayat Merong Maha Wangsa, the ruler of Kedah according to the Hikayat, told the royal cook to prepare his lunch. The cook accidentally cut her finger and the blood dropped into the prepared dish. She had no time to prepare another dish because the King was hungry and was waiting for his food. In view of the situation the cook served the prepared food. The king found the food to be delicious and ordered the cook to tell him the recipe. At first the cook did not want to tell the king the truth for fear of what will happen to her. Due to king's order she had to tell the truth and prepared to receive whatever the punishment the ruler might decide—even death. However, hearing the cook's story, the king did not punish her, instead commended her. From that day onwards, the cook had to prepare food by adding blood to the recipe.

The practice of drinking or mixing human blood to food or drink remind us of the habit of rulers in Sumatera who practiced the Bhairava cult. On the basis of the archaeological remains found in Padang Lawas, Sumatera (Schnitger, 1964) archaeologists are convinced that the sites belonged to the kingdom of Pannei. Kingdoms under the ruler of King Aditya Veraman who practiced Bhairava cult. One of the kingdom was the kingdom ravaged by the Colas when they rounded Sumatera and the Malay Peninsula. It was estimated that the kingdom, existed from the 9th to the 12th/13th centuries A.D. contemporaneous to the Bujang River sites in the Bujang Valley (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi, 1984). It is possible that the Bhairava cult prevalent in Sumatera during that time spilled over to the Bujang Valley area located just across the Straits of Melaka. Thus, the memory of the Bhairava Cult practice led to the writer of Hikayat Merong Maha Wangsa to include the story of Merong Mahawangsa who was fond of drinking blood and was very cruel to his subjects which led to the fall of the kingdom and the coming of Islam when the successor king adopted Islam as his religion.

Evidence of the Bhairava cult in Padang Lawas include the sculpture of Heruka, inscriptions and the monstrous appearance of the guardian of the candis. Among the inscriptions which have been transcribed are: (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi, 1984).

WanWaWanWangi
 Bukangrughr
 Hucitrasamasyasa
 Tunhahahaha
 Hum
 Huhuhehai
 Hohouhoho
 Omabhumi

I strongly believe that the various sounds refer to the ritual laughing, which was found during tantric ceremonies, and the date of the inscription was 12th/13th century. There is evidence for the prevalence of certain forms of tantrism in the Padang Lawas area related to the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. It has been suggested that the religion depicted by sculptures and inscriptions in most of the temple complexes in Padang Lawas was a kind of Tantric Buddhism which involved human sacrifice (ibid. 1984)

Alternatively, it can be said that the Buddhism during the period was related to the Bhairava from Sungai Langsat and the Heruka from the Bahal II Temple Complex as Kala-Cakra Buddhism (ibid, 1984). But the site at

Tandihet had not produced any finds that would show the kind of Trantric Buddhism. This is because the temple itself had the same type of façade as the majority of the temples in the Padang Lawas area, and also the find of maitreya (ibid, 1984) only proves that it was a Buddhist site. On the inscriptions there were the carvings of vajras.

Another example which one can relate to the existence of Bahirava cult in the Malay society prior to the coming of Islam is Maharaja Prabhu. According to R.O. Wolters, "Maharaja Prabhu adalah Adityavarman, yang prasastinya dijumpai di Minangkabau antara tahun 1347 hingga 1375". He was the ruler of Sumatera after the fall of Srivijaya in the 14th C.A.D. His contribution to the memory of Malay history was his involvement with the cult of Bhairava. The practice remain vividly in the writer of Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa when he told the story of the ruler who lusted for human blood. However, his story did not mention about the cult of Bhairava. The story talked about the cruelty of a ruler but never relate it to religion. This was due to the fact that the readers will not understand about the cult since it happened a few hundred years earlier. Furthermore the readers were already Muslims. The evidence for the Bhairava cult was the stone statue of Adityavarman. It was found in Sungai Langsat and measures 3 meters high (Bernert Kempers, 1959).

The physical appearance of the statue is as follows (Bernert Kempers, 1959): He stands on skulls. His appearance is frightening and he has two fangs and wears, arm lets and leg lets. His body hair represent by snakes. The inscription inscribed on the sculpture and the way the sculpture was dressed definitely show that Adityavarman was consecrated as Bahirava. He was presented as a 3 meters statue standing on the corpses that he had slain. He wears the leg and arm bracelet, indicating his royal statues. His arm bracelets are the symbols of snakes. The hair of his arms and legs are presented by symbols of snakes. He has a pair of tooth representing the pang of Bhairava. Everything about him symbolizes his nature as a Bhairava deity. He has a demon face (Bernert Kempers, 1964).

It has been recognized that there were 3 varieties of Heruka found in Padang Lawas (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi, 1984). The one from Bahal II belonged to Dvibhuja Heruka variety. This argument is based on the assumption that it fits the description of Dvibhuja Heruka; his asana is dancing on a corpse, vahana is corpse, symbols are vajra and kapala and the identification mark is khatvanga banner hanging from the left shoulder.

Heruka from Bahul II is 1.18m high, he left hand holds a skull and clasps the khatvanga and the right hand holds a vajra and his necklace is six beads hanging by the cord. Schnitger mentioned that he was dancing on the corpse (1964). The photograph did not show that. But Dvibhuja Heruka does not necessarily stands on corpses as vakan. It can be double lotus (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi, 1984).

According to O.W. Wolters (1999) in his interpretation of the leg bracelets, only kings are allowed to adorn himself with such leg decorations. On the basis of sculptural evidence, kings and females especially dancers, normally adorned with leg bracelets. In traditional society feet were regarded as the lowest part of human anatomy and thus very rude to use the feet other than for walking. However, a kings feet, according to certain people have divine and miracle power to heal and cure certain diseases such as the skin disorder etc.

The tradition of providing super natural power to kings can still be observed until today. As an example, the Raja of Perak has in his regalia, the feet bracelet made from gold and shaped in the form of snake, just like the arm-bracelet worn by the statue of Adityavarman, the Bhairava. The belief and tradition existed during the traditional phase can still be seen today in various ceremonies such as the inauguration of a sultan or weddings. They are practiced as long as they do not go against the Islamic laws and teachings. The belief that king has divine power is still prevalent among the uneducated Malay rakyat. But to the educated, they are just myths and legends.

4. Traditional Diplomacy and Present Day Reality

In Hikayat Hang Tuah, there is a story about Hang Tuah's visit to China as the Ambassador of the Raja of Melaka. This story is to highlights the importance of proper way of diplomacy by the ruler of Melaka in securing trade favour from the Maharaja of China by sending a senior minister to the court of China. In the story we are told how Hang Tuah managed to see the face of the Maharaja by pretending to eat the *kangkong*. Hang Tuah was also sent to Rome. There was a story about this in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*.

The implications of this trade missions to China is very useful to Melaka. This is due to the fact that China at the time was already a great nation. The diplomatic relations with China was the confirmation of the practice that started centuries before the rise of Melaka. During the Srivijaya period, the ruler of Srivijaya sent several missions to China beginning from Mo-lo-yu 644 A.D/(Wolters, 1970) Srivijaya also established strong link with India from the evidence provided by the Nalanda inscription of 9th A.D. (Wolters, 1970) and the Tanjore

inscriptions of the Cola King in 1025 A.D. China, India and Rome were the links which were built during the beginning of the Christian era. These traditional links were found to be the beginning of the trade links between Southeast Asia and India, China and the Middle East. They were the first trade partners of Malaysia. These trade partnership still continue to be develop and strengthen today. Thus due to that fact that Malaysia still believe that her future lies with these countries. This realization is shared by many countries of the world. They believe that India, China and Middle East will become economic forces of the future. The memories of the past will be the guide for future prosperity. Malaysia also will use the shared past among the Southeast Asian nation to progress towards the future.

5. Conclusion

There are many events in the classical Malay literary sources which in the past, scholars considered as myths and legends. However using relevant knowledge such as Hindu and Buddhist (iconography, Malay culture, Malay language and literature) all the myths and legends can be extracted as verifiable events in the history of the Malays.

The verifiable events in this paper are the consecrations of the kings of Sumatera and old Kedah as Bhairava. From the story of *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, archaeological evidence from Padang Lawas and the sculpture of Adityavarman, the efforts by the literary writers to give supernatural power to the kings and the diplomatic links with India Middle East and China, all these events can be classified as memories of the Malays of their past. From these memories, one can deduct the wisdom of the Malays in the past to leave these memories to future generation to continue to act in order to achieve prosperity. Because Europe and United State of America had not exist yet the diplomatic relations were established with the super powers existed during those time. Those super power continued to play important economic role even today.

These verifiable memories can only be interpreted by means of multi-discipline approach. It cannot be achieve by using literary approach only. An analyser need to equip himself with a number of other disciplines such as Indian studies, iconographic studies, history archaeology, culture history and linguistic.

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