

Nature As A Symbol of Malay Thinking

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Abstract

Nature plays an important role in the storytelling of the traditional Malay society. They wisely used nature to display the elements of teaching, social protest, satire, and social wisdom to solve the difficulties at that time. Modernization has increasingly depreciated the folktales. But there are efforts made by the community to resurrect them. Therefore, this study tries to identify and analyze the elements of nature as a symbol of traditional Malay thinking. This study uses text analysis. The results showed the wisdom of the traditional Malay community to use natural resources as a medium to convey a message to the members of the community as nature has a close relationship with human life.

Keywords: Nature, Story, Thinking, Malay Society

Introduction

Folktales at an early stage were inherited from one generation to another orally (Aripin, 1996: 13). Hashim (2013: 1) states that the oral literature genre consists of stories and non-stories. Non-stories consist of proverbs, riddles, folk songs, and traditional poems such as *pantun*, *syair*, and *gurindam*. Meanwhile, the oral genre in the form of stories consists of three parts, namely myths, legends, and folktales.

Folktales played an important role and function in society at that time. Roslina (2014: 2) considers folktale as a way to realize a purpose or function such as conveying information, educating, and entertaining the community. Therefore, folktales were becoming important for society at that time to obtain information and learn value.

In addition, folktale serves as a reflection of a society at that time. Said (1996: 16) argues that the interweaving of stories, characters, questions, and backgrounds, as well as messages in folktales, reflected the view of society's life. This is in line with Roslina (2017: 41) that folk literature is a description of the society whether it is a political, economic, social, cultural, or all related to the society. Therefore, it can be explained that folktale displays the views of the Malay community from various aspects.

Aripin (1996: 15) argues that folktale is universal and originated in a primitive Malay society where their life was based on farming, hunting, and fishing to survive. He added that primitive society developed with the processing of nature. It can be asserted that nature and society have a relationship with each other as revealed by the folktales.

However, Taib (1991: 2) argues that the presence of modern technologies such as television, radio, videotapes, books, and voice recorders has resulted in folktales being increasingly forgotten. He explains that the presence of technology causes folktales to be neglected. Therefore, it is a loss if folklore is neglected because it benefits society, especially children.

Objectives

- Identify the elements of nature that were manifested in folktales as a symbol of thinking of the Malay community in Pahang.
- Analyzing the elements of nature that were manifested in folktales as a symbol of thinking of the Malay community in Pahang.

To achieve these objectives, this study used text analysis. Zurinah (2010: 33) explains the applied approach of studying the literature as an object of creation similar to the concept of the other object created by God.

This study uses selected Pahang folktales from the Collection of 366 Malaysian Folktales (*Himpunan 366 Cerita Rakyat Malaysia*) by Othman Puteh and Aripin Said for analysis. This study focuses on folktales from Pahang only. The titles of the selected folk tales are "*Seuncang Padi* (A Pouch of Paddy)", "*Cincin Permata Biru* (Blue Gem Ring)", "*Wasiat yang Bijaksana* (A Wise Will)", "*Bangau Menenun Songket* (The Stork Weaving the Songket)", "*Takar Emas* (The Golden Jar)", "*Puteri Melur Sekuntum* (Princess Melur Sekuntum)" and "*Air Menitik di Atas Batu* (Water Dripping on the Rock)".

Discussion Analysis

Nature is a creation of God the Almighty which has various functions for human beings. In the folktale studied, nature such as rice, animals, forest products, river products, and others became a symbol of the author's thinking to show the life of the community at that time. In this study context, nature is seen as the economic resource of Malay society, reflects the nation's civilization, acts as a medium of education in traditional Malay society, is the mythical origin of places, and is in relationship with the human.

Nature as the Economic Resource of the Malay Community

Economic resources are very important in social life to meet daily needs. In this context, the Malay community focused on natural resources as a source of income to meet daily needs. Aripin (1996: 15) argues that the challenge of society in the past was only to get on with life. Therefore, they are very simple and assume everything including nature is a common right. In the context of this study, nature is seen as the economic resource of the Malays. This can be seen in the folktale entitled "*Seuncang Padi*" which describes a couple who are very poor and then become rich because the paddy they planted bears the grain. This clearly shows that the natural resource of rice provides a lucrative income as the following text:

They sowed the paddy in the backyard. Soon the paddy seedlings began to grow green. Finally, the rice bore grain turns yellow. When the rice was riped, they started harvesting. The poor couple was having so much fun. After two to three seasons of sowing rice and harvesting it, they had plenty of rice.

(*Seuncang Padi*, 2010: 10)

Based on the passage, it is clear that the poor couple finally had enough food because the paddy that was planted yielded rice grain. In the context of this study, it is clear that the natural element of rice, if grown and cultivated, can benefit the community by increasing economic yields. Therefore, nature can be seen to improve the economy of the Malay community.

Additionally, animals are also an element of nature that can be the economic resource of the traditional Malay community. They hunt to get food. In the folktale entitled "Cincin Permata Biru", the character, Awang Batin hunts in the forest to get food. This is depicted in the following passages:

One day, Awang Batin went deer hunting on Mount Tapis. The mountain was high and its peaks were thickly foggy. He searched until he was tired. It was almost dusk when he saw a large deer. The deer was white and looked odd. He killed the deer and took it home. All his family was happy. They ate the venison together.

(*Cincin Permata Biru*, 2010: 16)

Based on the passage, it is clear that the people used to hunt animals in the forest for food. The traditional society was having animals in the forest such as deer as food to survive. Therefore, it is very clear that the life of the traditional society was seen to be close to nature as they met their daily needs by utilizing natural resources.

Next, the folktale entitled "*Wasiat yang Bijaksana*" also depicted the story of a very hardworking farmer family. In this study context, the character of the farmer is shown as very diligent in utilizing natural resources such as fruits, coconut, and betel nuts to feed his family. This can be seen in the passage below:

"The farmer was diligent. Every day he worked on his farm. He grew various plants such as fruit trees, coconut, and betel nuts.

The farmer also grew rice. His diligence made it easy for him to earn a living. His life with his three sons had always been luxurious.

(*Wasiat yang Bijaksana*, 2010: 70)

Based on the passage, it can be explained that his diligence in utilizing natural resources provides lucrative results and sustenance. Indirectly, the crops could be sold and helped improve the family economy. In this study context, it can be seen that natural resources such as crop yields also benefited and improved the family economy.

In addition, forest products such as firewood are also an economic resource for the community. This can be seen in the folktale "Bangau Menenun Songket", featuring a poor couple who work to find firewood to be sold. In this study context, in addition to animal hunting and farming, finding firewood is also one of the ways to improve the family economy. At that time, firewood was sold to raise money and feed the family. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

"Their job from an early age was to collect firewood and sell it in town"

(*Bangau Menenun Songket*, 2010: 78)

Based on the text, it is clear that the folktale shows the community utilizes natural resources to improve the economy. People used to find firewood in the forest and sell it to earn money to support their families. In the study context, the author tries to show that natural resources such as firewood helped the Malay community to improve the economy.

In the folktale entitled "Takar Emas" a family that farmed was featured. It can be seen that farming was a source of livelihood for the traditional Malay community. The closeness of the traditional Malay community with the natural resources can be seen when they only farm in their daily life to earn a living.

"... He cultivated on the land that had been dug.
... Over time, the plant grew a lot of crops. Now he knew, what the gold jar meant to his father. The farmer enjoyed his life with his mother."

(*Takar Emas*, 2010: 140)

The excerpt showed the author of the folktale depicted a farming community to improve their economy. It can be concluded that societies used to devote their lives to nature to improve the economy.

In summary, the author depicted nature as the economic resource of the traditional Malay community. Furthermore, it can also be explained that the authors' thoughts are to show the outlook on life and the closeness of the Malay community with nature. Indirectly, the event showed the wisdom of the traditional Malay thinking to survive at that time.

A Reflection of the Nation's Civilization through the Use of Natural Elements

Custom is a tradition and a habit that is practiced for generations. Apart from taking nature as an economic resource, it can be seen that the Malay community also takes nature as their tradition. Aripin (1996: 20) explains that there is a folktale that has a connection with the customs and beliefs that were the past societal practices. In this study context, the folktale studied shows the Malay community used natural resources such as piper leaf, betel nut, lime, and gambier as traditional Malay customary gifts for the wedding (*hantaran*). This can be explained by the following passage:

“During her wedding ceremony, Puteri Melur Sekuntum asked for piper leaf, betel nut, lime, and gambier to be one of her *hantaran* (wedding gifts). The princess also told the people to eat piper leaf with betel nut, lime, and gambier.

Since that day, many people there had been planting piper and betel nuts. Since then, began the *hantaran* ceremony used piper leaf, betel nut, lime, and gambier. The custom is still applicable today.
(*Puteri Melur Sekuntum*, 2010: 212)

Based on the passage, it is clear that the use of nature, namely piper leaf, betel nut, lime, and gambier is used as a customary wedding gift. In short, it can be explained that the traditional customs of the Malay community came from natural resources. In addition, the description also portrays the Malay civilization that created a culture using natural resources around them.

Nature as an Educational Medium Among the Traditional Malay Community

In addition to being an economic resource and a traditional custom of society, nature is also a medium of education. Aripin (1996: 9) stated that society used to be very sensitive to the environment to produce artists who have great thinking which was presented through literary works, especially folktales. In this study context, nature becomes an educational medium for the author to convey his thoughts. Mohamed (2013: 50) stated that the Malays take nature as a teacher to learn the meaning of life. They often associate things they see, touch and feel with the description of life.

In the folktale "*Air Menitik di Atas Batu* (Water Dripping on the Rock)", the author's thoughts about nature are depicted by the water droplets which make a dent on the rock in the cave world that giving the impression of the importance of the effort to achieve success. This can be explained by the passage below:

“In the forest, there was a cave. It was in that cave that Buyung hid. As he sat pensively in the cave, he suddenly saw water dripping on a rock in front of him. The dripping of water makes a dent in the rock. How long had the water been dripping until the rock becomes dented, thought Buyung.

...

“Water dripped on the rock could even make a dent. If I studied diligently, surely, I would be smart,” said Buyung.

(*Air Menitik di Atas Batu*, 2010: 232-233)

Based on the passage, it is clear that the author is trying to convey the element of education through the environment. Buyung's character, who was initially lazy to study, made him a slow learner of the Quran compared to his peers. Eventually, Buyung felt embarrassed and ran to the forest and saw water droplets falling on the rocks causing a dent. There, Buyung realized that to be smart, he has to work hard. Therefore, it can be said that the author's thinking in utilizing nature to educate the Malays to strive for success.

Nature as a Myth of the Origin of a Place

Next, the environment is also a reference for the ancient society to name a place. Aripin (1996: 42) argues that folktale not only shows the Malay community is sensitive to nature but becomes their beliefs. Therefore, the origin of a place is the result of the sensitivity of the traditional society to nature and the events that take place around them. In this study context, a folktale entitled "*Asal Nama Negeri Pahang* (Origin of the Name of the State of Pahang)" describes the life of the aborigines who cut down the "*mahang*" tree which enables them to cross the river not using a boat. Eventually, the word "*mahang*" changed to Pahang and is now the name of the state of Pahang.

"No one answered. Finally, an old man said, "This tree is called Mahang."

The word Mahang eventually turned into Pahang. Thus, the state of Pahang got its name, which is now called Pahang Darul Makmur. (*Asal Nama Negeri Pahang*, 2010:181)

Based on the passage, it is clear that the past society refers to nature to name a place. Therefore, the event will be about the history and beliefs of the local community and reflect the Malay community as very familiar with nature.

The folktale entitled "Kampung Batu Sawar" also shows how the Malay community takes their surroundings to name an area. This can be seen in the passage below:

"The stone as big as a *kepek* thrown by the giant is still on the banks of the Pahang River. The village near the area is now called Kampung Batu Sawar"

(*Kampung Batu Sawar*, 2010: 235)

Based on the text, it is clear that the natural resource, namely stone, is used as a source for the community to name a place. Accordingly, the event became a local belief and a new knowledge to the next generation.

The Relationship between Nature and Man

Animals are also creatures of God the Almighty. Apart from being an economic resource, animals also provide many benefits to humans such as helping to solve human problems. Zurinah (2010: 101) states that in addition to plants, community life is also influenced by the animals around them. In this study context, animals are seen to greatly facilitate human work.

In the folktale entitled "*Cincin Permata*", it can be seen that animals, namely dogs, help save Kabun who is trapped in a cave. This can be seen in the excerpt below:

"...Apparently his dog was digging a hole. Kabun climbed out of the cave. After leaving, Kabun told his eagle to look for the old man. He wanted to get the magic ring back. The eagle flew high to the clouds. He saw the old man sleeping in his glass palace."

(*Cincin Permata*, 17: 2010)

In the passage, it can be seen that the dog has helped Kabun who has been trapped in the cave by digging a hole. The situation clearly shows that animals can save humans when they faced problems.

A folktale entitled "Ayam Dogol Membuat Jasa" also shows an animal that helps a grandmother named Bidan Tebah to return the magic ring. This can be seen in the excerpt:

"The king couldn't stand the pain anymore and said, "Return the ring to the chicken!". Dogol flew home with the ring. He returned it to his master, Bidan Tebah. "It's a magic ring. Ask for any help, grandma, you will get it."

(*Ayam Dogol Membuat Jasa*, 83: 2010)

The excerpt explains that the animal helped Bidan Tebah because Bidan Tebah previously had allowed Dogol to sleep in her house. It can be seen that if humans do good to animals, then the animals will do good in return.

In the folktale entitled "*Sereban tidak berbulu*", an animal, that is a chicken is shown to help a farmer wake up and detect the arrival of enemies who eat their livestock in the coop. This can be seen in the following passage:

"Among the many chickens were two roosters. One named Jalak and another Biring. The farmer was very fond of the two roosters making cock-a-doodle-doo sound in the morning. It woke him from sleep."

Jalak and Biring also alerted the farmer if any enemies came. Foxes and pythons could not prey on the chickens in the coops."

(*Sereban Tidak Sebulu*, 107: 2010)

Based on the passage, it can be seen that the chicken helps its master to wake up in the morning and tells him if there is an enemy who wants to eat his livestock by making a cock-a-doodle-doo sound. Therefore, it is clear that chicken also helps and benefits humans.

Conclusion

Based on the study, it is found that folktale contains important Malay community's thinking about nature. Thoughts about nature in the folktales prove that the Malay community is very familiar and sensitive to the world around them. In addition, this study also shows the importance of folktales to convey the thoughts of the traditional community to the next generation. Therefore, folktale needs to be ameliorated so that future generations can recognize these treasures of knowledge. The study of folktales is very important so that it does not become obsolete. This study is important to provide exposure to the new generation that folktales are loaded with elements of teaching and the culture of the local community.

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