

PRESERVING SINGAPORE-JOHOR-RIAU LITERATURE

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Abstract

A study of the connection between the literature of three areas (Singapore, Johor and Riau) was begun in 1987. The spirit and vision of these three areas was followed up with activities that accelerated the regional development of language, literature and culture. Dialog Selatan (Southern Dialogue) and meetings of scholars and intellectuals were among initiatives undertaken to reach a common goal towards preservation. What is the hope and aspiration behind these literary activities? This article explores initiatives taken and challenges faced by the three areas in preserving their literary ties throughout the 1990s. This article also introduces the efforts made to collect manuscripts and artifacts of Riau literature in Singapore, with the hope that it will open up ways for continued efforts towards the culture of research on materials in literature.

Keywords: Southern Dialogue, Riau, Singapore

*Di dalamnya itu hamba lihat
Gambar Sultan Johor yang bakti
Dari pada batu ia buati
Warnanya putih menggemarkan hati.*

*Sedikit tidak bezanya dia
Dengan rupa Sultan yang kaya*

KARTINI ANWAR

*Segala pakaian lengkap tersedia
Bertambah hebat di mata manusia.*

(I see inside it
A picture of the dedicated Sultan of Johor
Of stone it is made
It's white colour makes the heart glad.

It varies not a bit
From the appearance of the rich Sultan
With all his grand garments
Ever more resplendent in the sight of humans.)

Syair Perjalanan Sultan Lingga dan Yang Dipertuan Muda Riau
pergi ke Singapura
dan Peri Keindahan Istana Sultan Johor yang Amat Elok
(The Poem of the Journey of the Sultan of Lingga and the Ruler of Riau to
Singapore, and the Magnificence of the Palace of the Sultan of Johor)
written by Raja Khalid Hitam bin Raja Hassan al-Haji.
[Hassan Junus & Elmustian Rahman (comp.), 2002]

INTRODUCTION

Historical evidence of the ties among the chiefs of Riau-Lingga, Johor and Singapore dates back to the 19th century CE. Within the realm of these three states, several efforts were already in place to make knowledge and the documentation of knowledge a common culture. The aforementioned poem was published in 1311H/ 1893 CE by Mathaba'at al-Riauwiyah, Pulau Penyengat, and later in 1312H/1894 CE.¹ it was “diregisterkan di Singapura” (registered in Singapore). At the end of the poem, Raja Khalid Hitam advised that this “kisah yang maha mulia/misal mahanikam cemerlang cahaya” (noble story / just like a shining jewel) is to be spread “supaya berhamburan seluruh dunia” (so that it will scatter across the world). Nonetheless, he also stressed on the importance of protecting copyright and considered those who violated his orders to be committing a sin. This was done in the hope that all of his noble works were not to be “dihamburkan dia/segenap pasaran di jalan raya” (blurted out loud / to all and sundry in the streets).

This image clearly describes the background of the three areas that had a high regard for the knowledge culture in the fields of religion, language

and literature. In fact, when probed further, at the end of the 19th century, it can be seen that Riau provided a platform for the production of old Malay manuscripts while Pulau Penyengat had emerged as a notable centre for religion, literature and Malay culture. As a result, literary works of diverse form and in large quantity were produced. The palace was one of the institutions that fuelled the tradition of documentation of knowledge, for it had conserved the documentation of literary works and handled the management of disseminating them into the territories of the three states. The emergence of presses and publications in Singapore, such as *Al-Ahmadiyah* and *Al-Imam*, certainly caused such efforts to flourish.

A number of historical events in the region that followed outlined the political territory for Singapore, Johor and Riau, compromising the main centre of Malay literature in Southeast Asia. Singapore, Johor and Riau therefore took different survival routes befitting the context of the social background of their time as well as their future. In this article, we shall explore the initiatives, experiences and developments that took place in Singapore in the 1990s, specifically the ties formed between Singapore, Johor and Riau (SIJORI). Special attention is given to publishing efforts of works by writers from Singapore, Johor and Riau which were carried out as an initiative to further strengthen the ties among them.

EARLY DEVELOPMENT

The socio-political climate in Singapore, Johor and Riau during the 1970s and 1980s saw an encouraging development in literature. Fellow writers were keen to produce works with the background being the context of their respective lives, befitting their own aspirations. Efforts in strengthening the ties between scholars and intellectuals from the three areas were encouraged through awareness and cooperation to keep alive the literary culture of this region. Between the years 1971 to 1973, Asas'50 had taken steps to establish a connection with writers of literature from neighbouring countries. Several dialogue sessions were held, spearheaded by Persatuan Penulis-penulis Johor (The Association of Johorean Writers) (PPJ) and in the following years, dialogue sessions were held involving Indonesian writers such as Ajip Rosidi, Achdiat Karta Miharja, Taufiq Ismail, Abd Hadi W.M. and H.B. Jassin. In 1973, a literary village gathering was organized. The majority of attendees were Malaysian writers, specifically from Johor.

Writers of literary works from the Malay Archipelago originating from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei formed a tradition whereby they

met once in every two years to discuss issues on language and literature. The first meeting, *Pertemuan Sasterawan Nusantara* (a gathering of writers of literature from the Malay Archipelago) was held in Singapore in 1977, followed by one in Jakarta, Indonesia in 1979 and later Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 1981. Apart from strengthening the bond between them, this gathering established itself as an avenue for forums that boosted the development of language and literature at the national level and in the region. The outcome of *Pertemuan Sasterawan Nusantara III*, was a book published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Malaysia in 1984; this was a compilation of papers presented by notable names from the Malay Archipelago.

Among the suggestions discussed during these meetings were the role and cooperation required from particular movements or bodies to propagate the culture of knowledge acquisition. This was not merely confined to the field of linguistics and literature but ultimately would relate to knowledge and skills from broader disciplines in order to collectively cultivate a society with better intellect, capable of seizing opportunities and performing competitively. Singapore, which was represented by Suratman Markasan, put forth the role of *Asas'50* in the construction and growth of the Malay language and literature in Singapore. *Pertemuan Nusantara III* made it clear that there was awareness and interest in a partnership to propagate Malay literature in the region. At the end of the meeting, a resolution was put forward that a sustained effort was to be made to preserve the Malay language and literature and increase publishing in the region.

FURTHER INITIATIVES AND PUBLICATIONS

In the 1980s, a number of literary activities were initiated; one of which was the Hari Sastera (Literature Day) celebration. With Hari Sastera being held for the first time in 1983, Johor was given the honour to host the meeting of prominent intellectuals to discuss thoughts and views on the development of culture, linguistics and literature. *Tradisi Sastera Johor-Riau (The Tradition of Johor-Riau Literature)* (1987b) is a publication under the care of Persatuan Penulis Johor (The Association of Johorean Writers) (PPJ) and Gabungan Persatuan Penulis Nasional Malaysia (Union of National Writers) (GAPENA); and is backed by the government of Johor in collaboration with Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Johor Bahru. The publication is a major contributor to promoting a vibrant knowledge culture. It contains a collection of articles relating to three main topics: Malay language development, Riau cultural

influences on the Malay world, and Malay literature. The articles bring to the fore the significance of devising effective ways for a combined effort to face issues related to linguistics and literature. The articles also promote a pattern of dialectical thinking when faced with issues like language standardization and cultural polarization.

In the literature section, the publication focuses on views of prominent literary figures such as Abu Hassan Sham, Kemala, Umar Junus, Shaharom Husain and Abd Hadi W.M. Their discussion revolves around a deeper review of traditional literature, modern literature and Islamic literature. Abu Hassan Sham discusses works related to religion that were produced in Riau and were either written by authors who were residents of Riau, or who continue to reside in Riau, or those who emigrated to Singapore and Johor, especially after the sultanate of Riau was officially abolished in 1913. According to Abu Hassan Sham, literary works from Riau which are related to religion were produced in the form of popular poems so that these simple works of literature were palatable to the general reader compared to the sufi poems of Hamzah Fansuri or Nuruddin al-Raniri.

Shaharom Husain's creative experience in the world of writing and the struggle for national independence is highlighted in *Gapura Sastera Johor* (Gateway to Johorean Literature). He has produced a great number of novels and dramas with historical elements, displaying his deep interest into this genre. His works aim to exhibit aspects of politics, economy, society, tradition and custom in the development of history, with the expectation that the learning experience could forge a better path for the future. In relation to this, history should be viewed as a *historia vitae magistra*; that history is potentially knowledge and wisdom. Shaharom Husain's view should be taken into serious consideration to prevent historical amnesia from occurring in Malay society and in future generations.

Johor's role in modern Malay literature has been discussed definitely by Kemala. He deliberates on the contributions by prominent figures like Raja Ali Haji, Tun Seri Lanang and Munshi Abdullah from the 19th century CE, up to prominent figures of modern literature in the 1970s. In his article, Kemala shows the continued efforts in relation to scholarly activities which were undertaken by the writers and authors of Johor to preserve the Malay literature.

Overall, the publication of *Tradisi Johor-Riau* contributed significantly towards efforts to strengthen the ties of these three areas through a vibrant knowledge culture. In addition to meetings and dialogue sessions, everything

that was brought up during Hari Sastera 1983 was documented in the form of a publication. This was a crucial effort to help build and enrich the existing store of Malay literature.

DIALOG SELATAN (SOUTHERN DIALOGUE)

Throughout the 1990s, with Dialog Selatan, more efforts were put forth into having a series of gatherings of SIJORI (Singapore, Johor and Riau). The series of dialogues were held once in every two years, alternating among the three areas. Pioneered in Johor Bahru in January 1992, the Dialog Selatan I was proof of the serious determination of the Johor government for taking steps to strengthen cooperation in all fields, all in the spirit of SIJORI. Dialog Selatan I received tremendous support and saw good team work from the Johor State Government, PPJ, GAPENA, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), Majlis Kebudayaan Negeri Johor and several other involved parties. The determination that made Dialog Selatan a success showed the hope of these areas with a common origin to come together and benefit from existing expertise and strength, as a unifying factor towards facing the challenges of globalization in the 21st century. A publication entitled *Dialog Selatan I* (1995) was published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, consequently showing the importance of documenting and collecting all materials throughout the discussion hence boosting knowledge culture.

In the Dialog Selatan I session, Singapore was represented by essayists Selamat Omar (language), Hadijah Rahmat (literature) and Suratman Markasan (culture). Hadijah Rahmat touched on the growth of Malay literature and steps taken by Singapore amidst the current of the Malay literature in the Archipelago. Hadijah expressed her worries concerning a gloomy outlook for Malay literature. She also expressed the hope that works of literature would become a voice, balancer of life, receptacle of knowledge and the core root of the vision of society. With the spirit of brotherhood from the three areas, she was confident that Malay literature could advance its civilization and cultural tradition (1995:77).

Dialog Selatan II was held in December 1995 at Pekan Baru. To date, there has been no publication arising from articles presented in Dialog Selatan II. Dialog Selatan III was held in Singapore in November 2000. This series of dialogues were earlier scheduled for 1977 but was hindered by an economic downturn. The economic downturn had a political impact on SIJORI. This

was evident by the reduced number of participants from all three areas in comparison to the overwhelming response during Dialog Selatan I. On top of this, no specific publication resulted from Dialog Selatan III.

Representing Singapore, Hadijah Rahmat and Muhammad Salihin Sulaiman presented articles with the theme of “Sastera Melayu dalam Arus Jagat” (Malay Literature in the Global Current). Hadijah presented the issue of universality and globalization that should be marked with a vision that could inspire progress and assert the identity of the Malay race. According to her, the vision had to be shaped with a sense of social responsibility and historical vision. She explained how prominent literary figures in the early 20th century had affirmed an attitude towards openness and a progressive spirit through literature. Hadijah Rahmat invited readers to free themselves from the clutches of history that had been cocooning and constraining them from the vision for progress. She also outlined a number of suggestions to invigorate the knowledge culture for the development of the intellect and the prevention of an inferiority-complex syndrome for society.

Muhammad Salihin Sulaiman, who represented young Singaporean writers, imparted the vision of his generation of writers. As a writer who is still actively producing works of literature, Salihin Sulaiman is faced with life’s challenges, marked by uncertain economic conditions and the country’s swift and rapid development. He proposed alternative publication methods in the virtual form or as e-books in order to extend the reach of literature. However, amidst his passion to achieve the said vision, he is in tune with Hadijah Rahmat; agreeing that the younger generation of writers should not only be able to produce works in the alternative forms (with the formation of SASA2000) but must also buttress their literary works to ensure they do not falter or drown in the virtual sea.

ANTHOLOGY OF SIJORI WRITERS

The effort to compile short stories by SIJORI writers was made by Suratman Markasan; these were subsequently published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 1995. In Dialog Selatan I back in 1992, Suratman Markasan had proposed a trip through the Malay states together with literary activities. However, his proposal never came to anything. The publication entitled *Pertemuan Kedua* (*Second Meeting*), an anthology of short stories, is a milestone that realized the ambition to animate the publication of works written by the

SIJORI writers. *Pertemuan Kedua* includes 33 short stories; 11 short stories represent each area – Singapore, Johor and Riau. As the coordinator, Suratman Markasan stressed greatly on the quality of every short story he included in the publication to ensure the feelings and thoughts of the author could be fully appreciated by the readers.

Among the Singaporean short stories included in the anthology are works by A. Wahab Hamzah, Ahmad Afandi Jamari, Ahmad Awang, Basiran Hj Hamzah, Ismail Sarkawi, Iswardy, Jamal Ismail, Johar Buang, Mohammed Latiff Mohamed, Peter Augustine Goh and Suratman Markasan. This list clearly shows a healthy combination of notable established and young writers. At a glimpse, the works of the Singaporean writers can be identified as having a religious theme; for example the short story “Hisab” (Reckoning), “Sesat” (Wayward), “Perjalanan Seorang Fakir” (The Journey of a Destitute Man), “Hari-hari Terakhir Seorang Sufi” (The Last Days of a Sufi), “Surah Yasin, Setitik Kasih dan Sebuah Pemergian” (Surah Ya-Seen, a Drop of Love and a Goodbye), and “Malam Penentu” (Night of Reckoning). The writers’ inclination towards such an approach is actually to promote humanitarian elements that relate to the concept of *akal* (intellect) and *ikhtiar* (effort).

Though distinguishable by their regional background, readers may discover characters and issues relevant from a humanitarian point of view. The short stories “Semut, Lalat dan Cacing” (Ants, Flies and Worms) by Mohamed Latiff Mohamed (Singapore), “Lopak” (Puddle) by Zaharah Nawawi (Johor) and “Harta Peninggalan Ayah” (The Property Inherited from Father) by Idrus M. Thahar (Riau), are symbolic articulations that invite the reader to contemplate the uncertainty of life, and humanity. These short stories question the reality of life but also provide readers with the ability to create meanings or construct their own opinions according to their own context in life.

The short story “Semut, Lalat dan Cacing”, describes how the narrator is left helpless in fighting against ants and flies using his body for their food survival. The allegorical short story also dramatically makes use of worms, disgusting animals that live in a person’s stomach. These worms are vomited from the narrator’s mouth while he is in his prayers. Meanwhile, the short story “Lopak” describes a man (Pak Man) who hides his ugliness of character behind a mask of propriety and respectability. The “lopak” (puddle) created by Pak Man finally splatters onto his own face—a symbol that everything comes crashing down and reveals the truth. Although “Harta Peninggalan Ayah” is written using realism, readers can sense the meanings behind the

symbolism in this short story. The property and debt left by the character of the father can be interpreted in various ways. Among the inheritance from the narrator's deceased father are a "baju kurung Melayu" (traditional Malay outfit), a broken and rusted old sewing machine, a ruined fishing net, a hut, 10 coconut trees and a piece of land measuring twenty square yards. This short story successfully describes how "harta" (property) dan "hutang" (debt) can affect the intellect and efforts put in by a man.

FURTHER EFFORTS

Over the past few years, efforts to sustain SIJORI ties slowly began to diminish. Finally, the Dialog Selatan series ended. With these having come to an end post-Pertemuan Kedua, so did all efforts that had animated the publication of anthologies of creative works by the SIJORI writers. Nevertheless, Singapore writers continue to actively play a role in the strengthening of the Malay language and literature by attending seminars and conferences at the regional and international levels. These types of activities indirectly help to strengthen brotherhood ties and the relationship amongst writers and local intellectuals with neighbouring and international colleagues. There have also been initiatives to increase the number of publications as well as the promotion of English translations of the Singaporean and Malaysian creative works for a far greater reach.

Translation efforts have been invigorated through collaboration between Institut Terjemahan dan Buku Malaysia (Institute of Translation and Books of Malaysia) (ITBM) and Singapore's National Arts Council (NAC). The first work to have been published through this collaboration is an anthology of poems *Dari Jendela Zaman Ini (From the Window of this Epoch)*. This bilingual anthology is a compilation of 100 poems from 73 poets of Malaysia and Singapore. With the theme "relationship and humanity", this anthology is a response to the voice of the poets and what they reflect on in the face of the current of global modernization.

The second publication through the ITBM and NAC collaboration is the 2012 anthology of short stories, *Melangkau Jambatan Kedua: Cerpen Terpilih dari Malaysia dan Singapura (Beyond the Second Link: Selected Short Fiction From Malaysia and Singapore)*. This anthology contains short stories written by a group of new-generation writers from Malaysia and Singapore coming from various academic and career backgrounds. The works selected for this anthology are proof of the presence and contributions of these writers in developing the field of literature of both countries.

Additionally, there have also been initiatives made by Singapore's National Library Board (NLB) via the "Read! Singapore" programme launched in 2005. Novels and short stories by Malaysian writers were introduced through this programme; among others were the novels *Badai Semalam (Storms of Yesterday)* by Khadijah Hashim, *Haruman Kencana (Golden Fragrance)* by Zaharah Nawawi, *Detektif Indigo (Indigo Detectives)* by Faisal Tehrani, *Warisnya Kalbu (The Heart's Inheritor)* by Rahayu Md Yusop and works from Abdul Latip Talib; short stories included "Lemang Nan Sebatang" (One Lone Piece of Lemang) by Nisah Haron and "Gajah Putih" (White Elephant) by Zakaria Ali. Such initiatives have facilitated the translation of these short stories into English, Mandarin and Tamil.

PRESERVING LITERATURE ARTIFACTS: THE RIAU MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION IN SINGAPORE

A collection of manuscripts belonging to a certain ethnic group is a reflection of its people's historical development and civilization. Manuscripts provide an interesting perspective and written evidence of the history behind the production, copying and dissemination of knowledge and culture. Every bit of material that was written down, documented, copied or collected can be used for further research on the particular group of people who created it. Even the role of the individual involved in the collection of the manuscripts should never be excluded.

This section discusses the literary culture and its documentation in Riau, specifically in Pulau Penyengat. It highlights the digitization process of the Riau Manuscripts Collection before its handover to National Library of Singapore (in DVD format) by Professor Dr. Jan van der Putten and his team. The team preserved a number of manuscripts and printed materials by digitizing them and preserving copies of them. The manuscripts came from various sources in the Riau islands and this collection can be considered small when compared to the collection of manuscripts already available in Malay scholarship. The digitized materials were either from personal or museum collections from Riau Province, i.e. Pulau Penyengat and Tanjung Pinang. In this section, we examine the development in Pulau Penyengat which was once the centre of administration for the Yang Dipertuan Muda. We also look at how the palace and government élite embarked on the production, copying and collection of manuscripts and other important documents. The second part of this article discusses the content of the materials in the

Koleksi Manuskrip Riau (Riau Manuscript Collection) with a spotlight on the collection of Tengku Muhammad Saleh.

RIAU AS THE CENTRE OF CULTURE AND LITERATURE

Political instability had occurred in Riau Province prior to the 19th century CE. However, at the turn of the 19th century, trading activities in Riau-Lingga gradually experienced a positive recovery when Sultan Mahmud married Raja Hamidah (the daughter of Raja Haji Fisabilillah) and presented him Pulau Penyengat as a gift. Sultan Mahmud also gave administrating power over the region to the family members of the Yang Dipertuan Muda. Meanwhile, Sultan Mahmud built himself a new palace in Lingga.

It is documented in *Tuhfat al-Nafis*² that trading ships came from China, Siam, Java and Sulawesi to commence their trading there. There were also Arabs and sayyids propagating Islam and their Wahabi interpretations. Between the years 1784 and 1850s, there were about 20 religious scriptures in Riau, used as a source of reference by Raja Ali Haji at the time *Tuhfat al-Nafis* and *Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa* were written. From the years 1811 to the 1920s, there were 36 literary materials (poems and prose) from Pulau Penyengat.³ There were approximately 47 poetry texts produced in Riau between the years 1811 and the early 20th century.⁴ They comprised *gurindam* (couplets), original local poems and adapted poems. Between religious poems, historical poems and fictional poems, fictional poems were produced in greater number.

The culture of copying was also practiced extensively in the mid-19th century CE, while printing activities operated outside of Pulau Penyengat, in places such as Singapore and Batavia; the printing industry only caught on in Pulau Penyengat in 1899. Despite being under Dutch colonial rule, initiatives taken by the royalty to discuss, debate and reevaluate their leadership as well as political system via literature and culture were encouraging.

After the English-Dutch treaty in 1824, the trading environment in Riau deteriorated and fewer traders entered Riau. Specifically in Pulau Penyengat, a strong literary and religious culture emerged. There was a distinctive effort to record and understand history, so as to fulfill contemporary needs. On another note, the long-standing Johor-Riau relationship was further strengthened. By the order of Temenggung Abu Bakar, as the Maharaja of Johor, Engku Haji and Datuk Bentara Johor visited Riau to deliver the Maharaja's letter to Raja Ali Haji.⁵ During the visit, there were efforts to develop the knowledge culture and the exchange of opinions.

In Pulau Penyengat emerged the culture of sending and receiving letters and borrowing newly-produced manuscripts or personal manuscripts. Apart from the small tokens presented to the two officers of Temenggung Abu Bakar's delegation, they also brought home seven essays encompassing historical works, law, language and correspondence materials. Temenggung Abu Bakar was also lent manuscripts written by Raja Ali Haji that were "belum tersalin dengan khat yang molek..." (still not properly copied). Raja Ali Haji also reminded them, "apakala habis dibaca pulangkan kepada Ungku Lebar isteri Ungku Aman" ("once you have finished reading, return this to Ungku Lebar, the wife of Ungku Aman").⁶ This clearly testifies to the existence of a library system to manage the manuscripts and intellectual materials at that time.

This setting provides clear evidence that there were activities around the 19th century to increase knowledge through the creating, referring to, reading, discussing, and borrowing and lending of intellectual materials. In addition, there was also a system to ensure that the borrowed manuscripts were returned to their respective owners.

According to Andaya & Matheson (1980), the reasons leading to the rapid growth in the production of literary texts in Riau at that time stemmed from the influence and personal interest of the Dutch officers who collected manuscripts for their personal collection or due to orders from administrative personnel based in Batavia.

There were several manuscripts copied in C.P.J. Elout's office when he became the resident of Riau (1826 - 1830) that are now kept in Jakarta and Leiden. H.C. Klinkert, when working as a Bible translation officer in Riau for two and a half years, managed to collect 90 manuscripts. Meanwhile, H.T. von de Wall had sponsored publications of works in Riau and embarked on the compilation of a dictionary. Resident Elisa Netscher (1861-1870) tenaciously collected, transcribed and translated several texts that were published in notable Dutch journals.

A few members of the royalty of Pulau Penyengat made writing their pastime in the palace. Their penchant for writing had become their way of life. They recorded occurrences on a daily basis in the form of journals or personal notes. The passion to create and write also blossomed in the form of historical texts, narrative texts, instruction texts, leaflets and advice. The preservation of this knowledge culture was further developed in later eras, which can be proven by the classical works left behind and manuscripts collected by the next generation.

DIGITIZED RIAU MANUSCRIPTS IN SINGAPORE

The digitized manuscript collection that was handed over to the National Library of Singapore originated from thirteen separate sources. This collection comprised literary works such as poems, religious texts, printed books, writings on traditional medicine, geometry and astrology; copies of books that were used as references, letters, as well as documents such as contracts, land grants, receipts, maps, personal notes and invitation cards. Based on the years and dates found on some of the manuscripts and documents, we can assume that the materials in this collection were created or copied between the years 1807 to 1963.

The contributions came from both museum and personal collections. Two museums that contributed to the collection are the Muzium Dinas Kebudayaan dan Parawisata Kota Tanjung Pinang and Muzium Linggam Cahaya Daik, from the District of Lingga in Riau Province.

Contributions from personal collections are mainly from those individuals who have a family connection with the Yang Dipertuan Muda (ruler) of Riau. Among these are the collections of Tengku Muhammad Fuad (family member and descendant of Sultan Abdul Rahman Muazam Syah), Tengku Muhammad Saleh @ Tengku Muhammad Saleh Damnah (descendant of Sultan Mahmud Muazam Syah), Raja Muhammad Amin (descendant of Raja Ali Haji), Raja Hamzah Yunus (descendant of Raja Haji Fisabilillah), Raja Syu'ib (descendant of the Yang Dipertuan Muda) and the collection of Raja Fahrul (distant relative of the Yang Dipertuan Muda). Besides that, there are also contributions from antique dealers which are the collection of A Suk @ Suwiro, and the collection of Khairullah. Other contributions came from individuals such as Aswandi Syahri, Syamsu Adnan K @ Syamsu Adnan Cik, and Said Hodri bin Said Hasan Al-Abas.

Looking at the list of the contributors, it can be said that the culture of collecting manuscripts and documented materials of the Riau Islands in the 19th century is still taking place to this day. A large number of manuscripts from this collection are from the personal collections of individuals related to the royal family, either from the palace of Lingga or in Pulau Penyengat.

THE COLLECTION OF TENGKU MUHAMMAD SALEH

Tengku Muhammad Saleh bin Tengku Abu Bakar ibni Tengku Husin ibni Tengku Usman @ Tengku Embong ibni Sultan Mahmud Muazam Syah was a religious teacher born in Damnah Palace, Daik, Lingga on 17th January

1901. He passed away on 10th October 1965 and was buried behind the mosque of the Sultan of Daik, Lingga. Daik-Lingga was famously known as “Bunda Tanah Melayu” (the Mother of the Malay Lands) for it housed a number of tombs of the Malay Sultans, such as the tombs of Sultan Mahmud Riayat Syah, Sultan Abdul Rahman Muazzam Syah, Sultan Mahmud and Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Syah II. There is also the tomb of the 10th Yang Teramat Mulia (Royal Highness), Raja Muhammad Yusuf. Several palaces were built in Daik-Lingga: Istana Pangkalan Kenanga, Istana Keraton, Istana Damnah and Istana Robot. The construction of a palace named Istana 44 Bilik (Palace of 44 Rooms), was never completed due to its Sultan being forced to abdicate by the Dutch. Based on the background and lineage of Tengku Muhammad Saleh, the type and form of manuscripts from his collection can be used for further exploration.

This collection contains 87 various materials of manuscripts dated between 1839 and 1975. The oldest manuscript is entitled “Bintang Tujuh” (Seven Stars), a text explaining the knowledge behind astronomy, prediction, and the measuring of time, all explained with tables and diagrams. The text was handwritten by Abdullah ibn Abas, who had copied it from the original text owned by Engku Haji Fisabilillah. There is also a manuscript in Arabic entitled *Kitab Abdul Rahman Muazam Syah (The Book of Abdul Rahman Muazam Shah)* on worship. On this manuscript, there is an inscription of the year 1886 and this copy bears a stamp, indicating that it was printed in the Lingga & Straits Printing Office. Another manuscript pre-dating the 20th century is “Kaifiat Zikir Tarekat Naqsyabandiah” (The Discipline of the Naqshbandi Zikr) that was created by Salih Zawawi between the years 1895 and 1896, printed by Matbaah Riau-wiyah. This manuscript was a collection of *zikr* (invocations) that were practiced by this religious sect.

Among the materials in Tengku Muhammad Saleh’s collection are several poems he composed himself; such as “Syair Tajwid al-Quran 1” (Poem on the Correct Reading of Qur’an 1) and an untitled poem. There is also “Risalah Tajwid al-Fatihah” (Epistle on the Correct Reading of al-Fatihah) which he copied from the original Arabic text, translated by Abdul Hamid Isa Lingga. “Syair Tajwid al-Quran 1” (Poem on the Correct Reading of Qur’an 1) written by Tengku Muhammad Saleh was edited by Tuan Haji Muhammad Yunus, a *khatib* (preacher) at Masjid al-Jema’ Daik Lingga. These texts were composed during the first quarter of the 20th century.

There are several other poems in this collection, such as “Syair Raksi” (Poem of Compatibility), “Syair Nasehat” (Poem of Advice), “Syair Syahin

Syah” penggal yang pertama (The Poem of the King of Kings, Part One), *Syair Pelita Peringatan* (Poem of The Lamp of Remembrance) and a nazam (an Urdu poetic form) entitled *Nazam Tajwid al-Quran* (Poem on the Correct Reading of al-Qur’an). Besides poems, this collection also comprises a narrative entitled *Hikayat Tanah Suci* (The Story of the Holy Land) and a historical text entitled *Sejarah Kerajaan Johor* (The History of the Kingdom of Johor). All of the poems and nazam mentioned here were printed in Singapore by Al-Ahmadiyah Press and stamped by Muhammad Haji Amin.

Some examples of religious manuscripts include *Jadwal Bulan Arabi* (A List of the Arabic Months), *Khutbah Jumaat* (Friday Sermons), *Kitab Sifat Allah* (Allah’s Attributes), *Haza Kitab Dua Puluh* (This is the Book of the Twenty Attributes of Allah), *Risalah Jagaan Lidah* (A Pamphlet for the Guarded Tongue), *Surat Burdah* (Epistle of the Mantle), *Nasihat Ali al-Wafa* (The Advice of Ali al-Wafa), *Kitab Pembuka Mata* (The Eye-Opener) and *Kitab al-Faraid* (The Book of Faraid). From the list, it is clearly seen that the creation of religious materials were in relation to the fields of fiqh (jurisprudence) and tasawuf (sufism). *Kitab Pembuka Mata* and *Kitab al-Faraid* were written by Hj Abdul Karim Amrullah, also known as Haji Rasul, the father of a great scholar and ulama’ (religious scholar) named Hamka. *Kitab Pembuka Mata* explains the law of marriage, divorce and the concept of “Cina Buta” (Translator’s note: literally the term means “blind Chinese man” but actually it refers to a practice to make it lawful for a Muslim man to remarry a wife he divorced with three *talaq* (pronouncements of repudiation)). This text was completed on 23rd December 1923, printed and distributed by Matbaatin Bukit Tinggi and is still in good condition. *Kitab al-Faraid* is a book of notes that was handwritten in pencil and is also in good condition.

Other than religious manuscripts, the culture to enhance one’s knowledge of language was still practised in Riau. This is proven through the existence of a textbook on language by Abu Muhammad Adnan @ RH Abdullah, entitled *Kitab Pelajaran Bahasa Melayu Pembuka Lidah* (Introduction to the Malay Language) dated 19th November 1912. Based on its condition, it can be concluded that the manuscript was frequently used and there were also notes written in pencil inside. This collection of Tengku Muhammad Saleh also comprises *Buku Ukuran* (Book of Measurements) that was created by Haji Jafar, dated 16th December 1906. This handwritten book on the basics of geometry and knowledge on measurement was copied by him from the original book. This manuscript is interesting due to Haji Jafar’s use of clear diagrams to explain on particular concepts.

Tengku Muhammad Saleh's collection also includes the magazine *Al-Imam* (dated 16th March 1907), sample certificates released by Kelab Rusydiah (Rushdiah Club), court documents, land grants and several important letters. Among the valuable letters is a letter from the Riau Resident with its original seal 'Residen van Riouw en Onderhoorigheden, Residen de Bryun Kops', dated 2nd February 1911. The letter elaborates on the relinquishing of the power of Sultan Abdul Rahman as the Sultan of Lingga and demoting him to the position of Emir of Lingga. In the letter, Sultan Abdul Rahman is warned to ensure he would keep his loyalty towards the Dutch.

The culture of recording and documenting contractual activities is showcased through the collection of letters regarding the sale and purchase of orchards, land grants, *hibah* (Islamic bequest) documents, agreements, letters of authorization, acceptance letters, letters acknowledging debt, letters of representation, personal notes as well as maps of lands and orchards. This clearly shows that the people of the time had already devised a system for administration and management.

From the collection of manuscripts of Tengku Muhammad Saleh, it can be deduced that his collection was vast and varied. The manuscripts not only refer to materials in literature, language and religion, but also showcase a collection of documents that illustrates real-life activities from the 19th century.

This article only discusses a small portion of the Riau Manuscript Collection repositied in the National Library of Singapore. A lot can be studied and learned from the varied collection of manuscripts, from the perspective of history, literature or culture. Further research on the Riau Manuscript Collection should be made to uncover new knowledge and findings that may shed more light on the literacy of culture and knowledge that once spurred the Malay intellectual world.

CONCLUSION

Through this article, we have traced the ties between Singapore, Johor and Riau that existed since the 19th century. History and political development disrupted this connection and the economic scenario in many ways had an influence on the literary ties that had previously been established within the three areas. When the knowledge culture began to flourish in the Malay Archipelago, we can see that there was commitment and cooperation at national and regional levels to ensure that benefit could be gained through this relationship.

SIJORI was conceptualized, and several series of gatherings and dialogues that were held. However, a number of resolutions remained unachieved. The priorities and ideologies of each region had to be taken into consideration. Nonetheless, Singaporean remained firm in their determination and awareness. A “twosome” Singapore-Malaysia relationship still exists between writers of both countries. Through this relationship, a number of scholarly activities were planned and carried out.

Efforts for the preservation of literature were intensified in each country; each developing the increase in production of published materials, manuscripts as well as literary artifacts. Using literature as the driving mechanism, we are confident that the pulse of our literary ties will beat stronger through Singapore’s full involvement in Majlis Sastera Asia Tenggara (MASTERA), the arts council of Southeast Asia.

NOTES

- 1 Refer to Putten (1997:731) The publication of this poem was registered in Singapore and it was probably registered at the office of the Colonial Secretary in Singapore. The phrase “ala dimmah Ali ibn Ahmad al-Attas” was stated on the colophon of the poem. According to Putten, Ali ibn Ahmad al-Attas is believed to have been the one who sponsored the publication of the poem in Singapore.
- 2 Refer to *Tuhfat al-Nafis* written by Raja Ali Haji
- 3 Refer to *Tradisi Johor-Riau*, p. 130-34.
- 4 Refer to Abu Hassan Sham (1995:351-55)
- 5 Refer to Ahmad Fawzi Basri (1983:25- 29)
- 6 Refer to *Kisah Pelayaran ke Riau - Fasal yang keduabelas*.

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