Muhammad Haji Salleh and the *Malay Annals*

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Abstract

The *Malay Annals* (*Sejarah Melayu* or *Sulalatus Sulatin*) is the most respected of Malay classical literary texts. In 1981, Muhammad Haji Salleh published a volume of poems based on the chapters of the *Sejarah Melayu*, called *Sajak-Sajak Sejarah Melayu.* He has translated twelve of these poems into English and they appear regularly in English language collections of his poetry. This article analyses the major themes underlying Muhammad's whole text: the role of the poet as a moral and philosophical guide; the principles of characterisation employed; and the moral principles that sustain personal virtue and the state.

Keywords

Malay Literature, *Malay Annals*, Malay ethnicity, Muhammad Haji Salleh, personal and civic morality, *pujangga* (poet)

Sir Richard Winstedt has praised the court chronicle of the fifteenth century Malay kingdom of Melaka, the *Malay Annals* (*Sejarah Melayu*, or *Sulalatus Salatin*), as being "the most famous, distinctive and best of all Malay works" (*A History of Classical Malay Literature* 129). Winstedt considered the author "not only a pundit but a literary artist" and particularly delighted in the way in which he "gives us a vivid picture of a port thronged with Indian traders, Hindu and Muslim, with settlers from China, Java and Sumatra" (129).

Beguiled by the book since early childhood, Muhammad Haji Salleh (born 1942), wrote his own set of poetic reflections on the *Sejarah Melayu* during the late 1970s. He too has described the author as a man of "genius," adding that he was the equal of Goethe or Shakespeare (Muhammad Haji Salleh, *Dunia ialah Sebuah Aksara* 42). Muhammad's volume was simply called the *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu,* Poems of the *Sejarah Melayu*. It offered thirty-four "Chapters" (*ceretera,* literally "stories"), with at least one poem, sometimes more, based on each of the thirty-

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four chapters in the Shellabear edition of the original chronicle.[2] Every poem was prefaced by a short prose extract from that particular chapter of the source text.

The aim of this article is to describe the major themes of Muhammad's work, which lovingly expounds the past glory of the Malay ethnic community. Muhammad renounced writing poetry in English in 1974 and has written exclusively in Malay since then. *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu* was part of his drive to regain his "Malayness" during the 1970s and was arguably his most detailed poetic statement about Malay society. We will concentrate on three topics: the role of the poet; the characterisation of Malay men and women; personal and civic morality and their consequences.

It should be noted that Muhammad has also translated twelve of these 34 poems into English, under the title of "poems from the malay annals" (Muhammad Haji Salleh, *Beyond the Archipelago* 81-144; *Rowing Down Two Rivers* 71-110; *Purple Desire of the Islands* 254-300). I will normally use these translations when they are available.[3] When they are not, I will make my own translations and mark them as such (Trans. Aveling).

1. The Prologue and the Role of the Poet

The Prologue (*Mukadimah)* to the *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu* begins with a quotation from the *Sejarah Melayu*: "*Hamba dengar ada hikayat Melayu dibawa orang dari Goa; barang kita perbaiki kiranya dengan istiadatnya supaya diketahui oleh segala anak cucu kita yang kemudian daripada kita, dan boleh diingatkannya oleh segala mereka itu; syahadan adalah beroleh faedah ia daripadanya"* (Shellabear 2). Muhammad translates this as follows (the absence of capital letters is deliberate): "we hear that there is a malay history carried from gowa, let us improve on it with due ceremony, so that our descendants may be familiar with it, and remember it, and consequently gain benefit therefrom" (*Rowing Down Two Rivers* 73). It is an announcement that a new work is about to be written, on the basis of an older manuscript, which will provide knowledge of Malay society and moral benefit to its readers.

The Shellabear text presents the longest form of the Prologue and consists of two parts. The first part is taken from the Malay/Persian work of moral philosophy, *Bustanu's-Salatin* (written after 1638) and comprises a series of Arabic

[2] There are three major editions of the *Sejarah Melayu.* The "Shellabear edition" was composed in 1612 and edited by Wiliam G Shellabear in 1896; it is probably the best known. The second was composed after 1535 and was one of a series of texts collected by Sir Stamford Raffles. It is now held in the Raffles Collection in the library of the Royal Asiatic Society, London, and is generally referred to as "Raffles MS No. 18." It was edited by Sir Richard Winstedt and published in 1938. A third version is a recent edition by A Samad Ahmad (1979), based on three manuscripts held at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.

[3] The twelve include the Prologue, chapters 2, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, 22, 30, 32 and 34. For an English translation of original Prologue, see Muhammad Haji Salleh, *The Mind of the Malay Author* 24-26. For a translation of the whole *Sejarah* Melayu, see *C.C.* Brown, *Sejarah Melayu, "Malay Annals,"* 1970.

prayers with Malay glosses, praising God, Muhammad and the prophets. The second part describes a meeting of senior courtiers. One of them, "*seorang orang besar, terlebih mulianya dan terlebih besar martabatnya daripada yang lain"* (a very noble man, much greater and of a far higher level of dignity than everyone else, [Muhammad Haji Salleh, *The Mind of the Malay Author* [25]), brings the command to revise a Malay *hikayat*. The author responds by initially describing himself as "*fakir yang insaf akan lemah kedaan dirinya dan singkat pengetahuan ilmunya"* (a humble beggar who is of a weak condition and limited in his knowledge [*The Mind of the Malay Author* 25]). Nevertheless, he immediately proudly proceeds to describe his distinguished pedigree in some detail: *"Tun Muhammad namanya, Tun Seri Lanang timang-timangnya, Paduka Raja gelaran Bendahara anak Orang Kaya Paduka Raja, cucu… cicit… piut… Melayu bangsanya dari Bukit Siguntang Mahameru, Malkat negerinya*" (Tun Muhammad is his name, Tun Seri Lanang is he called, Paduka Raja his title, Prime Minister, the son of Orang Kaya Paduka Raja, grandson of… great grandson of… great-greatgrandson of… Malay his race, from Bukit Siguntang Mahameru, Malakat, his nation. [*The Mind of the Malay Author* 25]).

He provides the date of the meeting, 1612, and lists a number of royal persons related to the messenger. The name of the man who brings the command is Seri Nara Wangsa, called Tun Bambang, and his father is named too, before prayers are made for his wellbeing. The king is Paduka Seri Sultan Alaudin Riayat Syah, ruling in Pekan Tua. The command is then repeated a second time in slightly different terms: "*Bahwa beta minta perbuatkan hikayat pada Bendahara, peri peristiwa dan peraturan segala raja-raja Melayu dengan istiadatnya sekali, supaya diketahui oleh segala anak cucu kita..."* (It is our request that the Bendahara write a hikayat of the chronicles and genealogy of all the Malay kings and all the ceremonies and customs of their states, etc." [*The Mind of the Malay Author* 26]). This repetition may suggest a coming together of two different texts.

Muhammad has written on the Prologue to the *Sejarah Melayu* in the first chapter of his book, *The Mind of the Malay Author* (3-26). He points out that it places the Malay community as part of the Divine Plan, beginning from the creation of the world, and the rule of the sultan and the nobles of the court as part of that plan. He praises the author's great humility as being appropriate and virtuous when he talks about himself as a vehicle for recording the plan. Muhammad sees him as a "wise man," with a moral duty to teach virtuous living.

The Prologue to *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu* omits almost all of the traditional Prologue. It dismisses the pious Arabic prayers and thus the divine plan of history. One of the few uses of the word for God, *tuhan,* occurs in the second last stanza of the Prologue (*semesta tuhan yang luas* [x]), but is omitted in the English translation ("the great world" [76]). Subsequently, the term *tuhan* (never *Allah*) returns in Chapter 7:

di luar, tuhan mengaturkan

alamnya dengan senyap (18)

(outside, god quietly arranges/ his universe), where the playfulness is perhaps influenced by the Indonesian poet Rendra (cf. "Masmur Mawar"; in Raffel 156-58). God is also present but not obvious in a very few other places in the text. There is a brief mention of Him in Chapter 12 (*"tuhan melihat/ menjaga hujung seperti dia mengawal permulaan"* (32) (god cares for us/ watching the end as he does the beginning [90]). God is also mentioned once in Chapter 14 (iii) [4]; and, most tellingly, once in Chapter 18:

maka marah kami serahkan
kepada keadilan tuhan dan raja (49)

(we surrender our anger
to the justice of god and the sultan). (Trans. Aveling)

There is little reference to Islam (except in stories 7 (i), positively, and 32 (i), negatively). The world is largely a secular place, which God rules but only from a vast distance.

The Prologue to *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu* also omits the extensive genealogies and Tun Mamat's excessive humility. This new perspective makes the court more distant and brings the poet to the centre stage.

Muhammad's Prologue is not a translation; it is part of a poetic response to the some of the themes suggested by the classical text. It follows the conventions of modern poetry in Malay and is a personal document, not written for the pleasure of any king (as Raffles 18 is: "*akan menyukakan duli hadrat baginda*" [66]). In his Prologue, Muhammad is writing back to the *Mukadimah* in an original way, as he is to do throughout the rest of the *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu*. Being an independent poet, he can choose the first of the two forms of the royal commands to write and revise the chronicle, and ignore the second one. He can sidestep the debate about the location of Goa (in India, the Celebes, or Pahang; see Cheah Boon Kheng 17-20), as irrelevant to his text. He can use the Shellabear text and not Raffles 18, without feeling that he is being judged for scholarly laziness. This is a work of literature, not philology.

The purpose of the Prologue is to prepare the reader for what is to come in this new volume. There is a definite pattern to the address made to "*mamak bendahara, tun mamat*" (vii) (revered prime minister, tun mamat [73]). It begins with geography. First come references to the land, the seas and rivers of the wider Malay World:

[4] Where there are more than one poem on a single chapter of the *Sejarah Melayu*, they are marked, e.g. 14 (i), 14 (ii), etc.

bawalah kita kembali ke siguntang yang tinggi
ke samudera di seberang,
jawa di tenggara, bugis di perahu laut…. (vii)

(take us back to soaring si guntang
to samudera, across the waters,
to the javanese in the southeast, the buginese on the sea's belly…
[*Rowing Down Two Rivers* 73])

The seas bring traders to Melaka but foreign merchants are not included as members of the realm. The Chinese come in their junks and *tongkang*; Indians (*keling*) come with cloth. They may admire Malay civilisation, as the Portuguese do: "*feringgi yang kagum dengan tamadun Melaka"* (74) (the portuguese are in awe of malaccan life), but their main role is to contribute to the wealth and prestige of Melaka. They remain foreign and when they sail away, they disappear from the frame of the Malay world.

Geography is the setting for the second area of subject matter: "*manusia,"* humanity. Following the above lines in the opening stanza, Muhammad touches on the "*rakyat di sawah, hutan dan pasir"* (vii) (the people in the fields, forests and sands [74]). Stanza five lists the various types of settlement: "*kota dan bagan, dusun dan pelabuhan*" (viii) (the forts and ports, the orchards and wharfs [74]). Each of these settings is a place where water meets the land, and water provides a central unifying image throughout the volume. Chapter 7 (ii) emphasises the importance of water for agriculture and trade, both of which made the realm prosperous. Unlike other geographical regions that are land-masses (Europe, Asia, Australia etc), *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu* presents the Malay world as a seascape containing land: "*seribu pulau Melayu"* (82) (a thousand Malay islands [108]).

The state (*negeri*) is at the centre of Malay geography. The *rakyat* are important not as free citizens in a democratic state but subjects of a king. Everyone has a place in a hierarchical royal state, and it is members of the court who count most:

ceritalah tentang manusianya,
raja-raja di istana
bendahara dengan kebijaksanaan mereka,
bentara gagah dan setia… (ix)

(appraise her people,
sultans in the palaces
the prime ministers and their wisdom,
the brave and loyal retainers [75])

Other defined figures in the court are "*putera atau menteri-menteri*" (princes and ministers), "*datuk-datuk"* (lords) and "*orangkaya di balainya"* (ix) (officers in the

halls [75]). All of these officials are men, praised for their courage, wisdom and the other outstanding features that constitute their powerful public image.

Women are important in this world not because of anything they do but because of their incomparable beauty:

> *ukir dengan bahasa halus tuan hamba*
> *kecantikan puteri melayu*
> *yang tiada bandingnya di zaman itu.* (ix)
>
> (carve the beauty of malay princesses
> with the gentle nuances of your language
> for there was none to compare with them [75].)

They do not sing, dance, weave, study, provide interesting conversation… their roles are simply to be wives or concubines at best, and victims of war at worst. They are, as Indonesian poet Dorothea Rosa Herliany has entitled one of her forthcoming volumes, "*cuma tubuh*, *cuma tubuh*" only bodies, only flesh.

The third dimension of this discourse consists of the definition of the role of the poet. The speaker calls Tun Mamat a "*pujangga*" (viii). Muhammad translates this as a "bard" (73). The word is not found in Wilkinson's *Malay-English Dictionary* (1901, reprinted 1959) but does appear in Winstedt's *Unabridged Malay-English Dictionary* (1962). Winstedt notes that the word comes from "Jakarta," and means an "author, scholar, thinker" (257). Its immediate origin is quite clear: the term was part of the title of the pioneering Indonesian literary magazine, *Pujangga Baru,* founded in 1933 by Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana. It derives from the Old Javanese term (originally Sanskrit) *bhujangga,* a court poet, but also a non-brahmin ascetic (Zoetmulder and Robson 1982).

In the broadest terms, a *pujangga* was a poet and singer, a religious functionary and a philosopher. In his early book *Tradition and Change in Contemporary Malay-Indonesian Poetry*, Muhammad emphasised the individuality and creativity of the *pujangga* in terms that resonate with the Prologue of the *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu*. He writes that poets are:

> thinkers or men of letters. Externally they may appear to be obedient members of their society, accept and obey their *adat* and play their particular roles, but as thinkers or men of letters, they can be said to be individuals. In the act of creating a literary work a *pujangga* is his own master in a world beyond the rules of his society or the desires of his superiors. He chooses his own words, recreates his own experiences and formulates his own thoughts. The sensibility to respond to the world with balance and insight, the talent for language and style are qualities that make an individual out of a person, however rigid the society he may live in (Muhammad Haji Salleh, *Tradition and Change* 4).

In the later essay, "The Mind of the Prologue," Muhammad also claimed *pujangga* as a Malay term. He accepted here that the role encompasses a responsibility to write as the king commands, but insisted that it also required a commitment to serious subject matter, great literary talent and great wisdom. Muhammad charmingly depicted the poet as spending many a sleepless night, worrying how to please the king and the future generations (*The Mind of the Malay Author* 13-15).

Sleepless nights or not, the poet's ultimate duties in *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu* are twofold. The first is historical, to describe "*bagaimana kita hidup di zaman ini/ dan bagaimana bapa dan moyang kita/ memerintah negeri dan membajak tanah"* (viii) (how we live in our times, and how our forefathers administered the land and tilled it [74]).

The second is ethical, to provide a moral evaluation of the way in which people lived:

> *tuan hamba ialah pujangga,*
> *tugasnya berat, semuanya mesti dijaga,*
> *bahasa dan urutan peristiwa,*
> *kebesaran negeri dan hati kecil manusia,*
> *tapi yang amat agung,*
> *perkatakanlah yang benar,*
> *karena kebenaran itu isi sejarah,*
> *pembetul raja dan pengingat orang lupa,*
> *petunjuk yang lurus*
> *dan tiada patah di bawah pukulan.* (viii)
>
> (you are the bard,
> weighty is your duty, all things must be considered,
> language and the turn of events
> the might of nations and the conscience of man.
> but most important,
> speak the true word,
> because truth is the matter of history,
> straightener of kings and reminder of the forgetful
> the straight pointer
> that will not break under blows. [73])

Muhammad has described the *Sejarah Melayu* as "a moral history" (*The Mind of the Malay Author* 20). Morality is the fourth area of importance in the Prologue. It is the ultimate topic about which the poet writes. The order to create stories "picked from real memory" (76) encourages the poet to "*berilah warna pada yang baik dan buruk,/ hati bersih dan busuk*" (viii) (give colour to good and evil./ the pure and wicked heart [74]). The overarching criterion is "*kebenaran*" (viii), "truth" (73). Besides the passage just quoted, the term returns at the very end of the Prologue:

tulislah,
tulislah dengan segala alatan pujangga tuan hamba
supaya dari peristiwanya akan timbul kebesaran,
dari sejarah kita dapat dipelajari kebenaran. (viii)

(write,
write with all the tools of the bard's craft
so that from events greatness may arise,
from our history we may learn truth. [76])

History may be about human greatness but true greatness is judged by adherence to the truth.

Included within *kebenaran,* truth, are other positive virtues –*"sedar"* (viii) (heedfulness [74]), further expressed as "*mengenali diri/ menyelam ke semesta tuhan yang luas, memikir dengan hati yang faham apa yang telah berlaku*" (x) (know [oneself]/ dive into the worlds within emotions/ or be ready to discover the great world,/ think on all that has happened with discrimination,/ and foretell the future shape of time [76]); "*kebesaran dan daulat*" (ix) (dignity, greatness and majesty [75]); "*saksama*" (equality); and "*kasih saying akan rakyat/ dan tanggungjawab yang mengalir/ dengan hak rasanya*" (ix) (love of the people/ and a responsibility that flows/ within the conscience [76]). Muhammad's ideas of morality are aesthetic; they can be expressed as *adab*: "Discipline of mind and manners, good education and good breeding, politeness, deportment, a mode of conduct or behaviour" (Harun, *Bustan al-Salatin* 24).

Not all of its stories will be positive. Some stories will tell of greed for women, high status and gold. Others will tell of war and poisoning, of discrimination and hatred:

… *kebesaran dan daulat*
tumbuh dari air saksama,
dan air yang dicurah racun fitnah
dikeruhkan oleh baying-bayang
raja atau menteri-menteri
yang bercermin diri,
akan membunuh sekaliannya,
mereputkan lantai istana,
mematahkan tiang singgahsana
dan mengalir ke perigi rakyat
di kota atau di kampung jauh. (ix)

(dignity, greatness and majesty
grew from the waters of equality,
and the waters desecrated by slander,
or darkened by shadows

of the kings and ministers
who stand before mirrors,
will kill all,
rot the palace floors,
overturn the thrones,
and flow into the people's wells,
in the city or distant villages [75])

Potential moral failings are listed in the Prologue too: "*kendurnya di masa kita menyerah/ dan lupakan akan makna megah*" (viii) (we let [heedfulness] drop when we surrendered/ and [were] oblivious to the meaning of might [74]); "*fitnah*" (ix) (slander [75]) and the vanity of self obsession, "*bayang-bayang/ raja atau menteri-menteri/ yang bercermin diri*" (ix) (shadows of kings or ministers/ who stand before mirrors); murderous intents ("*akan membunuh sekaliannya*" [ix]); greed for gold ("*emas yang selalu bersinar/ di mata datuk-datuk beta"* [ix], gold that often shimmers/ in my lords' eyes [75]).

These faults are failures of "*Keadilan"* (justice), the third overarching abstract virtue, named just once in the Prologue. Justice and injustice are related to power, and power is transitory ("*betapa kuasa itu seperti kabus/ cepat hilang dan menyisih*" [ix], power is more like mist/ quickly fading and vanishing [76]). As aspects of power, these failings have consequences for the state. The book consists of "events" (*peristiwa*) told to illustrate personal and state morality, judged by the qualities of truth, awareness, justice.

2. Characterisation in *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu*

One of the striking features of the *Malay Annals* is the richness of its human cast. Muhammad rejoices in this variety and takes the opportunity to speak for them in many different voices. The translations use still other voices from English literature. The Prologue to *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu* relies on the status-based second person form of address ("you," not *kau* but "*tuan hamba*," my lord, and his title *"mamak bendahara"*). The second person is rarely used in the rest of the book. In most of the *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu*, the presentation of the major characters is fairly equally divided between the use of the first-person forms of "*aku*" (I) and third person names and ranks for "he" and "she." The first person allows for personal reflection on one's own actions and situation. The third person description of their deeds allows for comments that the characters themselves may not be able to make. In chapters consisting of several parts, both perspectives may be used to create a dialogue between subjective and objective understandings. The main characters speak and are spoken to; the *rakyat* are silent. Let us consider a few of these characters, beginning with the male figures.

The stories of the *Sejarah Melayu* start with Alexander, presenting him as being already well-known to listeners of the *Annals*. "*Seperti yang di dalam hikayat Iskandar itu"* (as it is told in the chronicle of Alexander [Shellabear 3]), the *Sejarah*

Melayu text says succinctly about his war with the King of India. Muhammad's First Chapter includes five linked poems, two on Alexander and three on Raja Suran, his descendant. Winstedt notes that the stories of Alexander sometimes depict him as a forerunner of Islam, and in others as a world-weary conqueror (*History of Classical Malay Literature* 76). Muhammad's preference is for the later interpretation for both Alexander and Raja Suran.

The first part of the Chapter presents a divided first-person image of the great warrior, unable to sleep at night and tormented by the horror of war. His body is weary and afraid:

> *tubuh masih tergetar oleh gerak perang,*
> *punggung lesu oleh lambungan kuda,*
> *di telingaku gemuruh hasrat*
> *denting pedang dan desing panah*
> *meretak dan mencantumkan mimpi kematian* (1)
>
> (my body still quivers from the actions of war,
> my loins are weary from bouncing on my horse.
> the rumble of desire rings in my ears,
> the clanging of swords and the hissing of arrows
> crack and reassemble dreams of death.) (Trans. Aveling)

But when morning comes, the second part continues, he will return to the violence of day, capturing enemy rulers, killing them, looting their palaces. More explicitly than part i, the second part asks:

> *apalah makna semua ini?*
> *dibentuk bayang hati*
> *kebesaran ialah sinar mata*
> *si rakus yang mencari*
> *bukit bukti untuk dirinya.* (2)
>
> (what does this all mean?
> formed by the shadows of the heart
> greatness is a light in the eyes
> a mountain of proof of the self [Trans. Aveling])

The dreams at night, the troubled conscience, affirm that public proof of one's own worth is no proof, because the true outcome of conquest and pillaging is a denial of the whole self (*"meniadakan seluruh diriku"* [2]). His motive is greed and power, neither of which can ever be satisfied.

The Raffles' edition of *Sejarah Melayu* divides the story of Raja Suran off into a separate chapter; the Shellabear text does not. There is a logic in joining it to the story of Alexander because both men are great warriors and explorers, and

both are disillusioned. Alexander travels to India, Suran descends to the bottom of the sea, where he meets and marries a beautiful princess and fathers a child with her. "*Seperti biasa"* (as usual), the text continues, because it is only a prelude to boredom and anxiety:

> *akhirnya bosan kembali juga*
> *kepada gelisah yang tumbuh pada akal pengembara.* (5)
>
> (at last boredom returns
> to the restlessness which grows in the mind of the wanderer [Trans. Aveling].)

This sense of the futility of lust, greed and power also marks Chapter Eight, which tells of the capture of the king of Samudera and his humiliation as the caretaker of the royal fowls. Told in the first person, the poem draws its impact not from its reflections on the futility of power but from its description of the simple life of the *rakyat* to which the king presently belongs. The work is dirty and demeaning ("*kerjanya kotor, menghinakan*" [22]) but it teaches him the laws of human life ("*undang-undang manusia*" [22]). The roosters are, sooner or later, defeated by younger roosters. The women do not remain faithful ("*tidak kekal"* [23]). The food comes from royal tables and is therefore left-overs. The more general lesson is that:

> *kalah-menang ini datang dengan naluri,*
> *mudah dan wajar.*
> *keadilan juga jadi peraturannya*
> *tanpa riuh atau bising penentangan.* (23)
>
> (winning and losing come instinctively
> easily and naturally
> justice regulates everything
> without noise or the hiss of opposition.) (Trans. Aveling)

There is a balance in the universe, even if it is not immediately obvious.

The rules of survival are further clarified in the next poem, Chapter Nine. The speaker is an old man, Sayyidina Ali Asmayu'din, who responds to the desire of the king to visit his brother. His advice not to leave the court might be considered cynical:

> *fitnah itu cara cepat*
> *kepada mereka yang berhajat*
> *tiada undang-undang sopan*
> *atau saingan fikiran*
> *yang menyaring*
> *gerak naik-turun kuasa.*

perturnnya hukum cita-cita semata,
semuanya halal di negeri nafsu,
tiada sesuatu yang mahal terlalu. (24)

(intrigue is the short cut
for the ambitious,
there's no rule of honour,
for the competing mind
to calculate
the rise and fall of power.
its rules are its own ambition,
all is legal in the enumeration of desires,
nothing is too expensive [84])

The instructions are realistic in their context but they are not moral. Asmayu'din tells the ruler to avoid speaking the truth but to seek alliances, give gifts to his followers and destroy his enemies. The book as a whole makes it clear that the two levels of human society have potentially different moralities. That of the court is full of intrigue and murderous intent; that of the people is innocent and harmonious.

There are only a few women characters in the *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu*. Some of them are unnamed sexual objects, for men to do with as they please. In part ii of the First Chapter, Raja Suran boasts:

gadis kutiduri setiap kali
putusnya perang dan nafsu menggantinya (3)

(I sleep with the girls every time
the war finishes and lust replaces it.) (Trans. Aveling)

In the Fifth Chapter, the king, Paduka Seri Pikrama Wira, boasts:

isteriku ramai, anakku berpuluh
gundikku menunggu hari senja
aku memuaskan mereka semua (13)

(my wives are many, my children number by the tens
my concubines wait to twilight
I satisfy then all.) (Trans. Aveling)

In the Nineteenth chapter:

ujung tanah menerimaku sebagai perompak
dan sebagai perompak aku menyerangnya.

setelah harta di kumpul
perempuan di himpun (50)

(land's end considers me as a pirate
and as a pirate I will attack them
after I have gathered their goods
I will collect their women.) (Trans. Aveling)

In Chapter 26, part ii, the Bendahara jokes with the young men of the court as he invites them to gossip on the veranda:

bagaimana engkau semua?
… mengganggu anak dara orang
dan berlagak di pasar sahaja? (62)

(How are you all?
Disturbing the girls
and putting on airs at the marketplace?) (Trans. Aveling)

Certain other women are named but they too still exist only in relation to the men characters as objects of sexual desire. (The only women who do not are old: Wan Empuk and Wan Malini in Chapter 2.) Tun Kudu, in Chapter 13, is passed from the king to Seri Nara Diraja for reasons of statecraft. She comments unfavourably on the arrangement:

kecantikan perempuan itu bahaya
kepada dirinya,
menyulitkan hidup yang mudah,
kerena kecantikan itu
daging yang didagangkan.
tiada bahagia padanya. (35)

(a woman's beauty is dangerous
for her,
it complicates her simple life,
because of that beauty
her flesh is traded.
it brings her no happiness) (Trans. Aveling).

Li Po, the Chinese princess in Chapter 15, is brought into the Malay world as an object of trade. She is physically attractive, luxuriously dressed, and married to Sultan Mansur Syah without any comment. Their wedding night is passionate and followed by positive sleep (*tidur yang menyempurnakan perkahwinan* [[43], sleep complements a marriage *Rowing Down Two Rivers* 94). Presumably this is a marriage

that may last – at least for a while. If so, Li Po is luckier than Tun Teja, daughter of the Prime Minister of Pahang, in Chapter 29 (ii), who prefers her own birthplace to Melaka (*"baik juga negeriku/ di sinilah rumaku/ masa anakku, aku gadis/ dan menjadi permaisurinya"* [71], my country is better/ it is where my home is/ where I spent my childhood, I was a maid/ and ruled as a queen [Trans. Aveling]). Or Tun Fatimah, in Chapter 33 (ii), daughter of the Bendahara (Prime Minister), who "*jangankan ia tertawa, tersenyum pun tiada*" (85) (not only did she never laugh, she never even smiled [Trans. Aveling]), understandably as the sultan killed her father.

The most striking depiction of a sensitive but still bound woman is Anum, Hang Kasturi's mistress in Chapter 16. The language of the preliminary quotation from *Sejarah Melayu* is fairly harsh: "*Kata sahibu'l-hikayat, ada beberapa lamanya maka Hang Kasturi berkendak dengan seorang dayang-dayang yang dipakai oleh raja di dalam istana*." Literally the sentence means: "The master of the story tells that after some time Hang Kasturi had an affair with a serving maid (concubine?) in the palace, who was used by the king." For his own purposes, Muhammad translates this epigraph in a much more romantic way: "as is told by the sahibul hikayat, after a lapse of some time, hang kasturi was in love with a lady of the king, in the palace" (95). The softening is appropriate for the romantic tone of the poem:

> *anum, kupilihmu dari seratus dayang istana*
> *kerena kau melembutkan suaraku,*
> *memulakan rindu pada malam,*
> *memadamkan marh pada sultan.*
> *anum, kupilihmu dari seratus kampung.*
>
> (anum, I choose you from a hundred girls of the palace
> because you soften my voice,
> make me yearn for the evening,
> extinguish my anger against the sulta,
> anum, I choose you from a thousand vilages.)

The intimate tone of second person address ("*kau*," not "*tuan hamba*," my lord, as in the Prologue) is reminiscent of the Indonesian poet Rendra's "Surat Cinta," which insists: "*Wahai, dik Narti/ aku cinta kepadamu… Wahai, dik Narti,/ kupinangkau menjadi isteriku… Wahai Dik Narti,/ kuingin dikau/ menjadi ibu anak-anakku!*" (Hey, little sister Narti/ I love you… I want you for my wife!… I want you to be the mother of my children! [Trans. Raffel, *Rendra* 27-29). The emphasis on the youthfulness of the couple, the sacredness and perfection of the night spent in making love, their blessing by the moon and the environment, all resonate with Rendra's poems at this time.[5] The very sensual quality of the poem

[5] For the poem see Rendra, *Empat Kumpulan Sajak* 11; comments by Muhammad Haji Salleh, *Tradition and Change* 110-12.

contrasts with Muhammad's more common intellectual tone in his poetry in general – and lack of poems on women in particular! The unstated fact that Hang Kasturi is soon to die at the hands of his best friend, Hang Tuah, adds an extra pathos to the poem for readers who know the Malay story and other traditional legends on lovemaking before inevitable death:

> *tapi kalau ada esok*
> *kita akan berkasih lagi*
> *pada esok hari,*
> *jikalau tiada,*
> *malam ini telah kita sempurnakan*
> *secara manusiawi* (44-45)
>
> (if there's a tomorrow
> we will love again
> on the morrow
> if not
> then tonight we have perfected it
> as human beings [96])

There is no tomorrow but neither can the night be surpassed. The active male and the passive female have found a perfect balance for once.

3. The Political Morality of *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu*

In these poems all actions, good and bad, have consequences. There are, in fact, two levels of morality here. Truth relates to the lives of individual persons. If future descendants can learn to lead virtuous moral lives, they will know themselves, God's world, acquire wisdom and they will be delivered from the threat of violence ("*tak mungkin ditakutkan oleh keris"* [x], fear no kris [Prologue to *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu* 76]).

Truth is publicly expressed as justice, which has implications for the life and destiny of the state itself. There are three clear examples of the consequences of failures in justice. The first is in Chapter 3. Muhammad does not spell the story out fully but it would be well known to his Malay readers. In the *Sejarah Melayu* Sang Nila Utama goes on a picnic with the courtiers and serving women, despite Permaisuri Iskandar's preference that they do not go. The women gather shells, the men hunt. Sang Nila Utama kills a deer in a particularly brutal way. The king climbs onto a rock, sees an unknown land in the distance and demands to sail there. On the way, a huge storm arises and after throwing everything he can overboard, finally jetisons his crown. The unknown land is Singapore. Sang Nila Utami remains there and creates a new state. The killing of the deer may have marked the end of Nila Utami's rule in Bintan; the loss of the crown certainly does.

In Chapter 10, a boy saves Singapore from attack by swordfishes. The story is told in detail in the *Sejarah Melayu*, the *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu* only alludes to it. The king, Paduka Seri Maharaja, tried placing his soldiers on the beach to resist the predators with their shins. This had no effect. The unnamed boy suggested that a barricade of banana stems be erected instead and that proved to be effective in ending the attacks. The king has already executed Tun Jana Khatib for apparently spying on his wife and he immediately accepts the nobles' suggestion that the boy is so intelligent that he might be dangerous when he grows up. The boy too is executed. Seri Maharaja's grandson, Raja Iskandar, is similarly inclined to irrational homicide. He has a young woman impaled and, in his grief and anger, the girl's father betrays the kingdom to the Javanese empire of Majapahit.

It is disconcerting but in civic morality there is not a one to one relationship between the person who commits the original fault and those who receive the consequences of those actions. *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu* begins the story of the boy with the inexorable mechanism of cosmic retribution:

> *dengan perlahan atau serentak*
> *balasan tiba juga,*
> *nyawa disukat nyawa,*
> *kecelakaan dengan peri*
> *kematian dengan alir darah,*
> *waktu berukur,*
> *sejarah kita bundar.* (27)

> (whether tardy or immediate
> justice journeys its circle –
> a soul for a soul
> accidents for misfortune,
> death for the killer.
> time moves in measures
> our history turns in cycles. [86])

What circles? From evil to punishment. Anyone might suffer someone else's actions; but when the state falls, all its citizens suffer. This is inescapable.

The nobles' malicious intentions towards the boy are justified through hypocrisy, untruth, presented as rhetoric:

> *negeri kita sempurna, tuanku,*
> *hulubalang dan orang kaya*
> *menjaga lembah dan anak sungai,*
> *hutan dan air.*
> *adat kita adil*
> *membahagi kuasa dan hak*
> *mengaturkan pangkat di puncak dan di akar*

istiadat mendaulatkan segalanya. (27)

(our country is perfect, your majesty,
our warriors and nobles
in control of valleys and rivers
arranging tiers at the crest as well as at the roots
tradition lends us the crown of sovereignty.) [87]

There is no room here for "*akal budak/ anak nelayan beduk"* (28) (a child's mind/ from the fishers' village of beduk [88]). In reality, the boy is a threat to their power, not their civilising rules. As the son of a sailor, he belongs outside the court. By turning their backs on his pure innocence, they have prepared themselves and their whole community for destruction.

Muhammad adds a new dialogue to the story, between the child, now named Hang Nadim, and his unnamed father. The child defends his action as following the teaching he received that he should always "*berbahasa lurus/ dan berbuat yang benar*" (29) (speak the plain language/ and act out the right [88]). His father comforts him by assuring Nadim that his actions will make the nobles realise that there are other voices, "*manusia di luar istana"* (29) (those/ outside the palace [89]), to which they should listen, the voice of humanity. He predicts:

negeri ini juga akan
menanggung dosa rajanya,
singapura akan hapus
dengan kebodohannya. (29)

(the country will bear
the sins of the raja,
singapore will disappear
with its folly. [89])

Those who know the story know that Singapore will eventually be conquered by Majapahit. The destruction of the state is hinted at in the epigraph but not described: "*Adapun tatkala budak itu dibunuh, maka hak rasanya ditanggungnya di atas negeri Singapura"* (28) (when the child was killed his pain and suffering was borne by the state of Singapore [88] – or "was imposed on"). The father, however is a true Malay: "*pegang tanganku, nadim,*" he insists, "*ini juga negeri kita*" (29) (hold my hand tight now, nadim/ this is also our country [89]). It is their duty to obey, no matter what evil the king does.

In the primordial contract between ruler and subject, recorded in the Second Chapter of the *Sejarah Melayu*, the people promise never to rebel ("*durhaka*") against the ruler, "*jikalau ia zalim dan jahat pekerti sekalipun"* (even if he is tyrannical and evil in his ways). In return, the ruler promises never to shame his people, not

to bind them, and not to slander them (Shellabear 20). Muhammad does not mention this contract in Chapter 10 but it is clear that Nadim's father is quietly convinced that his membership of the *rakyat* gives him rights. The mutual contract is mentioned in Chapter 18 ("*adat melayu tak pernah menderhaka*" [49], it is Malay custom never to rebel against the king), and most especially in the second part of Chapter 26.

The right to land as part of this contract figures in the epigraph to Chapter 26: "*Dan segala anak Melayu, bagaimanapun besar dosanya, jangan kamu bunuh, melainkan dosanya durhaka, karena segala Melayu itu tanahmu"* (61) (And as for all the Malays, no matter how great their sins, do not kill them, unless their sin is disobedience, because the whole of Malaya is yours [Trans. Aveling]). And it features in the poem that follows:

> *melayu itu tanahmu*
> *bangsa dan negerimu*
> *kau besar dan raja padanya.* (61)
>
> (Malaya is your land
> race and country
> you are great and their king [Trans. Aveling.])

By respecting the learned ("*orang berilmu*"), and being faithful to one's own race, whether one agrees with them or not, Malaya will grow in freedom (61).

The third, and most crucial, example of cosmic political justice relates to the fall of Melaka itself. This, of course, is another thing that is known by readers of the *Sajak-sajak Sejarah Melayu* from the start. In the Prologue the speaker demands:

> *garislah di kertas urat-urat waktu,*
> *tarikannya ke puncak muka surat*
> *apabila kita besar dan sedar,*
> *kendurkannya di masa kita menyerah*
> *dan luakan akan makna megah.* (viii)
>
> (draw the muscles of time
> swing them to the peak of the page
> when we were a great empire and always heedful,
> let it drop when we surrendered
> and oblivious to the meaning of might [74])

There is an ambiguity about the Portuguese admiration of Malay civilisation described in stanza six, because we know what it really foretells.

Chapter 32 (ii) describes a prosperous and vast state, stretching out "*dari Air Lilih datang ke Kuala Muar pasar tiada perputusan lagi, dari Kampung Keling datang ke*

Kuala Penjauh itu pun tiada membawa api lagi, barang di mana berhenti di sana adalah rumah orang; dari sebelah sini hingga datang ke Batu Pahat demikian juga" (79) (from air lilih to kuala muar; and from kampung keling there was no longer any need to bring the fire, as wherever one stopped one found houses [103]). The chapter paints a picture of great natural beauty; of children playing in the fields; water buffalos and cows; friendly people; old women selling cakes and sweets in the marketplace; fish, crabs and prawns in the rivers; somewhere the sound of a flute being played by a lovesick youth. This is Melaka at its stereotypical best, and it is about to be destroyed:

> *Melaka mewah kerana manusianya bangga*
> *besar rasanya kerena ilmu hidup diguna dengan akal bertimbang*
> *tiada takut pada yang baru atau membenarkan penipu.*
> *sembilan belas laksa semuanya waktu negerinya percaya pada bangsanya*
>
> (melaka is prosperous because it is proud
> it prevails because its knowledge is refined by a weighing mind,
> unafraid of the new, and always aware of the wrongs.
> there were a hundred and ninety thousand then,
> when the country believed in its people. [108])

The fall begins with no reference to the Portuguese., Rather, the Malay aristorcracy have become corrupt. In the twenty-eighth Chapter, some of the young men of Inderagiri are being abused by the young men of Melaka, who insist that they be carried about pick-a-back. They plead in shockingly strident terms with their king to be allowed to go home:

> *kurang ajar anak Melaka ini,*
> *dikiranya ia besar kerena menjajah*
> *tiada sama kita pada mereka,*
> *bangsa dilihat, pangkat diberi* (68)
>
> (the sons of Melaka are swine
> they think they are great because they have conquered us
> we are not the same as them
> they show off their race, they buy their status. [Trans. Aveling])

The basis of their claim to better treatment is simply that both they and the Melakans are "*manusia"* (human beings). Instead they are treated as slaves ("*hamba*"). It is better to go home because Inderagiri is their own state, their own land. Like Tun Teja, they belong where they came from.

The *Sejarah Melayu* is hard on the failure of young men. In Chapter 30, Raja Zainal-Abidin is a refined dandy, who takes any girl he likes and gives those he doesn't like to his companions. The author of the *Sejarah Melayu* comments

"*cabullah Melaka pada zaman itu*" ("great was the debauchery in those days" [Brown 125; Shellabear 176]) and his brother, Sultan Mahmud Syah, fearing that Zainal's behaviour will destroy the state, has him killed. This, unfortunately, contributes further to the looming destruction of Melaka.

Tun Fatimah (Chapter 33 [ii]) recognises the decline too. She laments the death of her father, husband and brother; the prevalence of bribery and greed; the foolishness of the old and the eagerness of the young to use their rank to gain what they want. The smell of death pervades the air. Tyranny runs uncontrolled. She wonders "*apakah akan terjadi pada melaka?"* (86) (what will happen to Melaka?).

"What will happen" happens in the next and final chapter. When the Portuguese overrun Melaka, it comes as no surprise:

telah lama alah melaka ini
feringgi hanya pemecah terakhir
pada negeri yang diretakkan
oleh biaperi dan orang besar-besarnya.
bukit istana diusung ke parit oleh zalimnya
yang tak tertebus pada tujuh keturunan. (87)

(melaka was lost a long time ago,
the portuguese but last soldiers
to a country split
by its own merchants.
injustice drags the palace hill into the drain,
that may not be redeemed for the next seven generations. [109])

The chapter, however, is careful in its apportioning of blame. The above verse blames Malay traders ("*biaperi*") and nobles for the downfall of Melaka. In the second stanza, the speaker admits that there were no external enemies but "*musuh kita ialah kita sendiri*" (87) (we were our own enemies [109]). The third blames the easing of laws, which allowed the sale of land to foreigners, "*kepada saudagar dan feringgi biadab*" (merchants and the barbarian Portuguese). The kingdom conquered, the king runs away, the ports are empty, the fields untended. The last image is again one of water:

di akhir sejarah ini
tidak mungkin kita menang melawan diri sendiri.
kosong selat Melaka
sarap zaman menunggu surutnya
tanah di air mengeruh sungai.
pergaduhan, mimpi dan kebanggaan dibawa banjir waktu. (88)

(at the end of this history
we may not win fighting ourselves.

the malay straits are empty
the age's debris waits for low tide
silt clogs the river
quarrels, dreams and pride are washed away by time's floods. [110])

The tone is melancholy, resigned. Muhammad leaves Melaka to its past. We can see Melaka vividly yet it belongs to another place, another time. It exists in the poet's mind and, thanks to him, vividly in ours as well. It is not multicultural Malaysia but it is part of the dream about a civilised nation, devoted to truth and justice, for each citizen and for their government.

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