

AUTHOR'S ETHICS IN THE WRITING OF TRADITIONAL MALAY LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study is to elucidate the author's writing ethics in the narration of traditional Malay literature. The study explored the ethics of the author by analyzing the Malay traditional texts of the *Raja Pasai Saga* (Hikayat Raja Pasai) that deals with the controversial issue of incest in the text. Qualitative research approach is designed to illuminate the author's writing ethics in discussing issues inherent in the traditional literature through descriptive texts analysis. Data was also analysed through library research by using two main resources, namely literature texts and selected articles. The Malay authorship approach was used to analyse the research data. The descriptive analysis finding found that the scribe was able to maintain his ethical principles in narrating issues which run contra to religious and cultural values. The author, in the traditional Malay authorship *weltanschauung*, was able to control his narrative system in adhering to the convention of the era. However, every issue that occurred during the traditional era had implications similar to that of the present era. Consequently, as narrated in the text, moral transgressions and conflicts cause the destruction of government institutions and the family social system especially if they are committed by the ruling class. As implication, the findings of this study could provide greater insight into the understanding of the incestuous narratives composed in traditional texts, which could guide other researchers, scholars, and students to embark on similar research.

Keywords:

Authorship, traditional Malay literature, ethics, *weltanschauung*, incest, ruling class

Article Received: 18 October 2020, Revised: 3 November 2020, Accepted: 24 December 2020

INTRODUCTION

According to *Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat* (2007, p.677), the word *pengarang* (author) refers to a person who can skillfully use a rope or thread to form beads of flowers. It can also signify to write a story (song or poem) or someone who does an editing of an essay before its final publication. Essentially, the word *mengarang* (compose) refers to the process of arranging flowers, adorning hairs with pearls or using beads and threads to fashion all sorts of creative arts. It can also mean to create some form of fine art using words, sound, storytelling elements, facts, and characters, among others, which is based on moral, social, and religious values (Muhammad Hj Salleh, 2000, p.221). The study of the authorship in the Malay traditional texts was also discussed by Zakaria, N. (2014) and Zakaria, N. Mohamad Hanapi, M. H., Harun, Nur Farahkhanna Mohd Rosli, et.al, (2020). They has stated that: According to the Malay tradition

system, there is no definite definition of authorship.

In general, the traditional author is an exegetist as he or she is able to adapt, revamp, improvise, and transform an original art into one that is more attractive or appealing based on the prevailing culture. According to Noriah Taslim (1993, p.158), as a royal scribe, the writer had to strictly follow the social norms and ethics of his or her society, just like other oral storytellers and members of the society. In this respect, a classical writer had to pen his or her ideas under a collectively approved social boundary to ensure their acceptance. According to *Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat* (2007, p.805), the word *collective* means performing an act together or in a group. The term *collectivism* refers to a way of life that emphasizes the concept of togetherness. In the traditional Malay literature, *collective* carries the meaning that a literary composition belongs not only to the author but also the society.

Given such significance, it becomes imperative that the creation of a literary work has to be inclusive in that it must comprise common and shared values. Thus, almost all Malay literary works have been produced with similar literary characteristics in terms of theme, plot, and characterization based on the societal conventional norms. Thus, deviating from such inclusiveness can render the works unacceptable to society. The convention of traditional Malay literature means “anything, such as a practice, a behavior, or an attribute, that is widely recognized and followed (*Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat*, 2007, p. 820). In the old days, any type of literature that violated such a convention would be considered deviant and, hence, it would be neither accepted nor recognized. In contrast, a literary work that uses aspects that are in line with the norms of society will be accepted as a text deserving recognition. The same convention is not applicable to modern Malay authorship, as the modern authors have more flexibility and freedom to create their literary works based on their creative ideas. As opposed to the old tradition, modern literary works can claim individual ownership rather than collective ownership. In other words, only the author has the rights to own his or her work and, usually, he or she has a copyright to their texts that vouches for such ownerships.

Borrowing contents from other authors’ literary works entails the author of a new book or an article to include proper citations and references. This new convention is diametrically opposed to the traditional convention that allowed and encouraged new authors to duplicate materials of other authors. Should this happen in today’s world, the authors will be considered guilty of plagiarizing other authors’ works. On the upside, however, today’s authors are not bounded by any societal convention, thus providing them with greater space to write their own brand of literary works. Without such constraint, the author can write openly such as to question or criticize a leader or a society without having to soften the tone of criticism by the use of metaphors or

symbols, a standard practice in the traditional Malay literature. In the modern world, the use of new elements or aspects in literature in terms of storyline, theme, plot, writing style, and characterization is considered a creative innovation. In the traditional Malay literature, the concept of authorship was nebulous and not clearly defined, as the term was widely viewed as the role of a storyteller. As such, the traditional Malay authors produced their literary works as stories containing “soothing texts” and “beneficial texts” (Zakaria, N., Mohamad Hanapi, M. H., Harun, Nur Farahkhanna Mohd Rosli et.al, 2020). The former were used to compose works that were entertaining and soothing while the latter were used to create works that were educational and intellectual. Literary works under the beneficial texts are created primarily created to contribute to intellectual development. For example, stories that help stimulate people’s mind to think and to give advice (Zakaria, N., Mohamad Hanapi, M. H., Harun, ., Alizah Lambri et.al, 2019).

In the past, such a question was dealt with by many authors with a fine social finesse that was aligned with the courtesy prescribed by the traditional Malay authorship. This social alignment was not surprising as the social and cultural Malay values served as a foundation for the development of a strong Malay society through traditional Malay literature (Norazimah Zakaria, 2015). In this regard, it is imperative that the learning of such literature be given a strong emphasis as the knowledge gained from such an endeavor can be used as guidelines (Jamian & Md Radzi, 2016) for today’s researchers and as a mirror that reflects the state of affairs of our society (N. Zakaria, Mohamad Hanapi, Harun, & Mohd, 2019). Traditional literature delves into the relationships of thoughts and worldviews of a community, as exemplified in old Malay literature that would portray the feudalistic mindset of Malays of past generations (Ali Ahmad, 2014; Zakaria, N, Mohamad Hanapi, M. H., Harun, Hasrina Baharum et.al, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the incestuous relationship was first carried out by Fischer (2003) who examined the meaning of incest in contemporary popular culture. Almost a decade later, Young and Saxe (2011) carried out a research in which they found that people delivered moral judgments of many kinds of actions, including harmful actions (e.g., assault) and purity violations (e.g., incest, consuming taboo substances). Based on the agent's innocent intent, participants judged accidental harms as less morally wrong than accidental incest; based on the agent's guilty intent, participants judged failed attempts to harm more morally wrong than failed attempts to commit incest. These patterns were specific to moral judgments versus judgments of the agent's control, knowledge, or intent, the action's overall emotional salience, or participants' ratings of disgust (Young & Saxe, 2011).

Based on a study by Jasmi, Muhammad, Mustari, and Md Saleh @ Masrom (2004), virtually all societies in the world see incest as a heinous crime. In their study, they cautioned that such a crime was on the rise, given the increasing number of incestuous cases being reported in the daily news. In view of this alarming trend, several researchers began to carry out studies by focusing on the effects or impacts of such an act on society. For example, Azizah Othman (n.d.) asserts that incest cases have now become so acute that has compelled many societies and governments to prioritize their efforts in mitigating such an act. In the Malay society, the idiom *haruan makan anak* symbolizes their profound aversion of such a despicable act. Clearly, such an increasing number of incestuous cases is symptomatic of social breakdown besetting today's societies, which can be attributed to several factors.

As emphasized by Raffar and Hamjah (2015), family bond plays an important role in molding a strong family with sound morals and ethics. In this regard, every parent must be responsible for the safety as well as morality of their children. In Asian paternal societies, a father is considered the head of the family who bears

such responsibilities. In recent years, however, marital conflicts and family crises have been observed to be increasing, leading to a myriad of social issues, such as abuses, divorces, separations, and incest. The latter is particularly alarming as it can tear apart the social fabrics of society. To date, several studies have been conducted to investigate the negative impact of such a social malady. For example, in their study, Rudd and Herzberger (1999) assert that the characteristics and consequences of brother-sister incest are of equal seriousness to those of father-daughter incest. This would suggest that brother-sister incest is one of the current blind spots in incest research and one that we cannot afford to ignore. In-depth knowledge of the dynamics and effects of brother-sister incest suggests specific treatment strategies are indeed necessary.

Likewise, studies focusing on moral conflicts have also attracted the interest of researchers. For example, Alkaff and McLellan (2018) examined online news reports of rape cases and analyzed interview data involving journalists and editors of Malay and English newspapers in Brunei and Malaysia. Their findings showed that Malay news reports were more restrained in reporting such cases compared to those of Brunei. Similarly, Anita Abdul Rahim and Adibah Abdul Rahim (2012) conducted a study that focused on punishments for committing incest. They found that, invariably, sharia offenders would typically only be slapped with a jail sentence or fine or both. In the same year, another landmark study was carried out by Salina Nen, Fauziah Ibrahim, Suzana Mohd Hoesni, and Zaizul Abdul Rahman (2012) that focused on a woman who was the victim of father-daughter incest. They found that she was overwhelmed with feelings of extreme guilt and fear and self-blame. To cope with such mounting emotional pressure, she had to rely on her inner spiritual strengths using several techniques, such as *suppression* and *minimization*.

From the literature review, it is evidently clear that the question of incest has been plaguing our conscience from past to present time, as it has caused severe moral conflicts in our societies.

METHODOLOGY

Data gathered from a library study involving two main sources, namely literature texts and selected articles, were analyzed. As mentioned earlier, this study applied the approach of the traditional Malay authorship. As highlighted in this old text, the role of traditional authors was more on *beneficial function*, which was to teach the reader the actions or behaviors deemed acceptable from the Islamic perspectives. The traditional authors were also referred to as *dagang*, whose primary function was to teach the people aspects relating to the human mind. Such persons tended to be humble and viewed themselves as weak or insignificant in relation to the Creator. Thus, it was common that the traditional authors wrote or composed their essays with a submissive narrative tone such as “hambalah seorang dagang yang hina, tidak berilmu dan berbakat serta tidak pandai menulis dan mengarang”, which literally means “I am a humble man, who lacks the knowledge and talent to write and to compose”. In the old days, the authors of the traditional literature tended to compose stories infused with either “soothing texts” to entertain and mesmerize the reader or “beneficial texts” to develop and nurture the mind of the people (Zakaria, N. 2014; and Zakaria, N. Mohamad Hanapi, M. H., Harun, Nur Farahkhanna Mohd Rosli et.al, 2020).

In contrast, *dalang* is the opposite of *dagang*, the distinction of which is best summarized by Koster (1997, p.65), who says “whereas the *dalang* is a self-confident author, the *dagang*, in contrast, behaves as what can best be described as a reluctant author. He disclaims all wisdom, power, and ability, and denies, or even rejects, all worldly success. For him, writing is merely a necessary evil that cannot, unfortunately, be dispensed with...” As such, a *dagang* occupies the highest level of the Malay traditional literary system. In the old Malay world, such a person saw himself or herself as a responsible author whose responsibility was to educate his or her society. A *dagang* would be very mindful and careful when creating a story to ensure it would be appropriate

by reusing “the idea of the book” and “reminding” people, as emphasized by Koster (1997).

The good manners of a *dagang* as a storyteller who highlighted the question of incest were clearly spelled out in his narrative. The incestuous insinuations in the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* text was a prefiguration of incest or behaviors that led to such an act. Such prefiguration was symbolized through an image envisioned by the author regarding the feelings of longing, passion, madness, lovesick, and pleasure harbored by the protagonist in a story. Such incestuous imagination can also materialize through attitudes, actions, dreams, and wishful thinking of the leading character. Like any feudalistic cultures, the authors of traditional Malay literature were under the authority of the ruling class, notably royal families and aristocrats, which, more often than not, stifled their creativity as they could only write materials deemed appropriate by the upper-class segment of society. Hence, such authors would be extremely mindful of their responsibility and limitations in writing stories that were not only eloquent but also beneficial for future generations.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The word *incest* in *Oxford Dictionary* (1994, p.402) means “*sexual intercourse between people regarded as too closely related to marry each other*”. In French, it is called *inceste*, *incestum*, *unchastity*, *incest*, and *incestus* that means familial adultery (Landau S.I, 1988, p.720). Insect also refers to “*the act of sexual intercourse or marriage between close blood relations, the criminal offense of marriage or sexual intercourse between blood relations where prohibited by law* (Kellerman D.F, 1981, p.761). Incest is also defined as intercourse between a man and a woman both of whom are forbidden to marry based on their religion or custom, as eloquently highlighted by the Malay idioms “*haruan makan anak*” dan “*harapkan pagar, pagar makan padi*”. The idioms stress that a person may commit such a heinous act to another person he or she is supposed to protect. According to *Kamus Dewan*

(2007, p.1317), there are three types of incest that carry the same meaning, namely *sumbang balai melintang*, *sumbang kadim*, and *sumbang pati*. The first refers to a person having intercourse with someone he or she can marry as forbade by his or her religion and custom. The second refers to a person committing an incestuous act with his or her close relatives. The third refers to an individual indulging in such an act with his or her family member.

The word *sumbang* means transgressing or going against customary or cultural norms. As such *sumbang mahram* has the same negative connotation of *sumbang balai melintang*, which means the sexual intercourse of two individuals who cannot legally marry as sanctioned by their religions or customs due to their close bond as family members (Kamus Dewan, 2007, p.1317). Several terms for incestuous acts have been used in the literature; however, the word incest is used throughout this article. *Sumbang mahram* is prohibited not only by the Islamic teaching but also by the Malaysian law, which when indicted can severely punish the defendants when they are found guilty by the court. Several contributing factors have been identified for this incestuous act, including the lack of understanding of and adherence to one's religious teaching. Such an act is severely abhorred because it can inflict a long-lasting impact on the victim throughout his or her life both physically and psychologically. Also, the bond of a family can disintegrate and its members stigmatized by society.

In this study, the concept of traditional Malay authorship approach was used. The following is a sample of texts excerpted from the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* manuscript that deals with issues concerning love, lust, and passion.

Tetapi akan Sultan itu terlalu ia berahi akan anaknya
yang bernama Tun Medam Peria dan Tun Takiah Dara
itu; maka pada suatu hari, Sultan Ahmad semayam
dihadap segala menteri dan segala hulubalangnya,

maka baginda bersabda kepada segala hulubalangnya
demikian katanya, “Jika seorang bertanam tanaman,
siapa yang harus dahulu makan dia?” Maka
Tun Perpatih Tulus Agung Tukang Sukara pun
berdatang sembah, “Ya Tuanku Syah Alam,
jikalau kami yang diperhamba ini bertanam
tanaman, orang yang lain juga harus dahulu makan
dia, lagi terlalu besar pahalanya mendahulukan
jamu itu,” karna Tun (Perpatih) Tulus Agung
Tukang Sukara itu tahu ia akan kias kata raja itu.

(Hikayat Raja Pasai, 1987, p.37)

According to *Kamus Dewan Edisi Ke-Empat* (2007, p.140), the word *berahi* refers to a state of lustful passion. It also means the feeling of extreme love. In the above excerpt, this word describes the lustful feeling of Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal toward his daughter, Tun Medam Peria dan Tun Takiah Dara. Tellingly, the “Jika seorang bertanam tanaman, siapa yang harus dahulu makan dia?” phrase uttered by the sultan means the person who plants a tree should be the first to taste its fruits, signifying his reason to commit in incest.

Not surprisingly, under such oppressive influence, the authors of Malay traditional literature would avoid writing stories that were against the conventional norms of the society they lived in. Such avoidance is evident in the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* text in which the author only used a symbolic language to convey the temptation of Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal to indulge in

an incestuous act. In this text, the criticism and displeasure of the author of such an act were registered through the answer given by Tun (Perpatih) Tulus Agung Tukang Sukara, lamenting it as a deplorable, humiliating misdeed that breached religious, cultural, and traditional norms. As a leader, the intention to commit such an act, let alone committing it, renders him a sultan not deserving respect of and allegiance from his subjects.

In the writing of *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, the objection of the author to the sultan's intention to sexually outrage his daughters is made evident by the ensuing text in which Tun Beraim Bapa, upon knowing his father's ill intention, absconded with his two sisters to a safer place. Tun Beraim Bapa was the heroic character who saved his two sisters, the characterization of which was intended by the author to be in line with the religious, cultural and Malay traditional norms. Nonetheless, the author was reined in by the concept of "pantang derhaka", a Malay concept that forbids a subject to rebel against the ruling sultan, as epitomized by his implicit admission that the action of Tun Beraim Bapa was considered a rebellion against the sultan, which deserved a death sentence. The eventual death of Tun Beraim Bapa was clearly due to his rebellion, signifying the cause and effect conveyed in this text. Because of his son's rebellion, Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal became enraged and plotted to kill the former as narrated in the following excerpt.

Maka Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal pun

bersabda kepada Dara Zulaikha Tingkap itu,

maka kata baginda, "Ayuh Dara Zulaikha Tingkap

bergelar Derma Dikara! Rahsiaku ini jangan

engkau katakan kepada seseorang jua pun, jikalau

Si Beraim Bapa tiada kubunuh, kerajaanku jangan

kekal dan bau syurga pun jangan ku cium."

(*Hikayat Raja Pasai*, 1987, p.43)

In the above excerpt, it is clear that the character of Tun Beraim Bapa is someone who is too strong to be subdued by warriors. As such, the initial strategy of Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal to kill his son was to ask the latter to ride a wild, mad stallion. Against all odds, he swiftly mounted and safely rode the horse without any harm, much to the displeasure of his father. Again, Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal plotted to kill his son, the intention of which was conveyed to Dara Zulaikha Tingkap. Clearly, through the above phrases, the author wished to inform the readers of the persistence of the sultan in killing his son by all means possible. To ensure the success of his plan, Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal asked Tun Beraim Bapa to fish with a net. Not wanting to be labeled rebellious, the latter dutifully followed his father's command.

Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal resorted to all sort of evil schemes to kill his son, including feigning the boat they were traveling with was made stranded by a tree trunk. The former cut the trunk into two pieces, hoping they would fall onto the latter, who earlier had to dive into the river to remove the trunk. With no visible signs of Tun Beraim Bapa in the water, Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal mourned and cried feignedly. Again, Tun Beraim Bapa survived from such an attempt, prompting his father to plot another scheme. Finally, the latter asked Orang Seri to prepare a poisoned cake. Despite knowing that it had been spiked with poison, Tun Beraim Bapa tried to eat the cake but it was snatched by his siblings, Tun Medam Peria dan Tun Takiah Dara, who also knew the cake had been poisoned. After taking a few bites, they succumbed to the poisonous effects, who were later made to rest in Bukit Fudul Allah. To remain loyal to his father, Tun Beraim Bapa took what was left of the cake and consequently died agonizingly. Rather than bereaving his son's demise, Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal rejoiced on hearing the news of Tun Beraim Bapa's untimely death.

Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal was so evil that he even killed his other son, Tun Abdul Jalil, just because Radin Galuh Gemerancang, a Majapahit princess from Java, harbored strong feelings of love toward the former. As embodied in the *wa'adat* or Malay social contract, a tyrannical ruler deserves to be punished and made accountable to his wrong doings. The emphasis for such retribution was well articulated by the author of *Hikayat Raja Pasai* by his admission of the cruelty of Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal that knew no bounds, culminating in the author calling the sultan as “haruan makan anak”, literally means “a bull rhinoceros that devours its offspring”. Following the killing of the Majapahit princess, Pasai was attacked and defeated by the Majapahit army, the advent of which made Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal to regret the murder of his offspring and to concede the defeat of his sultanate.

Clearly, the evil deeds committed by Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal was driven by his unbridled lustful desires that transgressed all religious and cultural norms, which finally came to an end by Allah’s will that saw his nation decimated by a foreign army, forcing him to take refuge in Menduga, which would take 15 days to reach on foot from Pasai. As highlighted in the text, Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal’ fall from grace was the fruition of his wild imagination of incest involving his two daughters. The manuscript of *Hikayat Raja Pasai* was written after Islam had spread throughout the Malay Archipelago, the influences of which made the author more cautious in highlighting such incestuous relationships. More so, he had to use implicit expressions to highlight such acts to maintain a semblance of decency and good grace. As narrated in the above text, the concept of retribution was eloquently articulated by the author in that the immoral Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal, who killed his sons, was forced to abdicate his throne and flee to another country. Such turn of fate reminds the readers of the punishment or retribution awaiting the transgressor of incest in this world. In Islam, its

followers are strictly forbidden to commit incestuous relationships as sanctioned in the holy Koranic verse as follows:

Prohibited to you [for marriage] are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your father's sisters, your mother's sisters, your brother's daughters, your sister's daughters, your [milk] mothers who nursed you, your sisters through nursing, your wives' mothers, and your step-daughters under your guardianship [born] of your wives unto whom you have gone in. But if you have not gone in unto them, there is no sin upon you. And [also prohibited are] the wives of your sons who are from your [own] loins, and that you take [in marriage] two sisters simultaneously, except for what has already occurred. Indeed, Allah is ever forgiving and merciful.

Al-Nisa’(4:23)

In most historical literary texts, kings were portrayed as tyrannical, ruthless rulers who finally saw the destruction of their thrones or parted ways with this world with painful demises as divine retributions from the Creator. In contrast, kings portrayed as just, morally upright rulers would see their empires to be peaceful, prosperous, and harmonious. In *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, the author skillfully uses a symbolic image of incest to convey the story of Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal, the ruthless Sultan of Pasai, whose empire fall to Majapahit after a series of heart-wrenching episodes, including the killing of his sons. Such text typifies the creativity of the authors of old texts in composing storylines filled with subtle criticisms of the tyrannical rules

imposed on the common people by ruthless, immoral rulers, as typified in the character of Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal in *Hikayat Raja Pasai*. As highlighted in the manuscript, the creativity of author was influenced not only by religious factor but also by customary and cultural factors that compelled him to rely on a symbolic image of incest to convey his reprehension of such an incestuous act.

CONCLUSION

In *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, the actual incest did not materialize even though Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal did harbor some sexual desires to commit such an act, which is conveyed by the author to readers through a symbolic image depicting the former's attitudes and actions. The use of such image underscores the imperative of the author, as a *dagang*, to strictly follow the convention of traditional Malay literary that disallowed explicit narratives bordering vulgarity or obscenity. With such an image, the author reminded the readers of the horrible consequences that could happen when such an act was to be committed by the latter. As highlighted in the text, the mere imagination of Sultan Ahmad Perumudal Perumal to sexually engage with his daughters had ultimately led to the destruction of his state by Majapahit military forces.

In the final analysis, the question of incest was articulately dealt with by the author of this traditional Malay literary text by using a potent textual image that symbolized such a reprehensible act and reminded its readers of its effects that could lead to irreparable consequences, such family and marital breakdowns, which could tear apart the social fabric of their society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper is based on the research grant Code: 2016-0216-107-41 (Top Down KPT). The authors would like to extend their gratitude to the Research Management and Innovation Centre (RMIC), Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI)

and KPT for the research grant that helped fund the research.

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