

The Process of Creating the Script for the Performance of, "*Bermulanya Di Sini...Kedah Tua*"

Mumtaz Begum Aboo Backer*, Halimi Mohd Noh and Husaini Yaacob

School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, MALAYSIA

*Corresponding author: mumzie@usm.my

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ABSTRACT

"Bermulanya Di Sini...Kedah Tua" is an artistic theatrical production, the outcome of a collaborative effort between performers and archeologists at the Lembah Bujang, Kedah. The creation of the script for the production goes with the same title of "Bermulanya Di Sini...Kedah Tua" is inspired by historical narratives and literary sources derived from the ancient civilisation at Lembah Bujang also known as Kedah Tua. "Bermulanya Di Sini...Kedah Tua" translated as Kedah Tua...where it all began, marks the beginning of a new historical discovery, especially at Sungai Batu, an area in Lembah Bujang to be recognised as the oldest ancient civilisation in Southeast Asia. The key steps involved in creating the script for the theatrical production were (1) translating archaeological artefacts and architectural remains at Kedah Tua and (2) interpreting existing literary works, historical narratives, and artists impression about Kedah Tua. The methodology applied in creating the script is a combination of practice led research and textual analysis methods; a systematic method for describing, interpreting, analysing, and evaluating performative interpretations of the available field texts which provided a framework for a re-imagined scenario and also the artistic license to stretch the boundaries of the historical discourse. This method allowed the script to picture the setting of Kedah Tua between 2nd CE and 6th CE, which further establishes a premise upon the varying performance elements such as the plot, diction, and characterisation.

Keywords: *script, textual analysis, performance*

INTRODUCTION

A script is a written version of the author's or playwright's thoughts conveyed through dialogues uttered by characters that drive the plot of the story (Gonzalez 1990). The word script is derived from Latin "scriber", which means to write (Contemporary Dictionary 2000). A script usually has three parts to it, the beginning, the middle, and the ending. According to Hernandez (2003), a script contains the writer's imaginations, anticipation, and messages to the audience. Looking at all the above-mentioned definitions and frameworks for script, this paper fills up the gaps by positing that a script ties the writer, actors, and audience in a close relationship through reflective communication. All three are constantly reflecting upon communicated acts, actions, dialogues, expressions, and messages in the text.

The notion of writing the script for the performance production at Lembah Bujang began with the realisation that there is not a single story but many narratives or versions of literary sources that could be an inspiration for the theatrical production. Fragments of various versions on the civilisation of Kedah Tua or Ancient Kedah also known as Lembah Bujang from distinguished travellers such as I-Ching, historians who chronicled certain events based on other historical and literary sources, mainly Al-Biruni and Al-Khindi, not forgetting Tamil literary works proves Kedah Tua as a much-appreciated civilisation before the 4th CE AD.

Bearing this notion in mind, the writing process for a script to place Kedah Tua and its' much-forgotten civilisation at the centre of an artistic platform began with field visits and studying the site with archaeologists. Observation of the sites, monuments and explanations from archaeologists further ignited our curiosity to investigate deeper into folklores, narratives, available literary and historical works that could help us picture

or even paint an imaginary scenario of the civilisation at Kedah Tua. This paper will discuss the theatrical and dramatic elements involved in script writing; the plot, the characters and characterisation, language and style, dance and props.

THE CREATION OF A PLOT OR STORYLINE FOR THE SCRIPT

Research on Kedah Tua (Ancient Kedah) by various archaeologists, scholars and historians, both westerners and locals, led to some very important discoveries of the civilisation. Nik Suhaimi Hassan (2008) states that earlier research carried out by archaeologists from 1840–2005 indicates that the civilisation in Lembah Bujang could have begun no earlier than 4th CE. However, the astounding discovery of a unique ritualistic monument dated 1st CE by Centre for Global Archaeological Research Universiti Sains Malaysia (CGAR USM), now changes the entire archaeological and historical framework and proves that the civilisation at Kedah Tua could have begun as early as 1st AD.

This discovery of the monument, a jetty, and iron smelting facilities at Sungai Batu not only raised debates and arguments about the timeline of the civilisation but also speculation about the spiritual beliefs, cultural practices, and socio-economy of the people during that time. However, in contrast, these discoveries further affirm the maritime trade activities at Sungai Batu which were also supported by other historical sources such as *The Golden Chersonese* written by Ptolemy, the infamous Greek geographer and astrologer (Wheatley 1961). Ptolemy's findings strengthened the idea of maritime trade between the kingdoms of India and China during the 1st AD. The question of how Lembah Bujang or Kedah Tua is implicated through this maritime trading is further postulated by the hypothesis of Lembah Bujang's geographical location between these two trading kingdoms. Lembah Bujang's strategic location between the Straits of Malacca and Bay of Bengal and the idea that it was much frequented by traders from China, India, and other parts of the world may not just be based on a fallacy. Trade items such as ceramics, sculptures, inscriptions, and monuments further prove the contact between the local people and the Chinese and Indian traders from as early as the 4th CE.

The *At-Tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah Darul Aman* written by Muhammad Hassan bin Kerani Mohd Arshad (1928) and edited in 1968 is an important document which chronicles interesting information about Kedah Tua during the 1st and 2nd CEs, respectively. Muhammad Hassan is described to be a close member of the palace of Kedah and his resources are from old documents and notes kept at the palace. The *At-Tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah Darul Aman* states that the first king of Kedah Tua is from a place called Gomrun, somewhere in Parsi (Iran) and his name was Maharaja Darbar Raja. According to Muhammad Hassan (1927), this king was ousted by the Parsi King and escaped in a vessel. However, his vessel was wrecked by a storm but managed to reach the shores of Sungai Merbok. The local people took to him immediately and accepted him as their king. This sounds more like a folklore, but certain accounts of the story seem logical; firstly, indeed, there was a place called Gomrun in Parsi, secondly, there was a king in Gomrun by the name of Maharaja Darbar Raja, the word *dabir* known as ruler/administrator, thirdly, the Parsi King ousted the Gomrun King and the latter escaped by a vessel. Information in this document about the royal ancestry of the Kedah Tua kingdom, the available literary, historical resources and narratives and the above-mentioned discoveries were instrumental to the creation of a storyline for the script of the performance.

The creation of the storyline or plot for "*Bermulanya Di Sini...Kedah Tua*" takes on the mode of dramatic, metaphoric and narrative criticisms respectively. Kenneth Burke (1897–1993), a literary scholar, theoretician and a philosopher states that dramatic criticism looks at texts that can communicate five essential elements leading to dramatic events:

1. The act - a particular message by the communicator.
2. Purpose - the reason for the message.
3. Agent - person who communicated/delivered/expressed the message.
4. Agency - the medium used to express the message.
5. Scene - the entire act with motives, location and time.

Burke's works were studied and analysed by John Wayne Kirk (1962), Wolin Ross (2001), and Richard Toye (2013) and they unanimously state that the above five elements known as dramatic pentad, links human communication as a form of action with motives that has a sociological impact on the way people choose to live; which once again reflects the notion of the script for Kedah Tua. Narrative criticism assumes that all the messages in the text/script function as the stories and storied accounts or tales but metaphoric criticism, on the other hand, as suggested by Andrews (1983), grounds its way in this discussion of script writing for Kedah Tua,

on the premise that reality can never be known directly. Although the plot of *Kedah Tua* takes into account some of the important facts from literary narratives, historical sources, and archaeological discoveries, the script is also written through the re-imagination of artists impression of a kingdom and community based on socio-economic maritime trade, iron smelting industry and socio-cultural ritualistic beliefs and practices which moves between animism and early Hinduism from 2nd–6th CE.

The script of "*Bermulanya Di Sini...Kedah Tua*" was written for the purpose of a theatrical production which incorporates the multi-disciplinary of creative arts; stylised acting, dance, music, vocal and sounds, choreographic movements, dialogues, martial arts, and scenography (Mumtaz Begum Aboo Backer and Manoharan 2016). The entire theatrical production personified historically documented cultures that existed during that period of time in Kedah Tua mainly the fusion between pre-Indiatic blended with ancient Malay cultures coated in a contemporised mood. The acting followed a stylised form using big and exaggerated gestures, language being old and classic Malay (spoken by aristocrats); dance had a characteristic of both traditional and contemporary in style.

The script of "*Bermulanya Di Sini...Kedah Tua*" falls into the classic melodrama genre, which combines the focus on both realism and anti-realism at the same time, the former on stage sets and props and the latter on character development. The characters in melodramatic plays can be stereotypical. The plot of the script is designed to appeal to emotions, sensationalised and able to arouse pity and fear among its audience. Good and evil are clearly depicted in white and black motives. The plot is emphasised over character development.

A plot is the arrangement of events within a story. In "*Bermulanya Di Sini...Kedah Tua*", the plot begins with an exposition, followed by rising actions building up into the climax or the pinnacle of the problem waiting to explode. At this point, the explosion of the unexpected takes place, creating a suspension of disbelief among the audience. The plot is like a volcano, the brewing of lava creates an eruption and the lava pours out. The lava in a dramatic plot is deemed synonymous to the falling actions that must follow suit with a resolution.

"*Bermulanya Di Sini...Kedah Tua*" opens with a prologue introducing the scene of a bustling and vibrant entrepot. Traders from China, India, and Arab can be seen busy mingling and trading among each other and with the local people. The port is a scene of porters and crew loading and unloading trade items from and onto the ships/vessels. This scene is a depiction of an artist's impression of Kedah Tua and also literary text that claims Kedah Tua as a maritime trading port. The words *Kataha*, *Kalah*, *Keda*, *Chieh-cha*, and *Kataram* are often mentioned loudly by the traders as to signify the names that had been given to Kedah Tua. The Tamil Epic *Parunkhatai* (10th CE) mentions Kedah as *Kataha* or *Kadaram* (Thani Nayagam 1968), whilst the Sanskrit historical record, *Suparagajataka* (4th CE) mentions of a port called *Kataha-dvipa*, which refers to Kedah. Wheatley (1961), on the other hand, states that the infamous Chinese traveller, I-Ching, recorded Kedah as Chieh-cha as how it was known among the Chinese travellers. I-Ching had travelled from China to India and had stopped at Srivijaya and Chieh-cha (Kedah) on both departure and return routes. In his memoirs, Kedah is described as the centre for trade and commerce in the region. The word *Kalah* is given by the Arab travellers, traders, and geographers for Kedah. The word *Kalah* refers to the *Qalah/Kalah* swords that were actually made through the iron that was found in Kedah. Rahman Zaki (1959) verifies the above statement by quoting Misar Ibn Muhalhil (3rd–10th CE) who points out that *Kalah* (Kedah) is the place where *Kalah* swords were made.

PLOTTING THE SCENES

Scene one sees the entrance of palace maidens in a circular shape performing the ritualistic dance around the ritual monument. This ritual monument is a replica of the monument dated 1st CE that was discovered by CGAR USM. The dance re-creates a re-imagined spiritual practice and ritualistic worship among the community of that time through choreographed movements, dance props, and gestures. The validity of this re-creation is based on the discovery of the ritualistic monument dated 1st–2nd CE, which suggests that the spiritual practices of the people at that time of period connected them to the idea of "adoration for universe" as a form of protection (Zolkurnian Hassan, Stephen Chia and Hamid Mohd Isa 2011).

The structure of the monument which is circular in shape may further suggests a deep connection with the greater cosmology as the circle represents moon, sun and earth, an idea that is rooted in animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism as all three spiritual beliefs do interrelate through a mutual support by accommodating the other without being too dominant neither irrelevant (Wright 1991). Dancers carrying pots filled with water, flowers and lighted pots while moving artistically in a circle around the ritualistic monument symbolised the sacred rituals of spirituality, ritual-cleansing, and faith. In addition, the idea of paying respect and homage in the form of a ritualistic dance and offerings to the powerful Sun God who resides in Mount Jerai, the highest peak in Kedah and watches over his/her subjects further induced the concept of animistic, Hindu, and Buddhist worship.

Scene two introduces the key characters of the story; the king (Maharaja Darbar), the princess (Puteri Cempaka), and the iron-smelter (Andika) as the protagonists, whilst, the king's brother-in-law (Wira) and his daughter (Mawar) as the antagonists. Etymologically, the names of the characters were chosen from combination of Sanskrit-Malay language signifying certain feminine and masculine attributes, such as floral motives for female characters and attitudes for male characters. For example, the names of both the princesses, *Cempaka* and *Mawar* refer to flowers whilst, *Wira* and *Andika* refer to heroic. The setting or location is at the iron smelting site. Maharaja Darbar is proud of his kingdom and the people who are hard working. He mentions about the *Kalah* sword sought by the Arabs and the appraisal of the Indians regarding the *kataram* (black seeds/iron) from Kedah. Below is an excerpt from the script displaying the king's feelings:

Maharaja Darbar: *Beta amat bangga dan gumbira dengan hasil kerja kalian...saudagar Arab mencari Kalah dari kita, saudagar India mahukan kataram kita... (I am so proud and happy with your work...the Arabs are seeking our Kalah, the Indians demand our kataram...).*

The King also announces the wedding of his princess to the Persian King, Adar to forge a diplomatic tie between the two kingdoms. Following suit, the engagement scene between Princess Cempaka and Prince Adar takes place at the palace, absent of dialogues but performed in a stylised dance manner. The royal family presents the *Kalah* sword and the iron smelting sites to the new groom, Prince Adar, as a sign to be the future ruler of the flourishing kingdom.

The plot continues with a rising action is seen at scene three where the actions of the antagonist as opposed to the protagonist are plotted. In a usual drama, the protagonist is depicted as good and the antagonist as the representation of obstruction or evil. A well-made play is structured in this manner to create the concept or idea of balance between good and bad. The antagonist presenting the obstacles for the protagonist can be viewed as a way to challenge the former. In this story, the antagonist is non-other than the king's brother in law, Wira, who has a hidden agenda! He dreams of becoming the king, ruling Kedah Tua including the iron and iron smelting sites. To strengthen his position as the King in the region and internationally, he also plans to marry off his daughter Mawar to Prince Adar. His accomplices are his daughter (Mawar) and Taji, the evil sorcerer. Scene four takes place at Taji's house where all three plots to kill the king and Cempaka! Below is an excerpt from the script, detailing the dialogues between Wira and Taji plotting.

Wira: Taji, aku tidak puas hati! Bila aku nak jadi Raja? Bila aku boleh berhak ke atas *Kataha*? Bila puteriku boleh berkahwin dengan Raja Adar?
(Taji, I am not satisfied! When will I become the King? When can I have the power over Kataha? When will my princess marry Prince Adar?)

Taji: Ha!Ha!Ha! Masanya sudah tiba Wira. Kau perlu bertindak sekarang!
(Ha, ha, ha! The time has come Wira! You have to act now!)

Wira: Apa maksud mu Taji?
(What do you mean Taji?)

Taji: Kau bunuh saja Darbar! Kau jadi Maharaja, Mawar berkahwin dengan Raja Parsi!
(Kill Darbar! You become the king, Mawar marries the Persian Prince).

The following scene sees two juxtaposing themes being presented; love, pride, and admiration as opposed to jealousy and suspicion. As Andika, the iron smelter and guardian of the iron smelting sites tells the story of the iron and its importance to Princess Cempaka with pride and love, he increases her admiration for him, the iron, and her kingdom. Through his stories, she realises that the iron is part of the kingdom's pride and soul. Andika creates a triangulation between the iron, the kingdom, and the princess. All three are precious and most sought after. As he is talking to her and presenting an anklet made by him from the labour of love and pride from the iron, they are being watched by Prince Adar, who becomes very suspicious and jealous of the two. His jealousy and suspicions are further poisoned by the venomous Mawar and Wira, thus wrapping himself further into their deception and lies.

The conflict begins to build up faster, with evil finding its way to the surface. Wira, Mawar, and Taji play their role and take centre stage. The King is murdered. As Princess Cempaka and her people mourn for the loss of their beloved king through a ritualistic funeral dance, the princess becomes the next target and lastly, Andika, the iron-smelter too is not spared. Having all obstacles cleared in their path, the trios are happy to be

the gaining party; Wira gets the kingdom and iron, Mawar gets Prince Adar and Taji gets both Wira and Mawar under his web of evil. However, their happiness does not last long as the kingdom then is struck by a tsunami swallowing everything and everyone along the way. The tsunami is created in this script due to two reasons, firstly, based on archaeological research speculation that a huge tsunami may have happened long time ago and buried the iron, iron smelting sites and other evidences, and secondly, injecting a positive idea and moral value that evil must and will perish.

CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERISATION

In a nutshell, writing a script is similar to engineering a story that requires focus, logical transition of events and characters that interprets, moves the events and bring life to the story. The characters and characteristics are significant elements to deliver the message of the script. Characters and characteristics are instrumental in shaping and realising the ideas plotted by the playwright in the script. The characters of Kedah Tua comprise of protagonists, antagonist, and supporting roles but can be understood on two levels; physically and symbolically. The physical protagonist in this script is Andika, the guardian of the treasures of Kedah Tua (iron, Princess Cempaka, and secrets of Kedah Tua), whereas, the antagonist is Wira, the destroyer of Kedah Tua's treasures. On a symbolic level, the protagonist can be seen as representing all good as opposed to the antagonist representing all evil.

The conflict rises when the antagonist is driven by his motives to get rid of the protagonist whom he sees as an obstacle to achieve his ill-inspired goals. The supporting roles on either side give strength to their leaders or play roles that give importance to the storyline to proceed in a logical manner. The language and style chosen for the script and the theatrical production is the language of the Malay aristocracy (*bangsawan*). The language in Malay aristocracy appropriates the setting of the scenario and the ancient kingdom with poetic phrases and diction. For example, the dialogues between Princess Cempaka and Andika has a poetic note; "*Andika, apakah gerangan yang dibawa untuk Cempaka?*" (Andika, what have you brought for me?). The word *gerangan* is poetic in classic Malay and not used in normal spoken or written Malay. In scene 5, Princess Cempaka utters; "*Oh! Bulan sudah mengambang, Cempaka terpaksa membawa diri...*" (Oh! The moon has become full, I must go...). The words *bulan mengambang* is used in poetry, literature and classic Malay.

The acting style however did not follow the *Bangsawan* or operatic theatre but a highly stylised acting style. The gestures were all exaggerated to arouse emotions, show or create effects from the audience; sympathy, love, happiness, and odious.

DANCE

This script would not be complete without prioritising the dance and the dancing of certain messages; further acknowledging the narrative events and strengthening the transition from one scene to another. There were five dances choreographed for Kedah Tua:

1. Ritualistic dance.
2. Iron smelting dance movement.
3. Palace dance.
4. Dance of love.
5. Funeral dance.

The ritualistic dance and dancers act as signifiers to the entire opening scene marking the rituals associated with animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Based on some of the artefacts found and the unique excavation site marked SB1B (Nadarajan 2012) reveal that activities related to animism and Hinduism were prevalent. In addition, the props or paraphernalia used in the dance, earthen pots filled with water, flowers and incense, suggests morning prayers, act of cleansing, offerings to the Gods and salutation to the Sun God for energy. Eight girls were chosen to dance this piece. The number eight is significant as it marks the Gods/rulers of eight directions in the Hindu Ashta Dikpalakas. Ashta means eight, Dik means directions, and Palakas means gods/rulers/guardians, believed to be a guide to a better living on this earth and beyond (Mumtaz Begum Aboo Backer et al. 2011). As the eight girls perform their rituals, they take turns to face the eight directions and complete the dance in a circle. The circle is symbolic to the idea of mother earth and the concept of all revolving around the powerful sun, becoming radiant from its energy.

The iron smelting dance movements are choreographed to depict the movements and motions of the iron smelters. The dancers comprise of five boys and the lead mover. Their movements were segmented to four parts taking into the consideration of four basic processes of iron smelting; roasting (driving out unwanted carbon or Sulphur from material), reduction (high-temperature smelting in a furnace), slagging (removal of impurities), and fluxes (chemically binding the purities together). The movers in varied speed and levels perform all these processes as a repeated routine to the sounds knocking the brass and metal. The words *Kalah*, *Kataram*, and *Kadaram* were repeatedly chanted throughout the dance sequence. These are names given to Kedah Tua and *Kalah* depict the *Qalah* swords that were made by the metal from Kedah Tua.

The palace dance or the welcoming dance is performed by the palace maidens to welcome the foreign prince whose presence marks two distinguished relationships; first a diplomatic tie between the two kingdoms and the second, a union of hearts, the tie between the heir of the throne (Princess Cempaka) and the new accepted foreign dignitary (Prince Adar). The dancers who use fans and veils as the props symbolise the shyness of the princess but also her obedience and curiosity through her acceptance of the prince. This dance is choreographed using geometrical lines and shapes to infuse ideas such as "openness of the heart" through the shape of the letter V, "acceptance" by the formation of a straight line and "curiosity" through the frontal and posterior crossing movements of the dancers with each other.

To profess the acceptance between the princess and the prince, the "Dance of Love" is choreographed. In this dance piece, there is a lot of body contact between the two lovers. The dance tells a story of the prince seeking the heart and love from the princess through the intimate moments of touching, embracing, and lifting the princess close to his heart and presenting a beautiful bangle as physical memory of himself. The dance is choreographed based on the writer's imagination that both lovers are at the river and during sunset. With the accompaniment of the sound of water and the close body contact choreographed movements, the dance is a picturesque of romantic images.

Last but not least of the dances, the funeral dance resonates a sombre and gloomy persona. The dancers in white, both girls and boys walk onto the stage carrying a long white cloth over their shoulders symbolising the royal body and the funeral procession. The dance movements here are slow in tempo but opposed by big rhythmic movements to show unhappiness and unrest. The emotions of the scene are expressed by the dancers through their facial expression, gestures, and bodily movements. The funeral dance is followed by the tsunami scene in which a shift of mood, tempo, and movements are visible. In this scene, the dancers are seen doing huge and fast rhythmic repeated gestures and movements with their arms. The dancers also do acrobatic acts such as forward, backward, side rolls, and somersaults to signify the wind, storm, and the tsunami of both their (the people's) feelings and the physical natural disaster.

CONCLUSION

The writing of the script was a process that took into consideration all the above mentioned theatrical and dramatic elements. Although historical narratives were readily available, however, very little were written about the community or the socio-cultural aspects of the people or their belief systems at that time. Malay, Tamil, Chinese, and Arabic literary sources mention about certain activities of the people through their documentation of iron, trading, and maritime activities. Archaeological artefacts and architectural remains at the excavation sites provided excellent basis for a re-imagination of a flourishing Kedah Tua kingdom before the 5th century CE to establish a scenario of an ancient kingdom in the Malay land, knowledgeable in iron smelting technology, maritime trade and diplomatic ties with the outside world.

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