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The Philosophy of Keris Design in Malay Civilization

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Abstract

Keris has been recognised as a Malay weaponry tool alongside spear (tombak), sword (pedang), dagger (badik), rust (kelewang), kerabit, and many others. Its status as Malay defence tool has been elevated to the highest level in Malay civilisation, rendering it superior to others due to its function, its refined philosophy and high value of aesthetic arts. *Keris* is not a strange culture in the communities of the Malay Archipelago as it is symbolic to the Malay supremacy and sovereignty since a long time ago. The function of a *keris* has experienced a lot of changes, from the early creation of the weapon to an amulet, an idolised heritage, an epitome of family ties, a mark of good deeds, a symbol of rank or degree to item of arts and souvenirs. It embodies various Malay philosophies and civilisation values. The uniqueness of *keris* is explained in the physical and non-physical forms by the owner or blacksmith. Frey (2010) states that *keris* is the most significant epitome of culture for the Malay community. Due to its significance, it also displays the dignity and status of the Malays as a civilised nation. The men will not be out of their homes without a *keris*, as they would be seen as naked without it. Despite the *keris* having various looks and styles due to the different locations and borders, ethnic groups, but the core and function remain the same. In general, it is not only a mere weapon or part of the whole ensemble, but it goes beyond that. It is a hallmark of Malay integrity and identity, in which contains various philosophies of Malay civilisation. The writer will discuss the history and background of *keris*, the parts of a *keris*, and the philosophy behind the function and role in Malay civilisation in this article.

Keywords: Philosophy, *Keris*, Malay Civilization, Design, Aesthetic

Introduction

Keris is synonymous with the Malay community, in particular, and it cannot be separated from the custom and culture of the Malay community. If we are to study the design structure, it can be said that it is short, three-pronged weapon used as a tool to defend oneself by way of stabbing or severing. Long ago, this weapon, famous in the Malay Archipelago can be seen as complementary to various types of martial arts, like *silat*, but today the initial function of this weapon changes from being a self-defence tool to the symbol or epitome of Malay civilisation. According to Helmi (2019), *keris* is a national heritage that should be

remembered as a hallmark of the Malay civilisation. It has thus, become proof that the Malay science and technology then, was ahead of its era.

This weapon, now regarded as classic and antique only serves as a symbol in a lot of customs and culture of the Malay. Its function may have been transformed, but its value and originality remain the same and even increasing, despite the fact that it has been affected through time. Long ago, *keris* used to be a loyal companion to every Malay man. It will be brought everywhere they go, neatly tucked at the waist. *Keris* is also a mark of Malay warrior ship. In *Hikayat Melayu* and *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, Taming Sari is a very popular *keris*, adorably linked with the heroic stories of Hang Tuah. It is even a mystical weapon once upon a time as it was connected to various elements of mysticism.

According to Al-Mudra (2004), as a cultural artefact, *keris* is a special cultural heritage of the Archipelago and the Malays, collectively. Thus, it is commonplace for the *keris* to be worn by peoples of Riau, Bugis, Java and Bali as complementary to the whole attire. As viewed by Woolley (1998), in line with the passing of time, this *keris*-wearing culture was then spread to all the corners of South East Asia as it was with the Malay culture that seeps into Malaysia, Singapore, Southern Thailand, Brunei and Southern Philippines.

Mohamad et al (2012) referred to *keris* as one of the many weapons of Malays, other than spear (tombak), sword (pedang), dagger (badik), rust (kelewang), kerabit and many others. Despite the fact that Malay weaponry serves various purposes and uses, *keris* maintains its reputation as an exclusive artefact and is hailed prestigiously in Malay life. The Malay communities regard the *keris* as an amulet, while the Javanese call it *tosan aji* meaning a magical weapon and which exudes trust and self-confidence, other than a harbinger of good luck, protection and security. Meanwhile, the Bugis society states that the *keris* is *polo bessi* meaning an ancestral weapon or a noble, priceless steel.

What the writers wish to impart and share in this article revolves around the history, the anatomy of the parts also the philosophical values behind its make and use. *Keris* is an item that has become part and parcel of the custom, culture and heritage of the Malays for a long time and it is appraised as a form of sovereignty in the history of Malay civilisation. It was a must for every Malay to adorn the *keris*, and being outdoor without it is akin to being outdoor without any clothing at all. That is how significant *keris* was the lives of the Malays years and years ago.

Objective

In this article, there are two study objectives

1. To explain the origin, the history, the function and the philosophy of the *keris* in Malay civilisation.
2. To understand the philosophy of the Malay civilisation contained in the *keris*.

The Definition of *Keris*

Yub (1991) explained that in general, *keris* is a sharp weapon used for self-defence especially in the Malay society long ago. According to Arman (2014) *keris* is a weapon, at the same time, an invaluable masterpiece although its functions have changed from being a weapon to an amulet, an idolised heritage, an epitome of family ties, a mark of good deeds, a symbol of rank or degree to item of arts and souvenirs. Al-Mudra (2009) opined that *keris* is a weapon and a highly treasured work of art, with its value lying in the beauty of the design and material, and the fact that the manufacturing is time-consuming and that it takes perseverance and skills to do.

According to Ibrahim (2017) the *keris* has to have a particular wavy blade or *luk*. This blade on a *keris* must be in odd number. The straight *keris* has one wavy blade. The next number of wavy blades has to be three, five, seven, nine, eleven, thirteen and above. Every wavy blade on a *keris* brings a different meaning and philosophy.

Referring to the 4th edition dictionary, *keris* is defined as a two-prong weapon and the blade has to be straight or in curves. Meanwhile, Harsrinuksmo (2004) a *keris* expert and writer of two encyclopaedias and six books on *keris* shared the view that one can be named '*keris*' when it fulfils the following criteria:

1. *Keris* must comprise of two main parts, the blade of the *keris* (including *pesi*) and the part named *ganja*.

2. The blade of *keris* must determine the specific angle of *ganja*. Not straight up. The position of the blade must be slanting. This is a sign of being a person from Java and from the Archipelago, whereby however great one's rank and position, he or she must bow in respect.

3. A regular measurement of the blade is between 33 and 38 cm. Several *kerises* outside Java can measure up to 58 cm. *Keris* made in Southern Phillipines called *sundang* can reach 64 cm in length. The short *keris* is *keris* Buda and the *keris* made by Nyi Sombro Pajajaran, which is around 16 to 18 cm only. However, the *keris* is made in small size and anything shorter than that cannot be regarded as *keris*, unless it is an amulet that resembles a *keris*.

4. A good *keris* must be made and forged from three types of steel and the minimum is two namely metal, fertiliser and pamor material. However, the old *kerises* such as Buda *keris* do not fertiliser in its make-up.

Although there are several other criteria considered as complement to the *keris* such as the sheath, the handle or the curve of the blades, only the four aforementioned criteria are enough to depict the physicality and attribute of a *keris*. According to Harsrinuksmo (2004), artefacts resembling *keris* that resemble *keris* made from other metals like copper, silver or gold are not categorised as a *keris*. The same it is with *keris* that does not go through the forgery process, although it is made of steel but it is also not categorised as *keris* but only as a decorative tool known as *keris-kerisan*.

The Origin and History of *Keris*

According to Miksic and Tranchini (1990), *keris* originates from the Javanese Island and has spread to the entire Archipelago. It was well acknowledged since the 9th century and proven with the images of carvings that can be seen in Candi Borobudur.

Kempers stated that the *keris*-making tradition in the Archipelago was influenced by the bronze culture spreading in Dongson, Vietnam, around 3rd century AD. Kempers assumed that *keris* is the next stage of development from the stabbing weapon in this era. The stabbing weapon at the time was in the form of human who stood on the handle and which joins with the blade (Harsrinuksmo 2004).

Following Al-Mudra (2009), carvings in the temples in the Java Island have proven that *keris* was known by the Javanese since the 5th century AD. On the stone carving discovered in Desa Dakuwu, Grabag, Magelang, Jawa Tengah, a relief showing some metal equipment was found. The carving was made around 500BC as written on the Pallawa letters that used Sanskrit. On the carving, it was clear that there was a very crystal-clear water source, also some images of weapons like trisula, axe, sickle, kudi and daggers which shapes are similar to that of a *keris*. Around the 5th century BC, when Indian influence began to permeate into the Archipelago, it brought along the metal-forging technology. The images can be seen on the walls of the

temples in Javanese Island, especially Borobudur and Prambanan temples. On the relief, a stabbing weapon that looked like a leaf was found. It was said to be a model of a weapon that had been popular in India known as *Keris Buda* and this is seen as a prototype of the *keris* (Al-Mudra, 2009).



Visual 1: *Keris Buda* discovered around the 10th century.

Source: Karsten (1998)

Keris Buda is short, straight-pointed and is quite thick. Most of them were found on the warrior tombs in Indonesian temples. Visual 1 above shows an example of two *Buda kerises* found in Malang close to Singgaraja and Janggala in the eastern part of Java and it is made clear that both were from the 10th century (Karsten, 1998).

According to Gardner (1936), *keris* originated from the pre-historic era and it was made from animal bones. Meanwhile, Griffith Wilkens (1937) in the national culture encyclopaedia: *Keris* and other Indonesian traditional weapons (Harsrinuksmo, 1988) stated that *keris* is a new culture from the middle of the 14th or 15th century AD, and it followed from the spear-shaped weapon used by the primitives in the Australian Island, if we look at the physical form that does not differ much from the original proto-type form of the *keris*. Next, Kempers (1954) in Harsrinuksmo (2004) pointed out that a *keris* developed, as a stabbing weapon from the Bronze era, where the handle came in the form of a small doll and the weapon itself was similar to the one in the Dong-son culture.

Raffles (2008) in his book, *The History of Java* stated that there were not less than 30 types of weapons used by the Majapahit army, but *keris* was placed at the highest position. To strengthen the evidence that the *keris* really came from Java and was already 1000 years old, Van Der Lith in Harsrinuksmo (2004) stated that during the operation and finding and excavating the artefacts in Borobudur Temple, an old *keris* was found, but it did not look similar to the *keris* on the carving at the temple. The body of the *keris* was seen to merge with the handle and currently it is kept in the Ethnography Museum in Leiden, Belanda.

Further evidence showing that *keris* has become part of the Javanese culture is in the report made by a Chinese explorer and traveller, Ma Huan who had taken note of his experience being in the entourage of Admiral Cheng Ho to Majapahit, whereby it was stated that almost all the men had *keris* on their bodies. It was clear that the *keris* did come from the Javanese

land and then it spread and evolved to every corner of the Archipelago. Thus, the Malay land also did not escape the influence of this weapon. The business connection with Majapahit also automatically influenced the structure of the culture and art in the region, or in Malaya in particular. Following Woolley (1998), *keris* had become the currency or the foreign exchange for business activity in the Archipelago, so it is not surprising that *keris* continues to thrive to other culture and ethnic groups in many other places of the Archipelago.

A historian, Suwarsono Lumintu in Harsrinuksmo (2004) did not agree to this argument and refuted the claim and theories of Western scholars who said that *keris* is not from Majapahit. He mentioned that a lot of books written by the Western scholars had mentioned *keris* as one of the stabbing weapons like blade, *sangkur* and so on. This theory is inaccurate as the *keris* is not the same with the blade or *belati*, where the original purpose was to hurt and to kill. *Keris* is produced not only as a very sharp weapon but also an inheritance that is believed to protect and save the owner.



Visual 2: *Keris* Malela Semenanjung with the handle and Kelantan *sampir* or sheath
Alwi Yusof collection
Source: Abdullah (2007)

In general, it can be concluded that the *keris* is not only a killing machine, like other weapons, but it has elevated its status in the lives of the people in the Archipelago. It is in the fold of the history that *keris* was indeed from the Javanese Land around the 5th or the 6th century, but the form was different from its form today. Its present shape began in the 12th or 13th century and it had been as its peak of excellence during the Majapahit era as reported by travellers from China, Ma Huan. It was at this time that the *keris* culture spread to Palembang, Riau, Malaya, Brunei, Southern Phillipines, Cambodia and Pattani. The culture as often misread by the Western scholars in a sense that their writings did not reflect the culture of the Archipelago. According to Abdul Mua'ti (2015) the early history of *keris* in Malaya was said to have started from the 13th to 15th century which is during the era of the Majapahit. The straight or curvy-shaped *keris* is explained by the process of the evolution in line with the passing of time that started in Java to the entire Archipelago. This is consistent with the

gradual change in the attitude and taste of the locals. Nonetheless, the function and use of *keris* still remain- as a weapon, as a dignitary item, as complementary to the Malay ensemble, a tool in mysticism and shamanism, a tool to carry out punishment, an epitome of dignity, and as a mark of power and authority among the Malays.

Geographically, the influence of *keris* covers Patani in Southern Thailand, Peninsula Malaysia, Javanese Island, Bali Island and Lombok, Sumatera, Sulawesi to the Southern Phillipines. Thus, the classification branding of *keris* include Patani *Keris*, Peninsula *Keris*, Java *Keris*, Sumatera/Minang *Keris*, Bali/Lombok *Keris*, Bugis *Keris* also Sundang/Sulok *Keris*.

The following are the general categories of *keris* based on the geographical location, as referred to (Mohamad et al., 2012)

1. Patani *Keris*

The Patani community in the southern parts of Thailand had designed *keris* since the time of the Patani Malay Sultanate. The form of Patani *Keris* is that it is generally large, strong and sturdy. Such a *keris* would be important in defending the sultanate from enemy attacks, especially from the Siamese soldiers that were, at the time, actively seeking to expand their territories in an aggressive way. However, the forging technique was quite brief and did not highlight a beautiful *pamor*. But the head of Patani *Keris* displays a very fascinating and intricate detail. The *keris* is normally known for its head, named Hulu Pekaka. Hulu Pekaka is also given various names according to districts, such as Hulu Coteng, Hulu Bangsa Agong and Hulu Tajong. The carving on Hulu Pekaka is also very distinguishable. Hulu Coteng is known for its god carving, whereas Hulu Bangsa Agong is famous for its Hindu-Buddha influence. Hulu Tajong, on the other hand, leans on the Islamic characteristics with flowers and plants motives.

2. Peninsula *Keris*

The Peninsula *Keris*'s form is inspired from the make of a *keris* known as the '*tempa Melaka*' in the Melaka Malay Sultanate. The length of the blade is between 10-12 inches, curvy and straight at the same time. Normally, the head of the Peninsula *Keris* is in the form of Jawa Demam, Ayam Teleng also Patah Tiga. In the said era, only the *kerises* with heads named Jawa Demam and Pekaka were allowed to enter the area of the palace as they are also used in events and ceremonies. For Ayam Teleng and Patah Tiga, this *keris* is forbidden from entering the palace area. This is due to the fact that the *kerises* with these heads are designed for fights.

3. Javanese *Keris*

The people of Java are known to have the most intricate and detailed *keris*-making philosophy and ethics. The design of the *keris* comes with a multitude of philosophies connected to their daily situations where the structure, the shape of the blade, the accessories and the *pamor* are produced by the owner, based on the nature with some influence from the mystical elements. In the Javanese communities, only *keris* with the ladrang sheath will be allowed to enter the palace as it is the ceremonious *keris* used to see the King. Meanwhile, the *keris* with the gayaman sheath is not permitted to be in the palace area as it is specifically for stabbing or for fights.

4. Sumatera Keris

The design of the *keris* in Sumatera does not differ much from the Peninsula *Keris* and the Bugis *Keris*, especially at the sheath and at the head. Nonetheless, *Keris Panjang* of the Minangkabau society is very popular as a *keris* of punishment. It is designed to kill the offenders or criminals who have to undergo death sentence. The offenders will be tied, seated and the *keris* will be placed on his left shoulder before it is stabbed deep into his body. This type of *keris* is also known as *Keris Penyalang*.

5. Bali Keris

Bali *Keris* is large in general, also long and wide if compared to the Peninsula *Keris* or *Keris Semenanjung*, Minang *Keris*, Javanese *Keris* or the Bugis *Keris*. This is because the philosophy behind the design of the *keris* is different from the Malays. In the Balinese community, *keris* is regarded as very pure, idolised and worshipped with certain rituals. The use is also different, that is by thrusting, and not stabbing like other *kerises*. *Keris Lombok* also has the same size and form but they are mostly influenced by Islam in terms of the make and the decorations.

6. Bugis Keris

Bugis *Keris* exudes a strong influence in the Malay culture where it expands from the southern parts of Sulawesi to the Peninsula Malaysia, South Sumatera and the Riau-Lingga islands. The influence is evident through the design and the head of the *keris*. In terms of the physicality, Bugis *keris* is forged to be thicker and heavier and it is used for self-defence and for stabbing. The *pamor* on this *keris* is very beautiful, where the decorations are called *tuli-tuli* and *banir* showing the social status of the owner.

7. Sundang Keris

The philosophy underlying this *keris* is that it is designed to chop, to cut and to flip the ship rope. The blade is characteristically thick, wide and heavy, and it is used by the Sulu people at sea, as they were sailors then. This *keris* is also used in the battlefield and is elevated as a regalia.

Visual 3 below shows the types of the blades, of the *Keris Malay Semenanjung* representing various locations in the Peninsula, some of which are Bugis, Malela, Pandai Saras, Carita, Anak Alang also Tok Chu blades.

Jenis bilah Keris Melayu Semenanjung



Visual 3: The Blade-types of *Keris Semenanjung*.

Source: Bahari (2009)

Methodology

The methodology used to produce this article is descriptive through library study that leans more on ethnographical studies. According to Marican (2005) ethnographical studies are studies that come in the form of written explanation on a culture concerning the custom, belief, also behaviour based on the information gathered from the field work. It is a descriptive study on the culture, sub-culture, institution or group in a society. Meanwhile, Creswell (2005) mentioned that ethnography is a qualitative study that explains, analyses and interprets the many forms of culture of a group. Kostera and Harding (2021) defined ethnography as a study done on a society with highlights on lifestyle and culture.

Thus, in this article, the study data will be compiled from a close reading and examination of academic materials from the library or even from trustworthy and reliable websites. The

process of obtaining the information focuses on the reading and referencing from books, journals, papers as well as articles on *keris*.

Findings and Discussion

The Design of the *keris*

A perfect *keris* has its complete parts on its blade. In the world of *kerises*, there are various terms used to refer to parts on a *keris*. They include *dapur*, *pamor*, *perabot*, *luk* and so on. These terms are commonly used in areas of the Archipelago. Visual 4 below refers to parts of the *keris* together with their descriptions (Yub, 2009)

a) **Mata (Point)**

The 'eye' or the point on a piece of weapon carries two definitions. The first one is the material covering the whole of the body and the second one would mean the sharp edge of the weapon. The length and the width of the point depend on the type of the *keris*.

b) **Puting (tip)**

The tip is also known as the axis or the handle. The look resembles that of the point of the *keris*, so that it can be attached to the *keris* head.

c) **Ganja**

Ganja is a piece of a holed metal and it is attached to the tip of the *keris*. It is thick and blunt at one end, and it is also sharp and pointed at the other end. Normally, *ganja* is made of a material separate from the point. However, there is also *ganja* made straight from the blade and this is called *keris ganja seiras*. *Ganja* that is made separately is named *keris ganja menumpang*.

d) **Dagu (Chin)**

The chin is the outer surface of the *ganja*.

e) **Kepala Cicak**

From the top, the *ganja* looks like a lizard. The thick, end tip of the *ganja* is the one named *kepala cicak*, or literally the head of the lizard.

f) **Leher (neck)**

Leher is the narrow part located under the lizard head.

g) **Perut**

Perut is the part underneath the neck.

h) **Sepit Rotan**

Sepit rotan is the narrower part under the *perut* of the *ganja*.

i) **Ekor (tail)**

The tail is the part that comes after the *sepit rotan*.

Kepit

Kepit is the sharp end after the tail on *ganja*.

j) Aring

Aring is the filigrees that are found on the back end of the *ganja*. *Keris* that has *ganja* filigree is known as *keris ganja rawan* or *keris ganja kerawang*.

k) Gandik

Gandik is the part that is close to the chin of the *ganja*.

l) Kambing Kacang

Kambing kacang or also known as *awak* is the part placed in the middle of both the 'eyes' of the *keris* close to the *ganja*.

m) Belalai Gajah or Elephant Trunk

The elephant trunk or also known as *kuku alang* is the curvy tip that points towards the chin of the *ganja*.

n) Lambai Gajah

Lambai gajah or also mentioned as *lidah tiong* is the sharp tip located at the end of the elephant's curvy trunk.

o) Rigi

Rigi is the toothy part in the form of the rice-end.

p) Janggut or beard.

Janggut is the filigree located under the *aring* and *belalai gajah*.

q) Keris Bone

Keris bone is the line that appears in the middle of both the eyes of the *keris*.

r) Keris Eyes

The *keris* eyes are the side of the sharp blade located in the left and the right sides of the *keris*.

s) Pamor

Pamor is the patterns like lines, circles, curves, slices, pinches or spots formed on the blade during the forging process. It is produced from the mixture of different types of metal.

t) End of the Keris

The end of the *keris* is the pointed end of the *keris* eyes.

u) Tuntung of the Keris

Tuntung of the *keris* is the sharp, end part of the *keris* blade.

v) Head of the Keris

The head is the handler made from wood, horn, ivory, or bones. Normally the wood selected is from beautiful wood like kemuning and sometimes it is layered with silver or copper.

w) **Pendongkok**

Also goes by the names *penongkok*, *dokok*, *dongkok*, *dulang-dulang keris* and *mendak*. It looks like a flower-shaped attached on the head as decoration, made from silver or copper.

x) **Sampir**

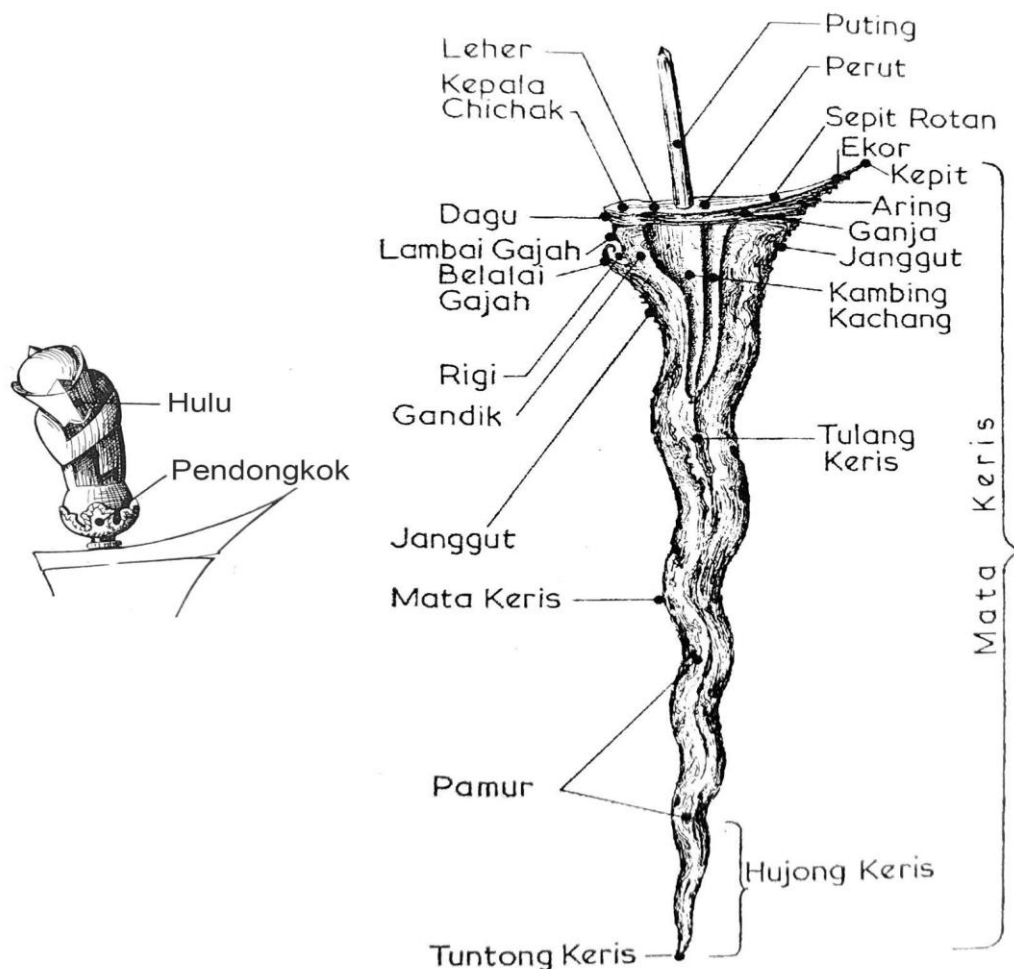
Sampir is part of the sheath. It is wide, thick, over and circular placed horizontally and slanting on the top part of the sheath. It is made of strong, hard and beautiful wood. The mouth part is punched to insert the base of the *keris* eye and the form of the will follow the form of *ganja* on a *keris*.

y) **Batang**

The batang of the *keris* is long and sometimes slightly pointed at the bottom. It is normally made from wood and ivory.

z) **Buntut**

Buntut is the most bottom part of the sheath. It is made from wood, bones, horns, ivory or metal and it has four types of shapes which is round, oval, square and axe-eyed.



Visual 4: Parts of *Keris*.

Source: Yub (2009)

The Philosophy of *Keris* in the Malay Civilisation

According to Bahari (2009), the Malay society is full of philosophies. In every design of a *keris*, three things have been formulated, namely the philosophy, the mannerism and the secret. The Malay race is full of philosophy, and they are rich with manners and impregnated with secrets. Although the *keris* is not merely designed to kill, it is still a much fatal weapon—once it is removed from its sheath it can potentially bring deadly consequences. Such an act aims to preserve the dignity of the owner, other than to defend himself (Mohamad & Rahman, 2013).

Keris is a work of art birthed from the sparks of inspiration from ethnic groups in the Archipelago that is very intricate, highly valued and rich with the aesthetic elements. *Keris* is a unique weapon that is very much adored not only by our community but also by foreigners, like Western researchers and specifically, *keris* lovers. The position of a *keris* for Malays has reached a very special position if we are to compare it with other weapons. This can show how the *keris* has become a cultural item for peoples of the Archipelago for the past decades. There are thousands of types of *keris* in the Malay world, especially in the Archipelago. According to Bakker (1984) there are about more than 400 ethnic groups around the Archipelago that also received the revolution of *keris* development in their lives. The diversity of ethnic groups also leaves an impact to the development of the types of *keris* where every ethnic will produce a *keris* template based on the society's own identity. As we can see today, the diverse types of *keris* show that this *keris* culture has become a culture in the civilisation of the Archipelago.

Thus, there are various philosophies behind the function and role played by the *keris*. Back then, it was a weapon of self-defence but now the function is more symbolic and leans more on the highly valued Malay civilisation. Among the functions and roles of the *keris* evident in the Malay culture is as the regalia of power (royal *keris*), complementary to the customary and wedding ensemble, medicine and shamanism, arts of self-defence (*silat*) and other ceremonies.

Keris as the regalia of power has shown its use as the symbol of power for the Malay Kings and Sultans. The coronation of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and Malay Kings will not be complete without a *keris*. Such is the epitome of power shown through the *keris*. As a complement to the ensemble in ceremonies like in a wedding, the *keris* is also used by the groom with a Malay traditional attire. The attire will also be incomplete without a *keris* tucked neatly on the waist. Other than that, *keris* is also used in the shamanism so common in the Malay society. However, there is no specific *keris* for this purpose. *Keris* is used in shamanism because the Malays regard it as having some mystical elements and its own strengths that can help the healing process.

Keris is also synonymous in self-defence, particularly *silat*. A *silat* will not be complete without a *keris*. *Keris* in *silat* can comprise of various types and can be used in training. Normally the training *keris* or the arena *keris* would have a lower quality compared to *kerises* for other purposes. Other functions of the *keris* are as the epitome of a ceremony or event like the convocation in local universities in Malaysia also in other government institutions. This *keris* will complement the ceremony—this is testament to the great value of a *keris* in Malay institutions.

a) **Philosophy in the design of a *keris***

According to Mohamad et al (2012), in terms of the design, the blade of the *keris* is in a good balance and it enables the *keris* to stand on its own without being supported. The

balance of the blade leans on the strength, sturdiness and stability when it is being used. He added that in fights, long weapons would be unnecessary. When one is armed, the weapon has to be hidden from the view of the enemy for the purpose of confusing him. In reality, if it is within sight, the weapon can be defined as good or bad. It will be accepted if it is good, but it has to be avoided if it is bad. Thus, if the *keris* is not seen, it is hard to ascertain if it is to be accepted or otherwise. *Keris* is used to stab, it is used in swift movements, hidden from the naked eye, also confusing and shocking the enemy in fights. That is the philosophy of the *keris* once the dagger is extracted from the sheath. *Keris* is designed with sharp blades and tip. In an attack or in averting an attack, the three-pronged *keris* can still be seen by the owner. In attacking mode, or dodging to the left or right, or even if one is not dodging at all, the eye of the *keris* is still seen. The short length, makes it easy for it to be removed from the sheath. This is the philosophy of the *keris* in fights, in any position, any form of injury would be inevitable.

The anatomy of the *keris* also has its own philosophy. The anatomy is the decorative part on the blade that has four sections according to (Haryoguritno, 2005). It is divided into the handle or named tip, the upper part of the blade known as *ganja*, the base of the blade called *sor-soran* and the body of the blade named *awak-awakan*, *pucuk* or end of the blade. The tip is the foundation of the blade, whereby without it the blade will not be firm and the head cannot be attached. According to Mohamad et al (2012), *ganja* also known as *cicak* (lizard) and the base of the blade mostly display various forms of artwork created by the owner during the forging. Some of the forms of art are *bungkul* (onion), *kembang kacang*, *jalen* (*taji ayam*) and *tikel alis* are inspired from the nature, or the flora and fauna. The philosophy that leans on the strength can be seen on the elephant's trunk, whereas the lizard shape implies that one has to consistently be wary of his surroundings at all times.

According to Mohamad et al (2012) the *keris* is also designed based on two philosophies, which is 'sarpa tapa' and 'sarpa lumuka'. With a straight blade, a *keris* is designed with the 'sarpa tapa' philosophy similar to a meditating snake. The owner of the *keris* is firm and highly disciplined. When this *keris* is taken out from its sheath, he is no longer seeking to talk but to kill in a swift motion. For a curvy-bladed *keris*, the philosophy is 'sarpa lumuka' like a slithering snake. This means that this *keris* can kill its enemy fast and mercilessly. When the *keris* is stabbing the opponent, it is taken out from the sheath slanting to the right and left as the stabbing is set to ravage and mutilate the opponent.

The emergence of Islam to the archipelago more or less influences the making of the *keris* afterwards. Other than adopting odd number on the blade of the *keris* to resemble the odd number in the pillars of Islam, the number of *tawaf*, the pillars of the prayers and so on, there are also daggers or *kerises* that have carvings of Quranic verses on the blade and the sheath. The edge of the dagger also illustrates a transformation, from figures of animals, gods and goddesses to natural creatures and forms that are in line with the Islamic teachings.

b) Philosophy in Actions

According to Helmi (2019) there are certain philosophies in one's actions such as kissing the *keris*, raising it and thrusting it. Kissing the *keris* implies being ready to accept duty and mandate in full redemption and honesty. Raising it up would mean upholding the power, sovereignty, responsibility and justice in carrying out the mandate. Thrusting it means having the determination to defend one's own country, race and religion from enemies.

c) Philosophy in the Forging Process

A Western scholar, Frey (2010) in his book, discussed the power and magic of a *keris* based on its history in the Archipelago and Malaysia, and he found that Malays believe that the *keris* carries some supernatural and mystical power. This power is believed to have stemmed from the type of metal used by *keris* makers long ago. Mataram *Keris* wrought in the year 1600 was made from 9 types of metal from various places and it took 17 years as the forging process only adopts one beat every Friday night. A similar case would be the Taming Sari believed to have been an extraordinary *keris* as it combined 20 types of metal. *Keris* makers were normally selected by the King and had gained a special position in the society. They would normally fast and meditate before the *keris*-making process was to begin. According to Mohamad et al (2012) in his other statements, the method of making the *keris* also carries its own philosophy. It lands on the origin of mankind, that is from soil, water, fire and wind. Humans are made from soil, and softened with water. It is then burned with fire and blown with soul. The blacksmiths at the time, or even the *keris* owner took the inspiration of *keris*-making from resources of the land like metal, fertilisers and nickel and it is mixed and forged with fire and water, before being recited with prayers or mantras with certain rituals depending on the owner's intention. Next, having forged the *keris*, when the blade is ready, it will be put to meditate for forty-four days at the highest place where it is made. The *keris* has a high, grand value that is unbeatable. During the *keris*-making, the owner's attire also has its own philosophy. The owner will be wearing all yellow if he is to forge a royal *keris*. If it is forged for warriors, the owner will wear all black and red girdle. If the *keris* is forged for a commoner, the owner will wear his common clothes.

d) Philosophy as a tool of self-defence

Several scholars share the same opinion (Al-Mudra, 2009; Buanadjaya, 1998; Duuren, 1998; Frey, 2010; Gardner, 1973; Moebirman, 1980; Pamungkas, 2007; Yub, 2006), that the philosophy of *keris* is created with various purposes. One of the main purposes is to kill. When taken out from the sheath and when the *keris* is thrust, it will kill, but that is only to preserve the dignity of the owner, and it no longer serves the purpose of defending him. Thus, as a self-defence tool, *keris* is made to be short and the design strange, as it is to be made a weapon compared to other Malay weapons like the sword, the spear and others.

e) Philosophy in the Adornment

When it comes to the adornment of the *keris*, there is a difference between the Malays and the Javanese. The *keris* is tucked at the waist on the front side, for the Malays under the premise that the luck of the *keris* is more important than oneself and it signifies that the bearer is ready to face any possibilities. This is as opposed to the way the Javanese wear their *keris*, which is at the back of the waist. The philosophy is to always be careful and the *keris* will only be taken out from the sheath when necessary, and the aim is to confuse the enemy. However, there are some similarities between them in terms of determining the position of the *keris* head when placed on the waist. When the head or the 'hulu' is facing the front, it means that the wearer comes in peace. However, if the head is facing backwards, the wearer is giving a warning that he is ready to fight. The same goes with the protocol in entering the place and meeting with the Sultan, whereby only certain *kerises* (Jawa Demam and Pekaka heads) are allowed, and for Javanese, only the *keris* with *sampir Ladrang* is allowed to enter the palace or *keraton*. That is the extent of the philosophy of adornment of the people in the Archipelago, at the time.

f) Philosophy in its Use

In terms of the use, the making of the *keris* is done with a simple philosophy that can be adapted to the convenience of the owner. The blade of the *keris* can be rotated to the left or to the right, according to the need, and the head can be handheld on the right or the left hand. The blade can be removed and used as a spear. For mystic practitioners and for those engaged in *silat*, the *keris* wrought is normally mixed with metals, like gold or yellow metal. This is to fortify the blade and it is believed to be able to gather mystical strength and can kill, when facing strong, invulnerable opponents.

g) Philosophy in the Maintenance

Keris maintenance by the Malay society also has its own philosophy. Normally, the *keris* will be wrapped with yellow clothes and placed higher. It will be cleaned, and bathed in the early month of Muharram. This is because the month is regarded as the month of *ilmu*, or knowledge. The *keris* will be bathed with lemon and certain rituals will be practised. One of the reasons is to preserve the blade from being eroded and the mantras and rituals are recited to give more substance to the *keris*, or *khadam* 'in' the *keris*. It is this element that influences the mystical strength of the *keris*.

h) Philosophy Life

Effendy (2008) has outlined ten symbols that have become the philosophy in *keris*-making in the lives of the Malays, as follows:

1. The symbol of luck and dignity

A good *keris* will contain values, strength or priority that can lay spiritual and physical foundation, and this is the hallmark of luck and dignity.

2. Symbol of masculinity

The *keris* is believed to have a strength that can increase a sense of bravery, warrior ship, and the self-conviction created from the trait of masculinity.

3. Symbol of Self-Esteem

The *keris* is believed to contain values of oneself or the credibility of the owner.

4. Symbol of Integrity

The *keris* is also believed to have the owner's sense of integrity and contains various materials and symbols.

5. Symbol of Sovereignty (Credibility and Power)

The *keris* contains the values and strength that can sustain the sovereignty, credibility and power of the owner.

6. Symbol of the body

The *keris* is made akin to the body of the owner as it will represent him in any ceremony or event.

7. Weapon

The *keris* is specifically created to be the main weapon.

8. Self-carer

Keris can become the carer of the owner, which means that it protects him and his people, or his family, from the many challenges and danger, be it physically or spiritually.

9. Helper in various fields

The *keris* has a strength or value that can help in various fields in one's daily life.

10. Clothing

As the *keris* has many priorities, values, symbols and philosophies, the *keris* has become 'a pice of clothing' throughout one's life.

Apart from that, the pamor on the *keris* is believed to have been linked with the owner's life and fate. The pamor that is populara among the Malay society is *pamor beras tumpah* or otherwise known as *wos wutah* and *hujan emas* or *udan mas*. The philosophy concerns with the safety and wellbeing of the owner other than seeking for good sustenance and to be loved by others. Meanwhile, the philosophy behind pamor hujan emas is to accumulate wealth, similar to the falling rain. This *keris* is much-coveted by the traders or businessmen who believed in its greatness. Thus, every pamor has its own different values of philosophy tailored to the desire and purpose of the owner. The *keris* has to be adaptable to the owner and it cannot simply be owned blindly, without the 'tayuhan' beforehand. The substance is also different, where the luck and the bad consequences need to be understood through the various forms of the pamor. In the world of the *keris*, 'matchmaking' is the term often used to refer to the compatibility between the *keris* and the owner (Mohamad et al., 2012).

a) Philosophy of Identity

Other than that, the *keris* blade has various types and names based on the district or territory where it is made. The names of the *keris* also get their names and identities from the metal used, the shame of the blade and the owner who forges it. This is evident on Pandai Saras *keris*, taken from the owner who came from Java, and migrated to Patani. Melela *Keris* that is popular in Kelantan territories and Patani is made from a dark-coloured piece of metal. It has curves and very aesthetic. The Bugis *keris* also has various versions and identities like *Bugis Semenanjung*, *Selayar Bugis* also *Bugis Terengganu*. All have different forms according to the identity of the place where the *keris* is forged and the following the owner. Such a diversity makes the *keris* more and more distinctive. Through the identity, the owner's background and origin can be identified. Such is the philosophy of the *keris*- it is not only functioning as a piece of weapon but also a form of identification for the Malays at the time.

b) Philosophy of Showing Status

Philosophy for a curved *keris* is formed based on the number of *luk* on the blade. The straight *keris* or the *keris* with one *luk* is used for a specific purpose, in customary practice or as a mark of *tauhid* (Ibrahim, 2017). The three-*luk* *keris* is often used by warriors (Mohamad et al., 2012) and commoners (Ibrahim, 2017). For five-*luk* *keris*, it is commonly used by religious scholars (Ibrahim, 2017). The owners tend to be linked with the gift of the gab (Mohamad et al., 2012). The five-luck *keris* in the Javanese island at the time can only be owned by the King, the royal dignitaries, like aristocrats with royal lineage. It is also called *Keris Keningratan*. Its philosophy is as the bearer of good luck and to uphold the credibility of the owner (Christopher, 2012). Meanwhile, according to Mohamad et al (2012), the seven-

luk keris signifies the credibility and charisma of the ruling power in the Malay society. Christopher (2012) stated that the seven-*luk keris* would signify the perfection of Allah.

1. It is commonly used by people who regard their worldly life as perfect so they will concentrate only on the spiritual life. Meanwhile, Ibrahim (2017) stated that this *keris* is worn by the dignitaries at the palace such as the admiral and the warriors. For the *kerises* with nine *luk*, it mirrors the wisdom and credibility of the owner's leadership (Mohamad et al., 2012), and it is also used by the royals and the rulers as an epitome of power (Ibrahim, 2017). According to Christopher (2012), this nine-*luk keris* is normally found by the wise, or public figures. Next, *keris* with eleven *lucs* shows that the owner has high ambition when it comes to economic and social advancement. For the *keris* with thirteen *lucs*, it shows that the owner has the courage to defend everything that he owns from being confiscated and he is willing to die to protect his dignity (Mohamad et al., 2012), although according to Christopher (2012) the number thirteen in the lives of the Javanese brings an unpleasant meaning, that it is evil, condemned or catastrophic. Thus, the making of this *keris* has the purpose of disregarding and warding off evil and catastrophes to the owner. It is also made for mysticism and power.

Philosophy in the Islamic Influence

The shape of the *luk* also receives influence from Islam. *Luk* on the blade of the *keris* is counted from the left and it will end also on the left. If it ends on the right, the characteristic of the *keris* will be regarded as imperfect. The *luk* should also be in odd number because it means weakness, whereas even number means perfection. Weakness here implies that humans (servants) are weak by nature and only Allah s.w.t. must be perfect. Even so, there are *kerises* that have even number of *luk*. This indicates that it is the final *keris* forged by the owner (Ibrahim, 2017). According to Ibrahim (2017), the position of the blade must be slanting from right to left. The philosophy is to bow. If we look at the *keris* from the front, it is as if it is bowing or surrendering. This philosophy is based on the Islamic teaching whereby the servant is succumbing and surrendering to Allah s.w.t, the one true God.

Philosophy on Aesthetic Value

The *keris* blade is also forged with various aesthetic patterns according to the creativity of the owner. Doyodipuro (1999) has listed 380 patterns (motifs) on the straight *keris* and 439 patterns on the curvy *keris* according to the *tangguh*, *tayuh* and *pasikutan*. The blades of the *keris* have different patterns or motifs although they are on the same *keris*. This makes every *keris* unique.

The aesthetic value on the *keris* makes it a unique and beautiful weapon but it also keeps various secrets and identities. The forging of *keris* blade up to the sheath and the head carries a certain style, pattern and some very intricate carvings which demonstrate the meticulousness of Malay culture and philosophy.

The Mystical Philosophy

According to Haryoguritno (2005), *pamor* on the *keris* blade is a symbolic drawing or sketching that can explain about the power or the strength of the mystics on the blade of the *keris*. The one designing the *pamor* will refer to his own philosophies where every form of *pamor* carries the purpose and hope of the owners. According to Harsrinuksmo (2004) the philosophy behind the round or spiral *pamor* is to gain sustenance and peace. For square or angular *pamor*, it symbolises the owner's strength and endurance from any kind of temptation or attacks- physically or non-physically (supernatural). For horizontal *pamor*, it

functions as an amulet that can ward off bad elements, and attacks from wild and venomous animals.

Such is the intricacy of the philosophy of a *keris*, showing that a *keris* is not only a weapon but also a sign of civilisation and culture of the people of the Archipelago. It is the one weapon which status is elevated in the entire community. There are various secrets and philosophies in a *keris* that narrate the priceless values of civilisation.

Conclusion

Keris is A Malay artefact with a very refined artistry. Through it, we are able to see the beauty, sanctity and intricacy of the Malay culture and civilisation. We are also able to perceive the philosophy, thinking and way of life of the very well-mannered Malay people. Ibrahim (2017) stated that the *keris* is symbolic to the identity or integrity of one's religion and race. The Malays, for once, would not leave their homes without a *keris*, because then it would be like going out without any clothes. Back then, every Malay would have at least three *kerises*, which is an inherited one, status one and a *keris* for his own cause. Through the inherited *keris*, one's origin, rank and role would have been able to be identified.

Such is the greatness of the philosophy of a *keris*, whereby it is not only a weapon but also a manifestation of an identity to very refined Malays. Today, the philosophy and function are preserved well. No more Malays leave their homes with a *keris*, and no more Malays use it to defend themselves unless they are in *silat* arenas. *Keris* today carries a more symbolic significance in events and ceremonies. Even so, the high philosophy continues to be embodied in the Malay civilisation and it would be inseparable from the folds of Malay life. Conclusively, *keris* is a nation's identity. To know the Malay race is to know the *keris* because it contains a wealth of philosophies of the Malay civilisation.

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