

Reflection on Social Aspects in Pahang Folktales

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i6/21863>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i6/21863

Published Date: 20 June 2024

Abstract

Folktales are a form of traditional literature that play an important role in conveying the thoughts and values of past societies to present-day communities. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze the social aspects in Pahang folktales. To achieve this objective, the study employs a societal approach based on the Malay Methodology Theory by Hashim Awang (1993). A total of 11 Pahang folktales contained in the text "Himpunan 366 Cerita Rakyat Malaysia," edited by Othman Puteh and Aripin Said (2010), are analyzed in this study. The results indicate that traditional Malay society skillfully blended stories to illustrate the effects and consequences of being an unwise community. The messages conveyed also have a significant impact on society.

Keyword: Folktales, Social, Reflection

Introduction

It is widely known that folktales are passed down orally with the purpose of entertaining and educating. According to Abu Bakar (2017: 21), folktales existed before humans knew how to write and are a tradition of a culture that is connected through oral communication. Additionally, Ishak (2005: 19) explains that folktales include stories of storytellers, animal tales, humorous stories, and origin stories. These stories should be revitalized and presented to the community so that the knowledge and values they contain can be disseminated to society.

Furthermore, Aripin Said (1996: 4) argues that human life and all its behaviors are not static. Therefore, these factors cause changes or additions to occur in oral traditions. However, it can be observed in the folktales studied that the messages conveyed by the society at that time contain values that are capable of educating the community.

Objectives

- To identify social aspects in Pahang folktales.
- To analyze social aspects in Pahang folktales.

To achieve these objectives, this study employs a societal approach based on the Malay Methodology Theory by (Awang, 1993). According to Awang (1993), the societal approach

views literature as an exposition of societal issues aimed at seeking goodness and justice for the community. There are 11 Pahang folktales contained in the text "Himpunan 366 Cerita Rakyat Malaysia," edited by (Puteh and Said, 2010).

Research Findings

In the context of community life, mutual respect and helping each other are essential for creating a harmonious and peaceful society. Traditional Malay society effectively educated the public through folktales to become a community that respects one another. This can be observed in the story titled "Penunggu Ibu Besi." This story illustrates how traditional Malay society conveyed messages about envy within the community. For instance, characters Kiman and Jiman are envious of Khatib Lela, who owns an iron mine. Out of jealousy, Kiman and Jiman decide to burn down the mine without thinking of the consequences. This is evident in the following excerpt:

"Khatib Lela ruled the Luit district. He owned the Bukit Betong iron mine. Others were amazed because Lela obtained lumps of iron. Kiman and Jiman envied him. One day, they went to Bukit Betong. Upon arrival, they saw a cave. 'Perhaps, in this cave, Lela carves iron stones,' said Kiman. 'I will burn this cave,' said Jiman." (Penunggu Ibu Besi: 158)

The excerpt above shows the presence of envy within the community. Thus, the intellectuality of traditional Malay society is also evident when they introduce the character of the "Iron Guardian," who consumes Kiman and Jiman, representing people who fail to maintain good relations within the community. Their envy and betrayal lead to their demise. The author's intellectuality in eliminating the characters Kiman and Jiman serves as a lesson to others that evil deeds are met with evil outcomes. In this context, the societal approach is appropriate for this story as it seeks goodness and justice for the community.

Next, the story "Bangau Menenun Songket" demonstrates the consequences of greed and breaking promises. The wisdom of traditional Malay society is shown through the character of Bangau (the stork), symbolizing gratitude. The husband and wife characters exhibit a lack of intellect by breaking promises, leading to their loss. This is evident in the following excerpt:

"One day, the husband went to the forest to collect wood. While walking, he saw a stork trapped, crying in pain due to an injured leg. The old man pitied the stork and treated its leg all day. Finally, the stork healed and flew away. ...the couple couldn't wait. Murni didn't come out of the room, didn't eat or drink. The old man's wife wanted to see Murni weaving songket. She pushed the door slightly. 'Don't, don't!' warned her husband, but it was too late. The old woman was shocked to see a stork plucking its feathers and weaving songket with them. 'I am the stork you saved. I was only repaying your kindness. You broke the promise. Now that you know my true form, I must leave,' said the stork." (Bangau Menenun Songket: 78-79)

The excerpt shows the stork repaying the old man by weaving songket. However, the couple breaks the promise not to look, causing the stork to leave. Their impatience and lack of wisdom result in losing the stork's help in weaving songket for additional income. The moral approach in this story aims to teach children the importance of helping others, keeping promises, and being patient.

The analysis also finds that the story “Tukang Kayu dan Tukang Besi” reflects social aspects, highlighting social protest within the community. This story shows the lack of respect among people. For example, a wealthy man arrogantly dismisses his neighbors, the carpenter and the blacksmith, due to the noise from their work. However, the wisdom of traditional Malay society shows that one cannot hinder others from earning a living. This is clearly seen in the following excerpt:

"Due to their hard work, the area became noisy. The rich man disliked the noise from the metal and woodwork. 'You both must move. Your work is too noisy,' said the rich man."
(*Tukang Kayu dan Tukang Besi*: 168)

The excerpt clearly shows the rich man's selfish attitude and disrespect towards others' livelihoods. In community life, respecting others is essential for a peaceful existence. Additionally, the story emphasizes that sustenance comes from Allah S.W.T. The wisdom of traditional Malay society conveys this message in a relaxed manner to educate children about mutual respect and understanding that sustenance comes from Allah S.W.T. Consequently, life becomes peaceful and harmonious.

Moreover, the analysis finds that the story “Suami Puteri Raja” also reflects societal aspects. This story shows that traditional Malay society values intelligent, brave, and strong young individuals as potential suitors. Such qualities are crucial and prioritized in society. For example, the king in this story seeks an intelligent, brave, and strong son-in-law through various dangerous tests, such as crossing a crocodile-infested pond. This is evident in the following excerpt:

"The king wanted a wise and brave son-in-law. He instructed the Minister to find a brave and wise young man to try his luck. Near the palace, there was a pond with many fierce crocodiles. Anyone who could cross the pond safely would become the king's son-in-law."
(*Suami Puteri Raja*: 184)

The excerpt shows that the king seeks an intelligent, brave, and strong son-in-law. Hence, in society, intelligent youths are prioritized to ensure they can protect their families well. This demonstrates the importance of being wise, brave, and strong to children, helping them face challenges. In this study, Awang's (1989) societal approach aligns with this story, raising awareness about the importance of these qualities in society.

Reflections on societal aspects are also detected in the story entitled 'Manusia Menjadi Labi-labi'. This story portrays a society that is impatient and prone to mistreating animals. Traditional Malay society also displays Labu's character, who receives retribution for his impatient and hot-tempered behavior, leading him to mistreat an animal. Labu, unwilling to release the mudskipper and cutting it with a machete, eventually transforms his entire body into a mudskipper. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

"It's been three days since Labu has been fishing. Suddenly, his fishing hook is snatched away. Labu continues to pull it ashore. The mudskipper blinked its eyes.
'Oh Labu, let me go. I will help you,' said the mudskipper. 'You lie! For three days I've been disappointed,' said Labu.
Labu was angry and he slashed the mudskipper with his machete. And so the mudskipper died.

Shortly afterwards, Labu felt his body heating up. He went down to soaking the lake. Suddenly, Labu felt his body change. His hands, body, and feet turned into mudskippers. But his head did not change." (Manusia Menjadi Labi-labi: 202)

The excerpt demonstrates Labu's cruelty in slashing the mudskipper to death. The negative behavior displayed by Labu ultimately receives appropriate retribution, as Labu transforms into a mudskipper himself. This clearly illustrates traditional Malay society's wisdom in educating the public by depicting the consequences of cruelty towards animals. Such behavior should not be emulated by other societies, as animals are creatures of God. Therefore, children will understand that evil actions will meet with dire consequences. In this case, the moral approach is tailored to the story. As discussed in the previous chapter, the moral approach is an event experienced by humans that educates society.

Furthermore, the story 'Puteri Melur Sekuntum' also demonstrates intellectual values from the aspect of society. This story manifests the intellectual value of a wise traditional Malay society in the field of traditional medicine. It can also be seen in this story that traditional Malay society cannot be separated from nature. For example, medicine in ancient times depended on natural sources. For example, Princess Melur Sekuntum, who had bad breath, was treated with betel leaf, betel nut, lime, and gambier. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

"Princess Melur Sekuntum told her story. After hearing her story, the white snake called four black snakes. Each of those snakes was asked to find gambier leaves. After these things were asked to find betel leaves, betel nuts, lime, and gambier. After these things were brought before the princess, the white snake asked the princess to eat them.

After chewing betel leaves and lime, immediately the foul smell of the princess's mouth disappeared. (Puteri Melur Sekuntum: 212)

The excerpt clearly shows the use of natural resources such as betel leaves, betel nuts, lime, and gambier for medicinal purposes. This clearly demonstrates the intellectual value of traditional Malay society in healing diseases even though modern medicine was not yet available at that time. This wisdom shows that Malay society is actually wise in various aspects, including the field of medicine. In the context of the study, Hashim Awang's societal approach (1989) is suitable for application in this story because it exposes society to medical knowledge.

The story titled 'Kendi Ajaib' reflects societal aspects. This story shows a community that is wise in educating children. Although they do wrong things, we need to educate them well and not punish them arbitrarily. In this story, it portrays a very naughty child who steals an old lady's pot. This can be seen in the following text below:

She smiled while waiting in her hut. Yatim ran towards the hut. Before Yatim could speak, the old lady said, "I knew you would come here eventually."

"Forgive me! I'm sorry, grandma. I was wrong to steal your pot. Please help me. Otherwise, my house will be submerged in the milk," said Yatim. (Kendi Ajaib: 216)

It can be seen that the excerpt clearly shows a good attitude in educating children. The old lady did not scold or punish Yatim even though he made a mistake. She forgave Yatim and gave him a chance not to repeat the same mistake. Through this event, children begin to understand that evil deeds will be met with evil. In this regard, it aligns with Awang's (1989)

societal approach, which states that society should be exposed to doing good. This is consistent with the story as it exposes the community to the importance of doing good.

Furthermore, the analysis continues with the story entitled 'Air Menitik di Atas Batu' ('Drops of Water on Stone') which also shows reflection from the aspect of society. For example, this story shows a lazy boy who studies and finally late read the Quran compared to his friends, However, society does not despise him and often encourages him to learn. Even so, Buyung feels ashamed of his other friends and hides in the cave. The wisdom of traditional Malay society also shines when using the symbol of a stone that is curved due to the dripping water that shows that every matter requires a process and effort. This can be seen as an excerpt from the text:

"One day, his friends held a feast of thanksgiving at the teacher's house. Buyung was ashamed to come. So, he went to the forest near his village.

In the forest there is a cave. In that cave Buyung hides. When hesitating thinking in that cave, suddenly he saw water dripping on a stone in front of him. The drop of water makes the stone curved. How long has the water been dripping until the stone becomes curved, think Buyung. Thinking like that, Buyung immediately got up and went to celebrate with his friends who finished the Quran. The teacher and his friends were very happy to see Buyung together. After that, Buyung began to study diligently.

"Water dripping on a stone will bend it. If I study diligently, surely I will be smart," said Buyung. (Air Menitik di Atas Batu: 232-233)

The excerpt clearly shows the wisdom of traditional Malay society in educating children to be diligent and not despair. In addition, the attitude of society always supports each other also educates children to respect each other. This attitude must be fostered from an early age so that they understand to respect each other can get along with society. This story can be adapted to Hashim Awang's societal approach (1989) because this story provides exposure to society to always do good with each other.

Next, the analysis can be detected in the story entitled 'Kampung Batu Sawar'. This story also shows the wisdom of traditional Malay society from the aspect of society. For example, you can see a community that is wise and creative to catch fish. Although at that time there was no sophisticated technology to catch fish. This story shows sawar being used as technology to catch fish at that time. This shows creative thinking shown in this story is also the wisdom of past societies that prove that the Malay people are very wise. This clearly shows the wisdom of traditional Malay society that can catch fish though at that time no sophisticated technology. They use wisdom to create sawar for catching fish. Creativity of society is clearly visible when they are wise using sawar as a fish catching technique. Sawar is used to hold back the flow of river water to make it easier to catch fish. Besides, this event gave awareness to children about the importance of thinking wisely and they can become successful in life. This story is in line with Hashim Awang's social approach (1989) because the story provides awareness to society about the importance of respecting each other.

They wanted to catch fish in the river. The giants really liked eating fish. They used a weir. The weir spanned the Pahang River. Because of this, the water flowed slowly. The fish would get trapped in the weir, making it easier to catch them. (Kampung Batu Sawar: 234)

This excerpt demonstrates the wisdom of traditional Malay society, which was skilled at fishing even without the advanced technology we have today. They used their ingenuity by making a weir to catch fish. The creativity of the community is evident in their clever use of the weir as a fishing technique. The weir was used to slow the river's flow, making it easier to catch fish. Additionally, this event teaches children that to sustain life, one must think wisely and make an effort.

Furthermore, the story "Murid yang Bijaksana" also shows reflection from the aspect of society. You can see, this story shows a traditional Malay society showing a society that pays attention to education. For example, you can see in the following text:

"There is only one student who succeeded in cooking the rice given before. The rice is not mixed with corn and rice.

'How can you separate the ingredients I gave you before, O Dayang?' asked Tuk Guru.

'O Tuk Guru, all the ingredients given before I threw and indang with nyiru. After all I make this rice,' said Dayang.

Tuk Guru knows that Dayang is his wise student. From that day on, Tuk Guru no longer teaches female students. On the contrary, Dayang became a teacher to teach female students.

(Murid yang Bijaksana: 261)

This story shows how a teacher asks his student to think about separating and distinguishing the ingredients given to him so that they are not mixed. Wisdom was shown when one of the students named Dayang was able to cook rice by separating all the ingredients. In the context of this study, it shows that the Malay society encourages children to think. As a result of their thoughts, children will take the right action. In fact, the consequences of thinking wisely will make them smart and they are also recognized to be a teacher to teach other female students. This will be attractive for children to think wisely and they will understand the importance of thinking to get rational decisions. In the context of the study, Hashim Awang's societal approach (1989) is in line with this story because it gives awareness to society about the importance of thinking and knowledge.

The story 'Seruling Ajaib' also portrays reflections of societal aspects among the people. However, this story shows a well-structured narrative with a clear cause-and-effect relationship. For instance, the story illustrates a community that still believes in seers, including from a medical perspective. The king is seen instructing a seer to treat his fainting son, and the seer asks for a lime fruit. Additionally, it can be observed in this story that looking down upon others has consequences. For example, the following excerpt can be noted:

"He was confident that the stupid child would definitely lose. King Donan's hen swayed and nurtured the chicken of Dewa Perakas. His chickens managed to kill Si Jalak. "Who are you, stupid boy?" asked Dewa Perakas. "It was King Donan who drowned by Tuk Nujum when I was small," said King Donan.

(Seruling Ajaib: 269)

The passage above shows that there is a society that believes in seers and also likes to belittle others. As a result, they are at a disadvantage because they trust the Tok Nujum and lose their country because they look down on others. Therefore, this incident provides a lesson to the community, especially children, not to belittle others. The community approach is clearly suited to this story as it exposes society to the importance of respecting others.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reflections of societal aspects can be found in stories entitled 'Penunggu Ibu Besi,' 'Bangau Menenun Songket,' 'Tukang Kayu dan Tukang Besi,' 'Suami Puteri Raja,' 'Manusia Menjadi Labi-labi,' 'Puteri Melur Sekuntum,' 'Kendi Ajaib,' 'Air Menitik di Atas Batu,' 'Kampung Batu Sawar,' 'Murid yang Bijaksana,' and 'Seruling Ajaib.' All these stories shape humans into good and wise societies. The narrative linkage tailored to cause and effect provides children with experiences to become wise societies when interacting with others. This study contributes towards the development of folk literature studies, particularly for the benefit of children in the 21st century. This study is also expected to enlighten the public about the reflection of societal aspects in the folk tales of Pahang as conveyed by storytellers, whether explicitly or implicitly. This research is also anticipated to benefit researchers, critics, and the general public, thereby contributing to the development of folk literature.

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